

**A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LECTURERS’  
PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP AND  
THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN THE SCHOOL OF  
LIFE SCIENCES AT A UNIVERSITY IN YUNNAN, CHINA**

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**Received:** 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

**Revised:** 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**Accepted:** 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**Abstract:** The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between lecturers’ perceptions towards charismatic leadership and their organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China. The study was conducted on 105 full time lecturers in 2020 (March to August) from the selected school. The main data collection tool was a questionnaire. The researcher used Mean and Standard Deviation to analyze the lecturers’ perceptions towards charismatic leadership and their organizational commitment. Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation was used to test the relationship between the two variables. The result of this study showed that the level of lecturers’ perceptions towards charismatic leadership was at a high level, total mean scored 3.74. The organizational commitment variable mean scored 3.65 in overall, regarded as high level. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there was a weak positive association between charismatic leadership and organizational commitment, ( $r(98) = .401, p = .000$ ).

**Keywords:** Lecturer; Charismatic Leadership; Organizational Commitment

### **Introduction**

Currently, 21st century skills are explicitly defined, critical thinking,

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communication, collaboration and creativity are the keywords, students are expected more as professionals and lifelong learners (Council, 2012). The development of the country, the cultivation of talents and the progress of society cannot be separated from a high-quality education. Therefore, the field of education is facing more intense competition and social responsibility (Natriello, 2007), more and more educational organizations are beginning to explore new ways to meet challenges, including educational reform and responsive education for all. That means a comprehensive improvement in the various functions of education and the quality of all those involved in the teaching process.

Loyal employees are the important asset to any organization. Employee's turnover and demand for organizational commitment increase with the competition within and outside the organization (Mowday, 1998). Schools and lecturers face more and various demands to adapt to changing environments. In this process, schools will have to be more dependent on teachers who are committed to school goals and values, and strongly desirous of remaining in the organization (Somech & Bogler, 2002). It is certain that the lecturer's organizational commitment is critical to the success of school.

Many empirical studies have shown that higher performance and productivity, as well as lower turnover, absenteeism, and lateness, correspond to employees of organizations with high levels of commitment (Cohen, 1996), lack of commitment to the organization may lead to turnover. Some studies have pointed to the impact of leadership on organizational commitment, Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982) and Lowe (2000) showed that leadership can also be a predictor of an organizational commitment, and employees' commitment to leadership far exceeds organizational commitment (Becker, 1992). People are facing a situation of rapid change and short-term, so from now on, new leaders who with extraordinary talent and influence are needed (Holloway, 2012). According to Conger-Kanungo (1997), the leader with charisma inspires more active and satisfied followers, charismatic leaders' foresight, innovation, and motivation seem to be the ideal conditions to drive large scale and highly adaptive organizational change, generally resulting in higher levels of performance and commitment (Bass, 1985). Studies have found increased self- assurance and voluntarily working longer hours by subordinates of charismatic leaders. Therefore, the relationship between charismatic

leadership and lecturers' organizational commitment cannot be ignored.

According to the Chinese government's "211 Project" (Ministry of Education, P. R. China [MEC], 2000) the selected public university was among the first universities to win the membership, so this university is a prestigious and influential university in Yunnan Province, China. The School of Life Sciences of the selected university is the first department in the university after the introduction of a university-school-department management system. Hence, the school's leadership may be effective, and the lecturers' organizational commitment may be high. Moreover, it has many full-time lecturers that can be represented in the research. Whereas the relationship between charismatic leadership and lecturers' organizational commitment has not been researched in the School of Life Sciences.

The researcher decided to select this school as the target to study the lecturers' perception towards charismatic leadership as well as its relationship with organizational commitment.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To determine lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China.
2. To identify the level of lecturers' organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China.
3. To determine the relationship between lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership and their organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Charismatic Leadership*

The concept of charismatic leadership must begin with German sociologist Max Weber (1964) who established "charisma" as an important term to describe authoritative forms based on perceptions of individuals. In other words, there are inherent powers and extraordinary abilities in a few people, they have exemplary character, and these people can be regarded as attractive leaders.

Leadership is an important factor in the creation, development and even decline of an organization (Mahmood, Basharat, & Bashir, 2012). They are responsible for labor selection, strategic direction planning, and decision-making, and ultimately achieve responsibility to the organization and its members. So, the impact of leadership on teams and organizations cannot be ignored. According to Conger-Kanungo, charismatic leaders are more typical types. Their foresight, innovation, and motivation seem to be the ideal conditions to drive large scale and highly adaptive organizational change (Conger, Kanungo, Menon, & Mathur, 1997). Conger and Kanungo (1987)'s attribution charismatic leadership focuses on five behavioral dimensions of the leadership that perceived by followers during the three stages of the leadership process. Including Strategic Vision and Articulation, Sensitivity to the Environment, Sensitivity to Member Needs, Personal Risk and Unconventional Behavior.

#### *Behavioral Theory of Charismatic Leadership*

Conger and Kanungo's theory states that "charismatic leadership is an attribution based on follower perceptions of their leader's behavior" (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000). When charismatic leaders are compared with non-charismatic leaders, charismatic leaders who have the ability to articulate an inspiring vision, and some actions will make followers believe that leaders have extraordinary missions.

Conger and Kanungo emphasized that do not necessarily develop linearly. When faced with a complex real-life environment, the leader's behavior will even participate in all three stages at the same time. In subsequent research, Conger and Kanungo (1998b) modified the scale developed in 1994 and compressed the original 6 dimensions into 5 behavior dimensions. The scale contains 20 Items. Therefore, the researcher mainly focuses on the following five behavioral dimensions: Strategic Vision and Articulation, Sensitivity to the Environment, Sensitivity to Member Needs, Personal Risk, and Unconventional Behavior. These five behavioral dimensions in detailed are explained as follows:

*Strategic Vision and Articulation.* Charismatic leaders are often strategic, but the vision they advocate may be nearly idealistic and different from the current situation. Conger's theory mentioned that leaders are considered charismatic

when they change their followers' attitudes to accept the vision they advocate. The ability to articulation cannot be ignored, so charismatic leadership needs not only a vision and plan, they also can effectively articulate their strategy.

*Sensitivity to the Environment.* Conger and Kanungo (1998a) found that there is an interaction between leaders and the environment. Conger further argues that the more crisis the existing environment, the stronger the "charisma" of the leader. Because leaders who can handle complex and volatile environments are critical to the success of the organization (Khilji, Davis, & Cseh, 2010). The ability to identify defects in the current environment is key to distinguishing between charismatic leadership and non-charismatic leadership.

*Sensitivity to Member Needs.* Human resources systems appear to be a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the organization and to some extent create and sustain valuable employee (Collins & Smith, 2006; Jiang et al., 2012; McClean & Collins, 2019). Assume that the leader understands and meets the needs of the member, the member will increase the productivity and get the organization more in return.

*Personal Risk.* Charismatic leaders seem to have some distinctive qualities. They build trust by following their example and taking risks, as well as unconventional Behavior. The process of translating attention to members' needs into a shared vision usually involves personal risks, including but not limited to loss of personal property, power, and reputation. Conger's theory mentioned that the greater the personal risk that the leader assumes for a common goal, the more members trust him.

*Unconventional Behavior.* A leader who has professional skills and can create surprises is considered Charismatic. Charismatic leaders are active innovators, and these unconventional behaviors are often the beginning of innovation, especially when they succeed, which arouses the admiration of followers. Leaders' unconventional behavior is to affect the beliefs and attitudes of the members.

#### *Organizational Commitment*

Loyal employees are needed for any organization. Organizational

commitment links the bond between individuals and the organization. It reflects a sense of loyalty and participation and is considered as one of the important factors to retain employees (Mowday et al., 1982). Previous studies have shown that organizational commitment has a significant relationship with leadership behavior, job satisfaction, turnover intention and performance.

The concept of organizational commitment was first proposed by Becker (1960), who defined organizational commitment as the behavior that employees devote themselves to their work with the increase of their unilateral investment in the organization. Becker's Side Bet theory is the basis of the behavioral approach (Meyer & Allen, 1997), he stressed that this commitment only happens when employees are aware of the costs of ending their ties to the organization. On the contrary, employees' commitment to the organization originates from emotional dependence, not from economic input. More specifically, commitment is regarded as the attitude of employees.

#### *Side Bet Theory of Organization Commitment*

Becker's theory of organizational commitment, proposed in 1960, described organizational commitment as a "consistent line of activity" which means that some valuable investments will be lost if people's social activities are stopped. Time, money, energy can all be collectively referred to as the accumulation of "side bets". The threat of losing these benefits creates organizational commitment and limits individuals' future development.

Based on Becker's theory, Meyer, and Allen (1997) proposed Three-Component Organizational Commitment and gave definitions, which included Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment, and Normative Commitment. They state that everyone has a corresponding psychological state to express their feelings about work and commitment to the organization and have different effects on work behavior. These three commitments are explained in detail as follows:

*Affective Commitment.* The dimension is the core element of organizational commitment and is used to express employees' emotional attachment, identification, and involvement to the organization. Allen and Meyer argued that employees with a strong affective commitment are those who want to stay in the organization and are willing to contribute to its survival and

development. Powell and Meyer (2004) showed that affective commitment is significantly correlated with four factors of lateral commitment, namely, satisfaction of condition, expectation, self-expression concern and individual adjustment.

*Continuance Commitment.* This dimension is an important development of Becker's Side Bet Theory. It refers to the lecturer's awareness that leaving the organization may bring him/her losses, such as economic cost and time, job experience, certain job skills and social connections. So, by weighing the pros and cons, employees think they need to stay in the organization in an effort to retain the benefits that have been accumulated. In addition, Meyer and Allen (1991) pointed out that Continuance commitment is related to employees' perception of occupation's choice. In some specific occupations, the more commitment to investment, the higher the commitment.

*Normative Commitment.* That is the commitment made by employees to the organization due to the influence of moral and social responsibilities. Employees with a high level of normative commitment perceive that they should be loyal to the organization, so they choose to stay in the original organization. There are relatively few studies involving normative commitments than the other two dimensions.

*Previous Studies on Charismatic Leadership and Organizational Commitment* Before Dvir, Kass, and Shamir (2004), few empirical studies focused on the emotional and cognitive impact of New Leadership on their followers. This study used qualitative and quantitative methods to determine the relationship between vision (the common dimension of all new leadership theories) and organizational commitment. Quantitative results confirmed that vision was positively correlated with the impact of affective commitment on the organization, not with continuance commitment.

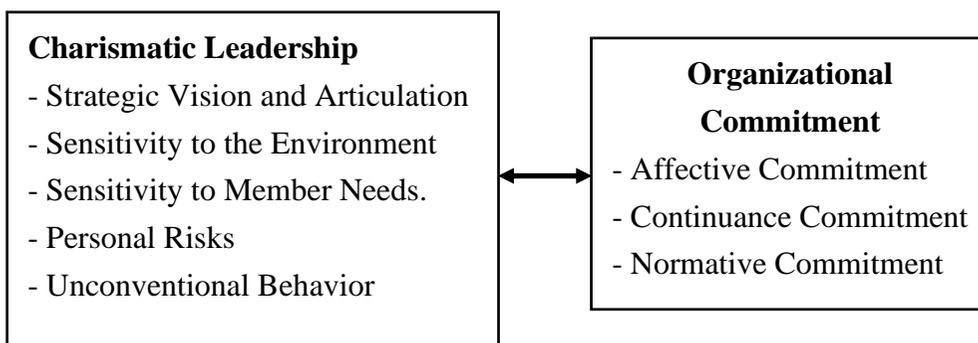
Michaelis, Stegmaier, and Sonntag (2009)'s study investigated the relationship between charismatic leadership trust in top management and followers' innovation. The findings showed both relationships were mediated by followers' affective commitment to change. Although the researchers did not directly prove the relationship between charismatic leadership and organizational commitment, they did confirm the link between charismatic

leadership and affective commitment in organizations.

Shastri, Mishra, and Sinha (2010) conducted their research in India to determine the relationship between charismatic leadership and organization commitment. The results showed that 5 of the 6 dimensions in Conger's theory were significantly correlated with organizational commitment. The researchers emphasized the importance of leaders having a clear vision and articulating it clearly, which can greatly affect employees' organizational commitment. Employees were more satisfied with charismatic leaders.

### Conceptual Framework

This study was determined the relationship between lecturers' perception towards charismatic leadership and their organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China. The charismatic leadership and the organizational commitment were the two main variables of this study. Since Conger-Kanungo's (1987) Behavioral Theory of Charismatic Leadership and Becker's (1960) Side Bet Theory of Organizational Commitment were used as the theoretical foundations, the subscales from both theories under two major variables were also put into the conceptual framework, as below Figure 1 shows.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study**

### Method

This study applied quantitative method and the researcher used questionnaire to collect the required data to determine the relationship between lecturers' perceptions of charismatic leadership and organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences in 2020 (March-August). The respondents in this

study were 105 full-time lecturers in the selected school. A total of 105 questionnaires was distributed online and 98 were returned, the return rate was 93.33%. A five-point Likert scale: (a) 1 = Strongly Disagree; (b) 2 = Disagree; (c) 3 = Neutral; (d) 4 = Agree; and (e) 5 = Strongly Agree, measured lecturers' perception of each item in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire has divided into three parts:

Part 1 was the demographic data of the participant, in this part, the researcher utilized five questions: gender, age, education background, academic position, and teaching experiences.

Part 2 was Charismatic Leadership Questionnaire. The researcher used Conger-Kanungo's (1998) 20-Item questionnaire in this research, which has five dimensions: Strategic Vision and Articulation, Sensitivity to the Environment, Sensitivity to Member Needs, Personal Risk, and Unconventional Behavior.

Part 3 was to survey the level of lecturers' organizational commitment. The researcher adopted Norizan's (2012) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, which has three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment.

## Findings

### *Research Objective One*

Table 1: *Means and Standard Deviations of Lecturers' Perceptions towards Charismatic Leadership (N=98)*

Charismatic Leadership	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Strategic Vision and Articulation	3.95	.749	High
Sensitivity to the Environment	3.85	.786	High
Sensitivity to Member Needs	3.87	.731	High
Personal Risk	3.41	.920	Moderate
Unconventional Behavior	3.60	.627	High
Total	3.74	.667	High

Table 1 shows the Means and Standard of lecturers' perceptions towards Charismatic Leadership based on five components were 3.74, which is in the range of 3.51- 4.50, interpretation was high level in general. Among them, the mean of Strategic Vision and Articulation (3.95) scored the highest, and regarded as high level, while the mean of Personal Risk (3.41) scored the lowest, regarded as moderate level.

*Research Objective Two*

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Lecturers' Perceptions towards Organizational Commitment (N=98)

Organizational Commitment	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Affective Commitment	3.81	.591	High
Continuance Commitment	3.56	.450	High
Normative Commitment	3.58	.581	High
Total	3.65	.391	High

Table 2 demonstrates that the overall mean scores of lecturers' perceptions towards Organizational Commitment based on three components were 3.65, which is in the range of 3.51- 4.50. The mean of Affective Commitment (3.81) scored the highest, and regarded as high level, and the mean of Continuance Commitment (3.56) scored the lowest, regarded as high level. Overall, the lecturers' perceptions towards Organizational Commitment regarded as high.

*Research Objective Three*

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Lecturers' Perceptions towards Charismatic Leadership and Organizational Commitment

		Lecturers' Perceptions towards Organizational Commitment	Conclusion
Lecturers' Perceptions towards Charismatic Leadership	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	.401**	There is a significant relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the analysis of the relationship between lecturers' perceptions towards Charismatic Leadership and their Organizational Commitment. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there was a weak positive association between charismatic leadership and their organizational commitment by lecturers in the school, ( $r(98) = .401, p = .000$ ). Thus, the research hypothesis was accepted, which means there was a significant relationship between lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership and their organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences at a

university in Yunnan, China.

### **Discussion**

According to the results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there was a weak positive association between charismatic leadership and organizational commitment, ( $r(98) = .401, p = .000$ ) in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China. Simultaneously, the lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership in the school was high (3.74), and the level of lecturers' organizational commitment in the school was high (3.65). The findings suggest in general that the lecturers feel the charismatic leadership behavior of their top leader and organizational commitment were high in the School of Life Sciences.

According to the result of this study, lecturers regarded the highest attitude towards charismatic leadership on strategic vision and articulation the received in the selected school. The administrators will actively communicate with lecturers when having visions and strategic plans. This analysis supports Conger-Kanungo's theory, which holds that vision is the core of charismatic leadership and believes that the most basic behavior is to share the vision with members and build trust. As effective leaders should gather the goal of a school, encourage collaboration of all the staff, solve the lecturers' problems, and develop positive school climate (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). According to Mahmood et al. (2012), results that are similar put forward that leaders are at the core of the organization and play a key role in the process of change. They are responsible for labor selection, strategic direction planning, decision-making, and ultimately achieve responsibility to the organization and members. In current study, the lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership on strategic vision and articulation is related to the affective commitment and continuance commitment of organizational commitments. Lecturers may prefer to choose an organization with similar values. However, there was some inconsistency between the current study and Dvir, Kass, and Shamir (2004) shows that strategic vision and articulation and affective commitment have a positive impact, regardless of continuance commitment.

Meanwhile, lecturers' perceptions towards the sensitivity to the environment and sensitivity to member needs of the charismatic leadership regarded as high in this study. The ability to identify defects in the current environment (Khilji

et al., 2010) and sustain valuable employees (Collins & Smith, 2006; Jiang et al., 2012; McClean & Collins, 2019) is key to distinguishing between charismatic and non-attractive leaders. McElroy (2005) pointed out that lecturers would like to stay in the school, where lecturers feel that their contribution was appreciated and have their personal growth, where has supportive and effective school leaders. In this study, the lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership on sensitivity to the environment is related to the affective commitment and continuance commitment of organizational commitments. Sensitivity to member needs is only related to the affective commitment. Lecturers perceived that when leaders pay more attention to the needs of them, the lecturers' feelings towards the school were more attached.

Lecturers showed only moderate positive towards charismatic leadership on personal risk in the selected school. Meanwhile, "In pursuing organizational objectives involving considerable personal risk" and "Takes high personal risks for the sake of the organization" these two options regarded as high. The researcher believed that there were some inconsistencies in this part. The reason for this might be due to lecturer's different definitions of "personal risk" and "personal cost". Findings reveal that the lecturers' perceptions towards charismatic leadership on personal risk is related to the affective commitment and continuance commitment of organizational commitments. Unconventional behavior is only related to the affective commitment. Kets de Vries (1988) found that charismatic leaders attract followers because they exude what follows lack: self-confidence and conviction. Through personal risk and unconventional behavior, leaders built the trust and commitment of followers (Conger et al., 1997). Michaelis et al., (2009)'s study investigated the relationship between charismatic leadership, trust in top management and followers' innovation. The findings showed both relationships were mediated by followers' affective commitment to change. Shastri et al., (2010) found that the relationship between leaders and members is based on common interests and the behavior of the group is influenced by the behavior of the leader. Moreover, the lecturers' organizational commitment in the School of Life Sciences at a university in Yunnan, China was high, the score was 3.65 in total. The highest score was affective commitment (3.81), then normative commitment was 3.58, the lowest was continuance commitment (3.56). This result is similar with Kamaylar (2016) mentioned that affective commitment in the No. 2 Basic Education High School was high, next was normative

commitment and last was continuance commitment. These data proved that lecturers feel 'emotionally attached' to the school, and that the loyalty and hard work of the lecturers is mainly due to their deep affection for the organization. Thus, further illustrated that lecturers' identity and attachment to the organization stems from their own values being consistent with the values of the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Charismatic leadership can increase employees' affective commitment (Barling et al., 1996). In school organizations, lecturers with high affective commitment will generally strongly identify with the school and its goals and may reject offers to go to another school that is more attractive.

The scores for lecturers' normative commitment were the second highest. Based on Jaros et al. (1993) that normative commitments are characterized by person's psychological attachment to an employment organization by internalizing their goals, values, and missions. Lecturers with a high level of normative commitment perceive that they should be loyal to this school, so they choose to stay. Nevertheless, all five components of charismatic leadership are not related to the normative commitment of organizational commitments. Although the relationship has not yet been determined in this study, administrators may consider pre-service training or welfare system for lecturers in schools more if they wish to increase lecturers' normative commitments, which makes lecturers morally think they should stay in school (Snape, Lo, & Redman, 2008).

The lowest score for lecturers' continuance commitment. Mowday et al. (1982) explained that as grows older, lecturers have fewer and fewer job choices, so they will be more loyal to their current school. Another reason is that people become more loyal when they realize that leaving is more costly than staying in the organization. Meyer and Allen (1991) pointed out that in some specific occupations, the more commitment to investment, the higher the commitment. According to Becker's Side Bet Theory the continuance commitment is an indication of the employee's psychological intention from an economic perspective. It refers to the lecturer's awareness that leaving the organization may bring him/her losses, such as economic cost and time, job experience, certain job skills and social connections.

## **Recommendations**

### *Recommendation for School Administrators*

The researcher would recommend that school administrators take more personal risks in their work and take responsibility for their own decisions. Administrators should build trust with members, store a lot of credibility, and increase the loyalty of lecturer, thereby improving organizational commitment. It is recommended that school administrators shape the role models, including professional skills and character.

### *Recommendation for Lecturers*

The researcher would recommend lecturers actively communicate with the school to reflect their real needs so that school administrators can develop better management systems. Another suggestion for lecturers was that they need to regularly self-evaluate their performance, improving cooperation with colleagues, enhancing group cohesion, and focusing on their own professional development.

### *Recommendation for Future Researcher*

Most of the existing research on charismatic leadership has been carried out in the Western whether these theories and models are applicable to Chinese school further research is needed. The researcher would recommend future researchers try to expand the sample to both public and private universities, use both qualitative and quantitative research method to analyze lecturers' perception more deeply towards these two variables.

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