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**Enhancing Organizational Commitment in Chengdu's Public Universities:  
Roles of transformational and lecturer leadership**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the impact of transformational leadership (TL) and lecturer leadership (LL) on organizational commitment (OC) in Chinese higher education. Analyzing survey data from 408 lecturers using PLS-SEM, the results reveal that TL directly enhances OC and indirectly strengthens it by improving LL. These findings underscore TL's pivotal role in fostering supportive academic environments and suggest that leadership training is necessary to cultivate OC. Future research should investigate the underlying mechanisms and explore their cross-contextual applicability.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Lecturer Leadership; Organizational Commitment; Higher education

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**1.0 Introduction**

Higher education in China is increasingly recognized as a pivotal engine for national development and innovation, underscoring the critical importance of lecturers' organizational commitment. As Chinese universities strive to enhance their global standing, they rely heavily on their academic staff to spearhead reforms, adopt innovative teaching methodologies, and conduct research with profound societal impact. Nevertheless, the escalating demands placed on lecturers, such as increased workloads, intensified publication pressures, and expectations to assume leadership roles, pose formidable challenges (Li & Zhang, 2023). These conditions prompt a vital inquiry into the extent of lecturers' commitment to their institutions amidst these burgeoning pressures. Exploring this question is essential for comprehending the current landscape of lecturers' organizational commitment and devising strategies to maintain their engagement, which is crucial for the sustained success and competitiveness of China's higher education system.

The Chinese government's strategic blueprint for higher education, articulated in the China Education Modernization 2035 plan, positions this sector as a cornerstone of national innovation and strategic imperatives (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, 2019). By March 2024, enrolment in Chinese higher education institutions reached 47.63 million students, representing the most extensive higher education system globally (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024). While reflecting the urgent demand for high-quality human resources, this exponential growth also presents significant challenges in managing and retaining an academic workforce capable of fulfilling these expectations (Li & Liu, 2022).

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Organizational commitment, defined as the degree to which employees are dedicated to and wish to remain within their organizations, is a crucial factor for institutional stability and effectiveness (Celep, 2000). This commitment is especially significant among university lecturers, whose roles are integral to the success of both academic and institutional endeavors. However, lecturers often encounter substantial teaching, research, and administrative workloads, which contribute to burnout and increased risks of turnover (Sun et al., 2023). These challenges underscore the importance of effective leadership in alleviating these pressures and promoting lecturers' well-being (Li & Zhang, 2023).

Transformational leadership, characterized by motivational inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, is widely recognized for its capacity to align personal and organizational goals, enhancing organizational performance. While the impact of transformational leadership has been extensively studied globally, its application within Chinese higher education remains insufficiently explored. Most existing research focuses on primary and secondary education levels, leaving a notable gap in our understanding of its influence on lecturers in the higher education sector.

In addition to institutional leadership, the roles of lecturers in their academic departments are critical in examining the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Leithwood & Slegers, 2006). As lecturers increasingly undertake leadership responsibilities within their units, they act as educators, influencers, and leaders in their academic communities. These roles often involve coordinating academic programs, mentoring junior colleagues, leading research initiatives, and fostering collaboration among faculty members. Such responsibilities enable lecturers to shape the organizational culture and influence their peers' behaviors and attitudes, thereby enhancing both their own organizational commitment and that of their colleagues. This dynamic reinforces a culture of engagement and dedication within the institution (Sun & Wang, 2017; Zadok & Benoliel, 2023). The dual roles of lecturers as both educators and leaders add complexity to the study of organizational commitment. On one hand, lecturers must fulfil their teaching and research obligations, often under growing pressures to publish, secure funding, and deliver high-quality education (Meng & Wang, 2018).

On the other hand, academic leaders are responsible for driving the success of their respective departments or academic units. This requires fostering strong interpersonal relationships, managing conflicts effectively, and inspiring colleagues to work together to achieve collective goals (Zhang, 2023). Understanding how lecturers balance these dual responsibilities is crucial for addressing challenges and fostering a sustainable academic environment within Chinese universities.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of transformational leadership, lecturers' organizational commitment, and lecturers' leadership in China's public universities?
2. Is there a significant influence of transformational leadership on lecturers' organizational commitment?
3. Is there a significant influence of lecturers' leadership on lecturers' organizational commitment?
4. Is there a significant influence of transformational leadership on lecturers' leadership?

## 2.0 Literature review

### 2.1 Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment, defined as employees' psychological endorsement of an organization's goals and values, along with their willingness to contribute effort and maintain affiliation (Celep, 2000), is a pivotal construct in this study. Employees exhibiting higher levels of organizational commitment are notably more willing to exert additional effort for their organization and align their ambitions with those of their employer (Fababier & Apostol, 2024). In higher education, organizational commitment among faculty members, lecturers, and academic instructors has a significant influence on institutional stability and performance (Jing et al., 2023). A substantial body of research highlights the crucial role of leadership in promoting organizational commitment, showing that effective leadership practices enhance this commitment by fostering professional growth and collaborative engagement (Karriker, 2019; Kim, 2022).

### 2.2 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership was initially introduced by Burns in 1978 and subsequently refined by Bass in 1985. This leadership style is encapsulated in the "4I" model, which includes Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This model characterizes transformational leaders as those who encourage their followers to surpass routine expectations and actively promote the development of leadership capabilities within them (Anderson, 2017). Over the past four decades, the transformational leadership theory has occupied a core position in leadership research due to its unique ability to drive comprehensive organizational change.

This theory significantly impacts university lecturers' organizational commitment through four dimensions: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. In the realm of Idealized Influence, transformational leaders foster an environment of trust and respect in universities by embodying core values such as integrity and responsibility through their personal example, thereby prompting teachers to develop a sense of identification and commitment to the institution (Khan et al., 2022).

In Inspirational Motivation, leaders stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and optimism by shaping the institution's vision, strengthening their emotional connection to organizational goals, and enhancing loyalty and dedication. Intellectual Stimulation encourages teachers to think critically and innovate, supporting them in exploring teaching methods and research practices. This meets the need for academic

freedom and enhances teachers' recognition of the organization's value through a dynamic academic environment. Individualized Consideration focuses on teachers' individual needs and development, building close leader-teacher relationships through customized support, enhancing their sense of belonging, and consolidating long-term organizational commitment (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021). Against the backdrop of China's higher education facing challenges such as faculty burnout, brain drain, and policy adjustments, transformational leadership transcends mere institutional compliance through its multidimensional effects, inspiring teachers to engage actively in organizational missions. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Transformational leadership has a significant positive influence on lecturers' organizational commitment.

### 2.3 Lecturer Leadership

This study adapts the term "lecturer leadership" from Katzenmeyer's (2009) concept of "teacher leadership," tailoring it to the unique contextual demands of higher education. Lecturer leadership defines university faculty's leadership roles, extending beyond classroom instruction to include academic research, institutional governance, disciplinary mentorship, and systemic educational innovation. Siddiqui et al. (2021) demonstrate that effective leadership practices enhance organizational commitment by promoting professional growth and collaborative engagement. Research has shown that providing educators with leadership opportunities significantly enhances their commitment and loyalty (Saleem et al., 2019). For instance, Wang and Rashid (2022) found that faculty members in leadership roles maintained high levels of institutional commitment despite heavy workloads. These lecturer leaders reported elevated job satisfaction and demonstrated increased motivation and loyalty towards their universities.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) characterized teacher leadership as a "sleeping giant" with the potential to catalyze transformative change in educational systems. In higher education, lecturer leadership stimulates a culture of innovation and adaptability. By empowering lecturers to assume leadership roles, institutions can cultivate a work environment that aligns individual professional growth with organizational objectives. This alignment is crucial for enhancing faculty members' organizational commitment, thereby strengthening institutional resilience and competitiveness in the complex and rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

H2: There is a significant positive influence of lecturers' leadership on organizational commitment.

Transformational leadership is defined by its capacity to inspire, motivate, and empower followers to transcend routine performance and cultivate their leadership capabilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This framework emphasizes shared leadership, shifting organizational dynamics from hierarchical, top-down models to distributed systems where leadership is embedded across institutional roles (Harris & Jones, 2019). Transformational leaders unlock lecturers' latent potential by aligning personal goals with institutional objectives and addressing individual needs, enabling them to assume proactive leadership roles in academic research, curricular innovation, and governance (Yeap et al., 2021).

Empirical research highlights the direct impact of transformational leadership on promoting lecturer leadership. For instance, Chai et al. (2017) demonstrate that transformational leaders who tailor support to lecturers' developmental needs empower them to take on greater responsibilities, such as driving educational reforms or leading research initiatives. Silitonga (2021) further highlights how this leadership style cultivates a culture of shared values and belonging, reinforcing lecturers' confidence in their leadership capacities. Such environments, characterized by collaboration and mutual respect, enable lecturers to transition from passive contributors to active leaders in shaping institutional agendas.

H3: There is a significant positive influence of transformational leadership on lecturers' leadership

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Participants

This study examines the impact of deans' transformational leadership and lecturers' leadership on lecturers' organizational commitment in China. It focused on 18 public universities in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, which employ 36,450 lecturers. The data collection method employed was simple random sampling. Eventually, 510 questionnaires were distributed using an online survey method, and 408 participants consented to participate in this study and returned the completed questionnaires (see Table 1), yielding a response rate of 80%.

Table 1. Respondents Profile

Category	Demography	Count (n=408)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	169	41.4%
	Female	239	58.6%
Dean's Gender	Male	277	67.9%
	Female	131	32.1%
Age Group	20-35 (Young Lecturer)	194	47.5%
	36-50 (Middle-Aged Lecturer)	196	48.0%

Educational Background	51-60 (Senior Lecturer)	18	4.4%
	Bachelor	101	24.8%
	Master	210	51.5%
	PhD	97	23.8%
Service Current University	0-15 years (Junior Lecturer)	356	87.3%
	16-30 years (Experienced Lecturer)	48	11.8%
	31-45 years (veteran Lecturer)	4	1.0%

### 3.2 Measures

This study collected data through a structured online survey questionnaire with 78 items on a 5-point Likert scale, divided into four sections: demographic data (5 items), deans' transformational leadership (20 items), lecturers' organizational commitment (20 items), and lecturers' leadership (33 items).

### 3.3 Data analysis

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as the analytical approach. PLS-SEM is a variance-based method for estimating path models that involve latent variables (Hair, 2017).

Before evaluating the hypothesized relationships, descriptive statistics were first computed to summarize the data, including frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations. These measures provided an overview of the respondents' demographic characteristics and the distribution of scores on the constructs. The study assessed the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships. The assessment utilized bootstrapping within the PLS-SEM framework to test hypotheses and validate the structural model. Key metrics considered in this evaluation included collinearity, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ). Bootstrapping, a resampling method, was employed to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients by examining t-values and p-values. This technique was applied to the second-order constructs in the structural model to test the study's hypotheses.

## 4.0 Findings

The analysis of first-order constructs presented in Table 2 demonstrates strong internal consistency reliability, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.868 to 0.955 and high composite reliability.

Table2. Measurement Model for the First Order Constructs

Construct	Alpha	rho ( $\rho_A$ )	CR	AVE
Idealized Influence (II)	0.955	0.956	0.962	0.759
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	0.944	0.945	0.96	0.856
Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	0.94	0.94	0.961	0.893
Individual Consideration (IC)	0.924	0.926	0.946	0.815
Commitment to the University Organization (CU)	0.909	0.909	0.936	0.786
Commitment to the Teaching Occupation (CT)	0.898	0.899	0.924	0.71
Commitment to Teaching Work (CW)	0.929	0.93	0.945	0.74
Commitment to the Work Group (CG)	0.938	0.938	0.956	0.843
Self-Awareness (SA)	0.939	0.939	0.951	0.766
Leading Change (LE)	0.868	0.874	0.919	0.791
Communication (CM)	0.891	0.892	0.925	0.755
Diversity (DV)	0.92	0.922	0.94	0.759
Instructional Proficiency and Leadership (IPL)	0.903	0.904	0.939	0.837
Continuous Improvement (CI)	0.952	0.952	0.961	0.806
Self-Organization (SO)	0.94	0.942	0.952	0.769

Similarly, Table 3 illustrates that the AVE values for all second-order constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.50. This further supports the validity of the latent variables and affirms that the constructs meaningfully represent the underlying theoretical dimensions. Together, these findings ensure the reliability and validity of both first-order and second-order constructs, providing a solid foundation for the structural model and subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table3. Measurement Model for the Second-Order Constructs

Construct	Item	Loading	Alpha	rho ( $\rho_A$ )	CR	AVE
Transformational Leadership (TL)	IC	0.941	0.967	0.967	0.976	0.910

Organizational Commitment (OC)	II	0.954				
	IM	0.963				
	IS	0.957				
	CG	0.866	0.927	0.928	0.949	0.822
	CT	0.928				
	CU	0.905				
	CW	0.926				
Lecturer Leadership (LL)	CI	0.95	0.973	0.974	0.978	0.863
	CM	0.932				
	DV	0.919				
	IPL	0.933				
	LE	0.908				
	SA	0.921				
	SO	0.937				

To address **H1**: The first hypothesis posited that transformational leadership positively influences lecturers' organizational commitment. The results in Table 4 confirm this relationship, with transformational leadership exhibiting a positive and significant influence on organizational commitment ( $\beta = 0.369$ ,  $t = 4.172$ ) at the  $p < 0.001$  significance level. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval corrected for bias did not contain zero, further supporting the reliability of the finding. Therefore, H1 is supported.

**H2**: The second hypothesis suggested a significant positive influence of lecturers' leadership on organizational commitment. The findings in Table 4 reveal that lecturers' leadership has a significant influence on organizational commitment ( $\beta = 0.558$ ,  $t = 5.751$ ) at the 0.001 significance level. As with H1, the 95% confidence interval corrected for bias did not include zero, confirming the significance of the relationship. Consequently, H2 is supported.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	STDEV	t-values	Decision	BCI LL	BCI UL	f <sup>2</sup>
H1	TL -> OC	0.369	0.363	0.088	4.172***	Supported	0.216	0.558	0.273
H2	LL -> OC	0.558	0.564	0.097	5.751***	Supported	0.353	0.729	0.622
H3	TL ->LL	0.663	0.662	0.053	12.494***	Supported	0.549	0.755	0.785

Note: This study used a 95% confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 10,000

**H3**: The third hypothesis proposed that transformational leadership positively influences lecturers' leadership. The results in Table 4 indicate a strong positive influence, with transformational leadership having a significant impact on lecturer leadership ( $\beta = 0.663$ ,  $t = 12.494$ ) at the 0.001 significance level. The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval also did not contain zero, solidifying the evidence for this relationship. Thus, H3 is supported.

## 5.0 Discussion

The analysis of effect sizes provides insights into the strength of relationships between the constructs in the structural model and the overall contribution of transformational leadership and lecturer leadership to organizational commitment. The effect size of transformational leadership on organizational commitment was 0.273, indicating a medium effect according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, where 0.02 represents a small effect, 0.15 a medium effect, and 0.35 a significant effect. The effect size of lecturer leadership on organizational commitment was 0.622, signifying a significant effect. In contrast, transformational leadership had an even greater influence on lecturer leadership, with an effect size of 0.785, also categorized as a significant effect. These findings highlight the pivotal role of both transformational and lecturer leadership in fostering organizational commitment.

Figure 1 demonstrates the second-order constructs of the structural model, including the  $\beta$  values and t-values, which validate the hypothesized relationships. The structural model's high  $\beta$  values and significant t-values reinforce the robustness of the direct and indirect effects analyzed in this study. The transformational leadership and lecturer leadership together explain approximately 72% of the variance in organizational commitment, indicating a strong model fit. Additionally, transformational leadership accounts for approximately 44% of the variance in lecturer leadership, underscoring its foundational role in shaping leadership dynamics and organizational outcomes within the academic context.

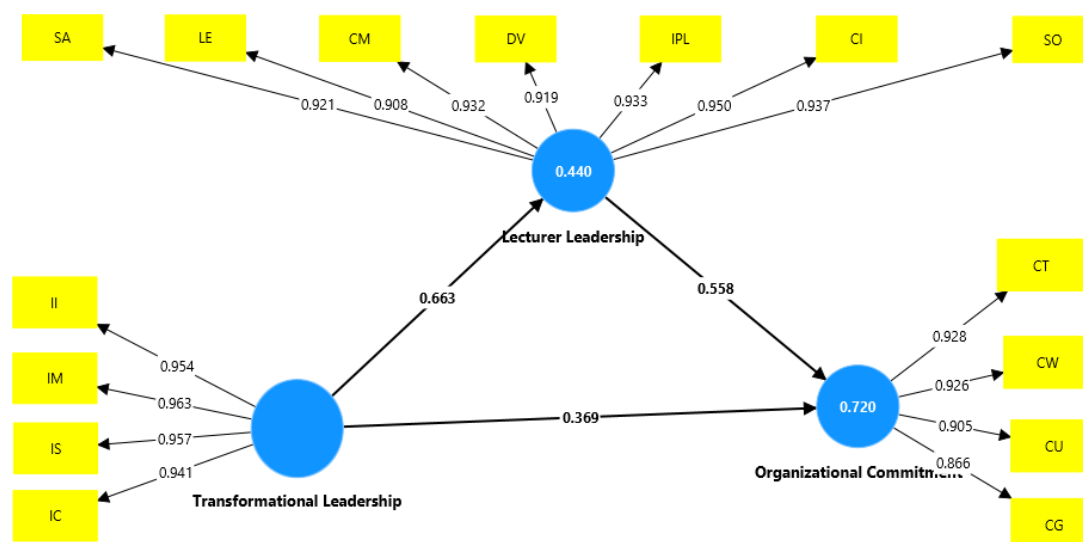


Figure 1. Structural model

## 6.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

This study sought to investigate the direct and indirect effects of transformational leadership and lecturers' leadership on organizational commitment within public universities in Chengdu, China. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the measurement and structural models, the findings revealed several significant relationships. Transformational leadership was found to have a positive and significant direct effect on lecturers' organizational commitment.

Similarly, lecturers' leadership had a positive and significant influence on organizational commitment. These results underscore the critical role of effective leadership styles in fostering organizational commitment among lecturers, highlighting the interconnectedness between leadership practices and institutional success. The findings provide strong empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that leadership styles are pivotal in enhancing lecturers' organizational commitment.

To achieve this, university administrators should prioritize implementing and nurturing transformational leadership practices. Such practices align institutional goals with the aspirations of individual lecturers, creating an environment of shared purpose and engagement. Simultaneously, universities should invest in comprehensive leadership development programs for lecturers to enhance their leadership capacities. Strengthened leadership skills amplify lecturers' direct influence on organizational commitment and reinforce their mediating role in leadership processes. Integrating leadership development into broader organizational strategies can generate a synergistic effect, further enhancing institutional effectiveness. Additionally, fostering a supportive organizational environment—through mentorship opportunities, recognition of achievements, and strategic resource allocation—can encourage the cultivation of leadership behaviors at all institutional levels. This approach strengthens organizational commitment among lecturers and ensures sustainable institutional growth and long-term success.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. University leadership should incorporate transformational leadership principles into strategic planning, performance management, and faculty development efforts.
2. Institutions should create and implement targeted training programs and mentoring schemes to enhance leadership skills among academic staff.
3. Policies recognizing and rewarding lecturers' leadership contributions should be institutionalized to encourage active participation and ongoing commitment.

While this study offers valuable insights, future research could explore the following areas:

1. Comparative studies across different regions or types of higher education institutions (e.g., private vs. public) to validate the applicability of the findings.
2. Long-term research designs to examine how leadership development interventions impact organizational commitment over time.
3. Additional mediating or moderating factors, such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, or psychological empowerment, should be incorporated to improve the current model.
4. Qualitative methods (e.g., interviews or case studies) could provide deeper insights into how lecturers perceive and practice leadership within institutional settings.

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### **Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study**

This study contributes to leadership and higher education research by empirically validating the relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and lecturer leadership (LL) in relation to organizational commitment (OC) in Chengdu's public universities. It extends TL theory by demonstrating its cascading effect on LL and OC, offering a novel leadership development perspective. Practically, it provides evidence for policymakers and university leaders to adopt TL-driven training, fostering lecturer empowerment and institutional loyalty. The findings enrich OC research in non-Western contexts, supporting collaborative leadership reforms.

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