



Preferred Leadership Traits by Employees: A case study in Telecommunication Organization

Maizan, C.¹, Florianna, L. M.^{2*} and Hamidi, H.³

^{1,2,3} Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Leaders affect employees' performance in the organization by their leadership style, which is dependent to the degree of favor by their followers. It is vital for the organization to identify the most effective leadership styles which will boost performance in the organization. This research studied the type of leadership trait most preferred in the telecommunication sector. This qualitative study used the Full Range Leadership Model to identify and suggest the preferred traits of a leader. The sampling method used was purposive. Interview guides were used as the research tool. A total of six (6) informants were interviewed. The results showed transformational leadership style is the most preferred by all the informants as the employees found that the traits of the transformational leader bring more positive impacts on their work performance.

Keywords: Leadership traits; Transformational leadership; Telecommunication sector; Full-range Leadership Model; Employees performance.

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INTRODUCTION

The function of organizational leadership is critical in generating vision, mission, determination, and setting goals to efficiently attain the organization's goals (Xu & Wang,

2008). Mintzberg (2010) pointed out that the key to trust from regard to others is leadership. Employee acts as a significant personality within the organisation to guarantee that the organisation remains productive. Without a worker to carry out the assignment, there is no place within the organisation as a leader. This is why the leaders must show that they can be role models for their supporters. This will enhance employee motivation on the job (Olawuyi & Shakur, 2017).

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E-mail address:

mmflendai@unimas.my (Florianna, L. M.)

*Corresponding author

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The leader affects the employees' performance in the organization by its leadership style which is dependent to the degree of favor by their followers. Raelin (2011) stated that leadership is directly connected to the practices to which people are committed. The most essential quality of a leader is when they can use their personality to influence their followers. This is then translated into positive relationship with job satisfaction and the performance (Lian et al., 2011).

Mohiuddin (2017) stated that leadership plays an important character in every organization. Numerous studies have been made to understand the traits of leadership. However, not much are known about the needs of the leadership activities in an organization. One of the solutions to these problems is to adopt the most effective leadership styles which will boost performance in the organization (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2015).

Leadership style can affect the efficiency of employees in distinct ways. Workers who feel like they are a part of the organisation would work harder to contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives (Narayana, 2017). The powerful corporate management style indicates that adherents hold comparable views and ethical values with their leader's regard. They can demonstrate to be efficient in obtaining their efficiency when these values align with the company intent.

Researchers debated the impact of leadership style on employee performance (Mwobeki, 2017). In the leader, the impact of different styles can affect the worker differently by which their achievement is directly affected. Every country depends on

its levels of education to grow and it is believed that no educational institution can grow without the quality of the leaders, a strong case, now widely recognized (Sa'adatu, 2013).

In Malaysia, employees, especially those in government agencies have been criticized for a long time because of poor performance, lacking on flexibility, inefficient, poor responsibility, and red tape (Said, Alam & Aziz, 2015). The leadership in Malaysia has been long linked with hierarchy and relationship (Ansari, Ahmad & Aafaqi, 2004). In the other words, the leaders in Malaysia have sufficient power on authority towards their followers (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, every anger and hostility against their superior is displaced, and the tendency is to satisfy their superior (Jayasingam & Cheng, 2009).

According to Iqbal, Anwar and Haider (2015), the leadership problem in the public sector happens due to the lack of strategic interventions of specific leadership styles to the particular situation. For instance, they are dependable to be treated by the public-school principals (leadership) and most principals are failed to build an ethical atmosphere in the institution (Khokar & Rehman, 2017). Moreover, many organizations are facing problems with unethical practices, high turnover rate and poor financial performance because of the lack of effective leadership (Al-Khajeh, 2018). Most of the company did not take a consideration of what types of leadership style need to be adopted by their managers.

In telecommunication context, there is limited research on the relationship of which the transformational leadership is linked

directly with organizational innovation because there is always any other third variable or internal or external effect included (Malik & Awan, 2016). In accordance to a study conducted by Mohamud, Mohamed and Mohamud (2015) in the telecommunication sector in Somali, it was stated the problem is due to little understanding of how the leadership in the company support employee performance. Thus, the leadership traits and employee performance still own their gaps. Hence, this study aimed to:

- i. Study the perception of the employees on the current leadership traits in the organization.
- ii. Explore the preferences of leadership styles in the organization by the employees

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Leadership in Telecommunication Sector

According to Malik and Awan (2016), leadership is importance to initiate innovation. The transformational leadership style is said to provide a great opportunity to provide the innovation as these types of leadership is trying and provide greater opportunity for innovation. Thompson and Webber (2016) in studying United States context also stated that leadership best practices in the telecommunication company are when leaders establish measurable, realistic, specific, and timely goals to improve employee performance and assist in achieving improved team results. This is supported by Snow & Hrebiniak (2002) in which they emphasized that goals are important since they provide the areas of attentiveness and focus to which performance improvements are required.

High turnover rate can negatively affect the performance of an organization (Hom & Kinichi, 2001). The leadership traits or behaviour is said to be an agent to identify and prevent or reduce the turnover rates in the telecommunication sector. Understanding the employee turnover is important in the telecommunication sector so that the leader may decide to hire high performance employees and easily influence them to achieve what are required by the organization.

In Somali context, telecommunication sector is considered very important because it has contributed to the technological innovation and according to Ali and Ibrahim (2014) each of the telecommunication company has attempts to be well-known in terms of their services and products. Mohamud, Mohamed & Mohamud (2015) conclude their study of telecommunication sector in Somali context that the telecommunication industry itself should provide a good leadership behaviour to their industry which its actually can improve the performance of their employee.

Full Range Leadership Model

The Full Range Leadership Model consists of three main categories namely Laissez-faire, Transactional and Transformational as shown in Table 1.

Laissez-faire Leadership

Avolio (1999) noted that laissez-faire leadership is poor, ineffective leadership and highly dissatisfying for followers". Laissez-faire leaders attempt to pass the responsibility of decision-making process to the group which essentially cause decision making to become very slow leading to the task may

Table 1: Full Range Leadership Model

Laissez-faire	Transactional		Transformational			
Hands-Off Leadership	Management by Exception (MBE)	Contingent Reward (CR)	Individual Consideration (IC) Caring	Intellectual Stimulation (IS) Thinking	Inspirational Motivation (IM) Charming	Idealized Influence (II) Influencing
	Passive MBE	Active MBE				

not be undertaken consequently. This type of leadership usually resulting in projects that go off-track and deadlines missed when team members do not get enough guidance or feedback from leaders. It was found that team effectiveness is comparatively lower than traditional style (Gadirajurrett, Srinivasan, Stevens & Jeena, 2018).

Transactional Leadership

Contingent Reward (CR). Economic and emotional exchanges are the basis of contingent reward management. It clarifies the role demands, and the required results are rewarded or praised. The leader tracks deviations from standards with active management-by-exception and offers corrective action (Puni, Mohammed, & Asamoah, 2018).

Management by Exception (MBE). Management-by-exception are divided into active and passive. Active refers to the vigilance of a leader whose goal is to make sure that standards are met, meanwhile, passive refers to a leader who intervenes only after noncompliance has occurred or when errors have already happened (McCann & Sparks, 2019)

Transformational Leadership

According to Keskes (2014) transformational leadership style is a process of ensuing collective goals through mutual tapping of both leaders’ and followers’ motive bases

toward the achievement of the intended change. They build each other in order to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation. Jamaludin, Rahman, Makhbul and Idris (2011) stated that the process of transformational leadership would induce highly motivated and dedicated followers, exploit a vision that is able to change the organization and increase followers’ optimism and value besides infusing the senses of justice, loyalty and trust. This statement was supported by Wang and Zhang (2014) as they both stated that the transformational leader possessed the ability of motivation of influence their followers. They mentioned that transformational leadership will enhance the commitment within organization through the motivational process by reason of the transformational leadership will provide feedback, support and reinforce them so that they can achieve their expected job performance. Besides, the transformational leadership also know how to go through their own action to influence employees view of careers. In most cases, however, people perform best when they get inspiration and motivation from their leaders – transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership behavior is often correlated in high levels satisfaction on employee (Walumbwa, Orwa, Wang, & Lawler, 2005), the performance of the organization, followers’ engagement in work (Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009), and employees’ willingness to exert extra effort to reach expected goals. Studies shown that

transformational leadership is the key element in creating a supportive work environment in which employees are structurally empowered to provide optimal outcome (Cummings et al., 2010). According to Avolio and Bass (2008) transformational leadership can be broken down into five distinguishable behaviors, commonly referred as the “Four I’s” of II, IM, IS, and IC. These are referring to idealized attributes, idealized behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration.

Idealized Influences (II). Idealized influence encompasses behaviors that instill pride in followers for being associated with the leader or often called as charisma. It indicates that a leader will go beyond their individual self-interest for the greater good of the group and make personal sacrifices for others’ benefit. A transformational leader with idealized attributes displays a sense of power and confidence and is able to reassure others that they can overcome obstacles. They tend to talk about their most important values and beliefs and the importance of trusting one another.

Inspirational Motivation (IM). Inspirational motivation is the second factor of transformational leadership, which incorporates those who talk optimistically about the future and articulate a compelling vision for that future. They talk about what needs to be accomplished, but express confidence that those goals will be achieved. A person who uses inspirational motivation also creates an exciting image of what is essential to consider.

Intellectual Stimulation (IS). Intellectual stimulation is the third set of behaviors and

attributes, which implies that transformational leader seeks different perspectives when solving problems and get others to look at those problems from a different angle as well. Those who utilize intellectual stimulation also encourage non-traditional thinking and suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments. They often re-examine critical assumptions to question if those assumptions are appropriate and accurate

Individual Consideration (IC). Individualized consideration is the fourth and final factor of transformational leadership. Those transformational leaders who display individualized consideration spend time coaching and teaching their followers, and in doing so, promote self-development. They treat others as individuals, rather than simply group members, and identify the differing needs, abilities, and aspirations for those individuals. Newer transformational leadership studies indicated that the charismatic and visionary type leader can inspiring their subordinates to surpass their personal interest for the organization’s own good (Jimenez, Bueno, Galangue, & Matriano, 2017). This is due to the fact that leadership as a powerful relationship built on interactive influence and come with a particular purpose between co-workers and any colleagues where they are advanced to a higher level of motivation that affect the alteration in the organization.

Many other studies (e.g., Zhu, Chew, and Spangler 2005; Elenkov 2002; Wang et al. 2011) have suggested the transformational leadership behaviors as vital role for the organization’s success. This is because, the concept of participative approach is still insufficient in the data collected and it was

noted that this approach is critical to the sustainability of leadership processes especially in large work environments.

Implication of Bad Leadership Style

According to Flaherty, Mowen, Brown and Marshall (2009) the earlier leadership study has primarily highlighted on the intrinsic of individuals leaders and its dominant was the attributes, but the next approach to leadership study leads to altered outlook on different style of leadership. This demand the manager/supervisor to foster a leadership style so that they can influence their subordinate. However, while the different of the leadership style have the potential to influence employee in different ways, the recognition of the most appropriate leadership in the organization is still vague (Clark, Hartline & Jones, 2009). This is due to the different personality of the leadership have a different influence towards their followers or subordinate.

In the context of organization culture, Testa (2002) insisted that national culture affect the employees' appraisal of the work environment and on employee-related outcomes. By using a compatible and incompatible leadership dyad from a cruise organization as a sample, the result indicates that compatible dyads of subordinate evaluated their leaders higher on consideration behaviors compare to incompatible dyads subordinates. In addition, the study also reported that compatible dyad subordinates also have higher levels of trust and satisfaction with their supervisor compare to the members within incompatible dyads.

Organizational commitment in the other hand is the major determinant of organiza-

tional performance (Riketa, 2002). According to Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) it is generally agreed that the commitment of employee towards the organizations representing a different structure, and that admit these differences enables researchers to make exact prognosis regarding the impact of commitment on behavior. Lok and Crawford (2004) emphasized that the level of commitment between individual to the organization is differ because of they hold different personal values, attitude and beliefs. Thus, the commitment of the employees will decrease if the leadership styles are not fit to them and caused to not achieve their performance.

Leadership and Employees' Performance

In any particular work or job, there must be someone to be a leader. A leader is either someone who voluntary to be or being selected by its team. A leader is expected to lead their team members to achieve a particular objective by motivating them to work better. In an organization, most of the time, the leader is someone who being involved in the job they performed and they gained a trust from the management to lead others. Yoki (2005) explained that, leadership is an upper management processes to guiding, structuring, and ease the activity and relationship a group and organization. Mills (2005) stated that it is a process which everyone can influence thinking, behaviour, and attitude of others.

According to Mintzberg (2010) leadership is the key of trust that comes from the respect of others. A similar opinion is expressed by Syafii et al., (2015) which revealed that one of the important factors that determine employee performance is leadership. Several

previous research results have proved that better leadership will improve employee performance (Yildiz et al., 2014; Asrar-ul-Haq and Peter, 2016; Hendriani et al., 2014; Karisoh, 2016).

The command or information from the leader to the members of the organization is an exchange in term of social and trust perspectives which affect its members performance (Wolumba, Mayer, Wang, Wang & Workman, 2011). According to Padash and Golparvar (2010) leaders who support their subordinates in enhancing their performance will heighten the employee's tendency to innovate and stimulate them to be creative. This is all done through the leaders' fair behaviors with their employees. Some research proves that organizations that have leaders who have good managerial competence, have high integrity, have the ability to motivate, and can direct employees who can be accepted by individuals within the organization will be able to improve employee performance (Yildiz et al., 2014; Karisoh, 2016; Maharani, et al., 2013).

The responsibility of leadership is very deliberate and important in an organization as one of the determinants of success in achieving the mission, vision, and goals of an organization (Supendy, 2012). Doucet, Fredette, Simard and Tremblay (2015) found that transformational leadership is more visionary where the leaders motivating their subordinate to meet certain expectation of desire states.

Same opinion stated by Asrar-ul-Haq and Kunchinke (2016) where transformational types of leader is usually leads the employee by provide them a vision. Thus, the relationship between leadership and employees'

performance is significantly related as the leader is the one who provide the path by vision, and the result of the employees' performance.

In the context of fast-food operation, early theorist from the earliest study had believed that the main source of the effectiveness of leadership place inside the personel traits of leaders themselves (Jimenez, Bueno, Galangue, & Matriano, 2017). The traits alone, of course failed to explain the effectiveness of the leadership (House, Rousseau, & Thomas- Hunt, 2015) because, the effectiveness of the leaders is depending in many factors and some of them might be from the factor of their followers and also the leadership styles their have to implementing a leadership role.

METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative approach. The purpose of using qualitative design is to gain deep understanding and new ideas and it is very helpful in breaking a general problem statement into specific context (Rhodes, 2007). The instrument used in this research was interview guide. The interviews were conducted three times; pre-interview, the actual interview and post-interview for follow-ups. This is including asking a several questions to enrich the finding of this study. The protocol was divided into three sections. Section A consisted of the demographic details of the informants. Section B consisted of the main question to answer the objective. In Section B, the part was divided into two parts, where part one (1) for research question one also objective one and part two (2) is for research question two also objective two.

Six (6) informants participated in order to help the researcher to achieve the objective. The informants' age ranged between 35 to 57 years old, six female informants and one male informant. The lowest educational level is Diploma, whereas the highest educational level is Bachelor degree. The informants all have served in the Telekom Malaysia within the range of 10 years to 37 years of services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section displayed and discussed the results of perception of the employees on the current leadership traits in the organization and the preferences of leadership styles

in the organization by the employees in the telecommunication sector.

Figure 1 shows that all informants were found to have perceived traits in transformational leadership style. The characteristics of leadership styles were aligned with model of this study which emphasizing. The Four Common I's (Barbuto, 2005; Hall, et al., 2002; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Kelly, 2003) namely intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individual consideration and idealized influence.

The perception of employee towards the current leadership style in organization is more towards transformational leadership

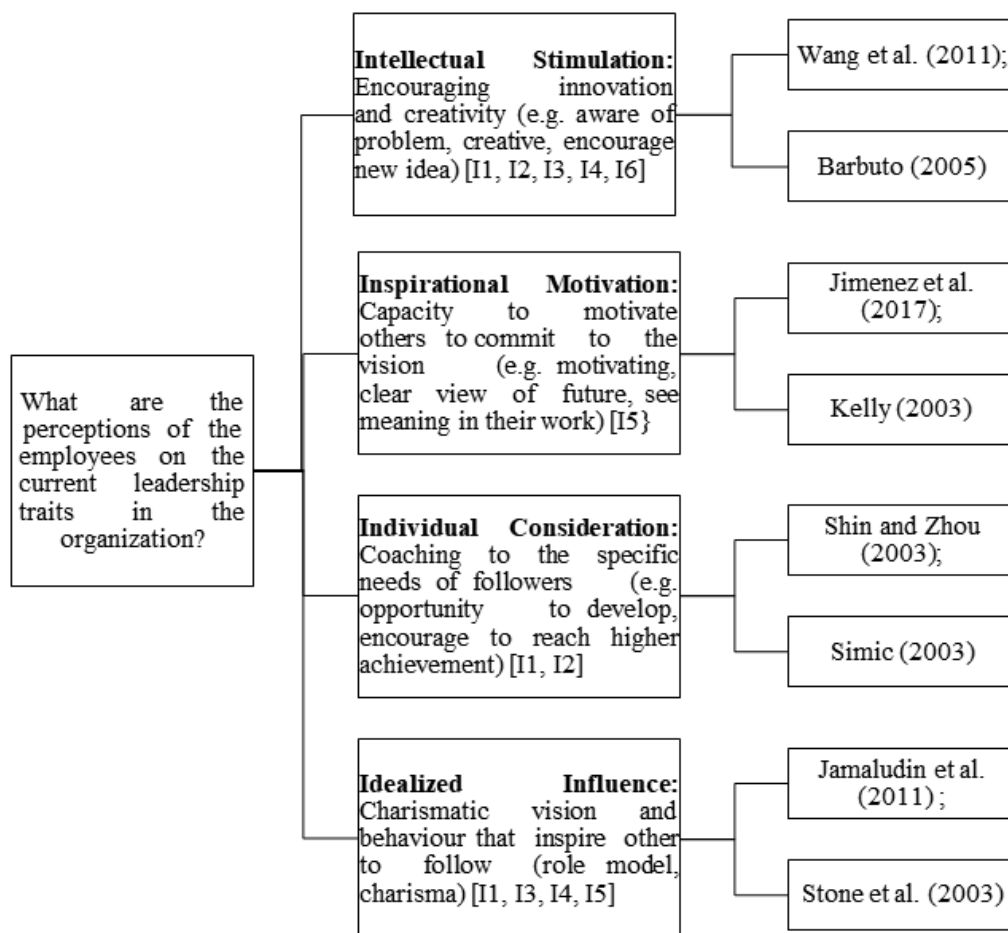


Figure 1: Perceptions of the employees

traits. However, each informant has different opinion on the traits perceived. Most of the informants perceived intellectual stimulation traits where they identified their leader encourage them to be more innovative and aware of problem. Nonetheless, there is only one informant has stated that the leader is more inspirational motivation, in term of motivated others to commit to the vision. Another informant has stated that their leader more towards individual consideration and idealized influence traits respectively.

All informants except informant 5 fit with intellectual stimulation in which the leader encourage their subordinates to contribute an idea supporting the study of Wang et al. (2011) where the concept of participative approach created by the leaders is a vital role for the organization success. In other words, it is more encouraging the subordinates to be creative and innovative for solving problem (Barbuto, 2005).

Inspirational motivation more towards the leader motivated the entire organization, clear statement about the future and give opportunity to their subordinates. Informant 5 was mentioned that the leader should provide a clear view of the future to their subordinates which was supported by Jimenez, Bueno, Galangue and Matriano (2017) where the charismatic and visionary type of leader can inspire their subordinates for their own interest as well as the organization's own good. Individual consideration according to Shin and Zhou (2003), people treated individually and differently according to their knowledge and talents which means that the leader has motivate the followers individually as per informant 1 and informant 2.

Informant 1, informant 3, informant 4 and informant 5 described a leader that possess idealized influence where it is more towards building a trust and confidence and become a role model to their followers as stated by Stone, Russell and Patterson (2003). This is due to the confidence it provides in term of changes in the organization where their subordinates less likely to resist a change implemented by the leaders. The statement supports the study of Jamaludin, Rahman, Makhbul and Idris (2011) by which transformational leadership will induce highly motivated employee and infusing the sense of justice, loyalty and trust. In short, the leadership perceived by the supporting staff in Telekom Malaysia is transformational leadership style and the first objective of this study successfully achieve.

Leadership is a significant alignment in the organization to give an impact to improve the work, which will increase the effectiveness and performance of employees. Employees are valuable assets in an organization, and ensure the productivity and efficiency of the work to be done. In this study, the authors explored the leadership perceived and to compare with the preferences of employee in the organization in order to improve their performance. In order to achieve the objective of this study, the researcher has emphasized more on the characteristic of transformational and transactional leadership styles and ask the informant's suggestion on how that characteristic can improve their performance.

The leadership traits (as in Figure 2) preferred by the employees in the organization is transformational leadership. Most of the informants preferred perceived idealized influence traits which required the leader to

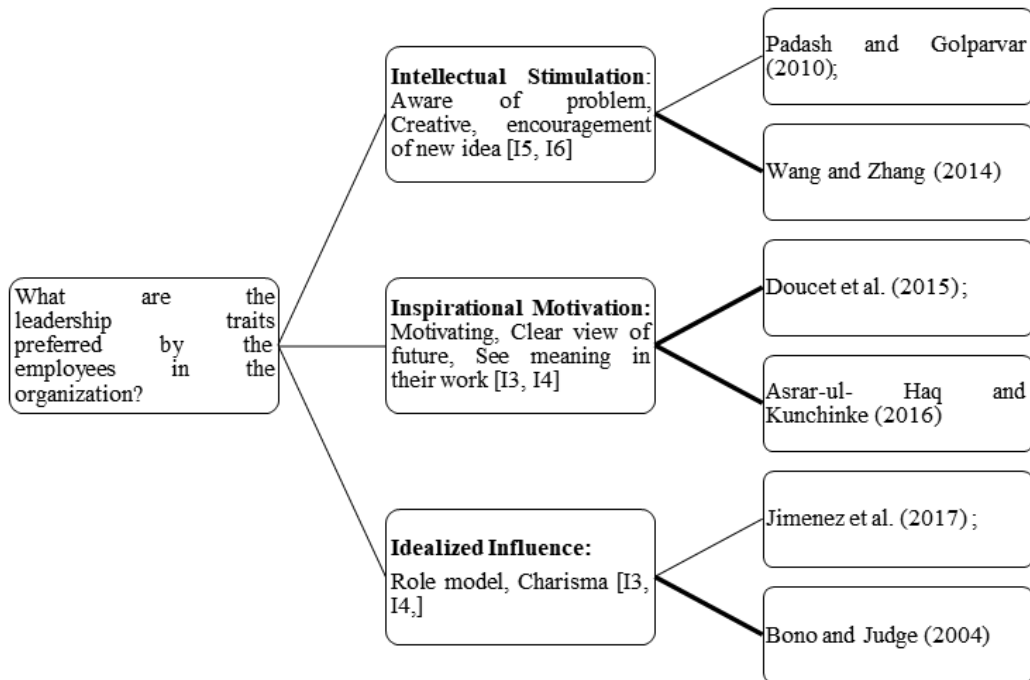


Figure 2: Preferred leadership traits

become a role model and someone who has a charisma to their employees. Other informants preferred inspirational motivation traits where the leader required to motivate their employees and provide clear view of future to help employee see meanings in their work. Another preferred trait is intellectual stimulation, where the leader is required to be someone who is aware of problem related to their employees and to be a creative thinker as well as someone who can encourage their members to provide new ideas.

This study has provided an overview on the understanding of leadership traits which are preferred by support staff in a Malaysian telecommunication company. Through this study, it is found that the employees in the telecommunication sector were equipped with basic knowledge of leadership traits and characteristics. However, specific terms and deeper understanding is yet to be found.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the most preferred style is the style of transformation management. This showed that employees in this telecommunication organization would prefer leaders who are not only charismatic and visionary, but also capable of exceeding their private interest to the advantage of each parties.

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