

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP, ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND  
SUSTAINABILITY IN THE PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES IN  
MALAYSIA

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Mika and Rafa.

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainability is considered a significant element for property development. However, implementing sustainability effort and achieving sustainability goals are real challenge debated since three decades ago. According to the United Nations General Assembly Brundtland Report, protecting the environment and the society in the midst of human seeking economic growth is at times taken for granted. The motivation behind this study is to seek deeper understanding of the role of transformational leadership in promoting sustainability among property development companies in Malaysia. The study aims to determine the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability among the top management at the listed property development companies, through the mediating role of organisational culture that would lead to sustainability in terms of environmental, economy and social. The study employed a purposive sampling method with data collected from top management from total population of 100 listed property development companies in Bursa Malaysia. Multivariate data normality tests, descriptive statistics, and structural equation modelling through SmartPLS were used for data analysis. Construct validity and reliability tests were performed to ensure the usability of the constructs studied. The findings of this study revealed a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability. Also, the study found significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and organisational culture namely bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture. However, the results established insignificant relationship between organisational culture and sustainability. Also, the findings confirmed that bureaucratic organisational culture mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability, while innovative culture and supportive culture did not. The results confirmed that the listed property development company practicing leadership transformation at top management level will promote sustainability with the mediating role of bureaucratic culture. This study has contributed to the literature by presenting new empirical evidence not only in organisational studies on the role of transformational leadership in promoting sustainability, but also empirical evidence on the mediating role of bureaucratic culture that is evident in the property development companies Malaysia listed in Bursa Malaysia that declared their sustainability efforts in their Annual Report in 2016. The findings of the study have several theoretical, practical, and managerial implications in the fields of leadership, organisational culture and sustainability. Therefore, this study recommended organisations to invest in transformational leadership trainings to support the leadership behaviours through bureaucratic culture towards achieving sustainability.

## ABSTRAK

Kelestarian dianggap sebagai elemen penting bagi pembangunan hartanah. Walau bagaimanapun, melaksanakan usaha dan mencapai matlamat kelestarian adalah satu cabaran sebenar yang dibahaskan sejak tiga dekad yang lalu. Menurut Laporan Brundtland Perhimpunan Agung Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu, dikala manusia mengejar pertumbuhan ekonomi, perlindungan alam sekitar dan masyarakat adakalanya diambil mudah. Motivasi di sebalik kajian ini adalah untuk memahami dengan lebih mendalam tentang peranan kepimpinan transformasi dalam mempromosikan kelestarian di syarikat pembangunan hartanah tersenarai Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan hubungan antara kepimpinan transformasi dan kelestarian dalam kalangan pengurusan tertinggi di syarikat-syarikat pembangunan hartanah tersenarai di bursa, melalui peranan mediasi budaya organisasi yang seterusnya membawa kepada kelestarian dari segi alam sekitar, ekonomi dan sosial. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah pensampelan bertujuan dengan data yang dikumpul daripada pengurusan tinggi dari seluruh populasi 100 syarikat pembangunan hartanah tersenarai di Bursa Malaysia. Ujian normaliti data dan multivariansi, statistik deskriptif dan permodelan persamaan berstruktur melalui SmartPLS telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data ubah. Ujian kesahan dan kebolehpercayaan telah dijalankan bagi memastikan kebolehgunaan konstruk yang dikaji. Hasil kajian menunjukkan hubungan kebolehpercayaan yang positif yang signifikan antara kepimpinan transformasi dan kelestarian. Selain itu, kajian mendapati hubungan positif yang signifikan antara kepimpinan transformasi dan budaya organisasi iaitu budaya birokrasi, budaya inovasi dan budaya sokongan. Walau bagaimanapun, hasil kajian ini tidak menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan antara budaya organisasi dan kelestarian. Dapatan kajian mengesahkan bahawa budaya birokratik didalam organisasi memainkan peranan sebagai perantara hubungan antara kepimpinan transformasi dan kelestarian. Hasil kajian mengesahkan bahawa syarikat pembangunan hartanah yang mengamalkan kepimpinan transformasi di peringkat pengurusan tinggi akan mempromosi kelestarian melalui budaya birokratik. Kajian ini telah menyumbang kepada literatur dengan memberi bukti empirikal baharu bukan sahaja dalam kajian organisasi tentang peranan kepimpinan transformasi dalam mempromosikan kelestarian, tetapi juga bukti empirikal tentang peranan mediasi budaya birokratik yang wujud antara kepimpinan transformasi dan kelestarian dalam 100 syarikat pembangunan hartanah di Malaysia yang tersenarai di Bursa Malaysia yang melaporkan usaha kelestarian didalam Laporan Tahunan 2016 mereka. Dapatan kajian ini mempunyai beberapa implikasi dari segi teori, praktikal dan implikasi pengurusan dalam bidang kepimpinan, bidang berkenaan budaya organisasi serta kelestarian. Oleh itu, kajian ini mencadangkan agar organisasi-organisasi melabur dalam latihan kepimpinan transformasi bagi menggalakkan ciri-ciri kepimpinan melalui budaya birokratik kearah kelestarian.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
	<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
	<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>iv</b>
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>v</b>
	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>vi</b>
	<b>ABSTRAK</b>	<b>vii</b>
	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>viii</b>
	<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>xiii</b>
	<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>xv</b>
	<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>xvi</b>
	<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	<b>xviii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background of Sustainability and its Relations with Transformational Leadership and Organisational Culture	1
1.3	Background of Property Development and Sustainability Issues in Malaysia	5
1.4	Problem Statement	9
1.5	Research Questions	13
1.6	Aims of the Study	14
1.7	Objectives of the Study	14
1.8	Scope of the Study	16
1.9	Significance of the Study	18
	1.9.1 Contribution to Knowledge	18
	1.9.2 Contribution to the Industry	19
1.10	Conceptual and Operational Definitions	21
	1.10.1 Transformational Leadership	21
	1.10.2 Organisational Culture	23

	1.10.3 Sustainability	24
1.11	Organisation of Thesis	26
1.12	Chapter Summary	28
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>29</b>
2.1	Introduction	29
2.2	Transformational Leadership	29
	2.2.1 Leadership Concept and Theories	31
	2.2.2 Bass' (1985) 4I's of Transformational Leadership	34
	2.2.3 Transformational Leadership in Malaysia	40
2.3	Organisational Culture	44
	2.3.1 Dimensions and Types of Organisational Culture	46
	2.3.2 Wallach's (1983) Bureaucratic Culture, Innovative Culture and Supportive Culture	48
	2.3.3 Organisational Culture and Transformational Leadership	55
	2.3.4 Organisational Culture as Mediator	59
	2.3.5 Organisational Culture in Malaysia	64
2.4	Sustainability	67
	2.4.1 Challenges of Sustainability	69
	2.4.2 Elkington's (1997) Triple-Bottom-Line (TBL) of Sustainability	74
	2.4.3 Sustainability and Leadership	79
	2.4.4 Sustainability and Organisational Culture	85
	2.4.5 Sustainability in Malaysia	89
2.5	Theoretical Foundation	95
	2.5.1 Theory of Transformational Leadership	96
	2.5.2 Theory of Organisational Culture	103
	2.5.3 Theory of Sustainability	107
2.6	Hypothesis Development	111
	2.6.1 The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Sustainability	112

2.6.2	The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Organisational Culture	116
2.6.3	The Relationship between Organisational Culture and Sustainability	120
2.6.4	Organisational Culture Mediation in the Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Sustainability	125
2.7	Research Framework	130
2.8	Chapter Summary	131
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>133</b>
3.1	Introduction	133
3.2	Research Design	133
3.3	Research Approach	136
3.4	Research Population and Sampling Procedure	137
3.4.1	Research Population	137
3.4.2	Sampling Procedure	139
3.5	Unit of Analysis	144
3.6	Data Collection	145
3.6.1	Research Instrument	146
3.6.1.1	Research Instrument for Transformational Leadership	148
3.6.1.2	Research Instrument for Organisational Culture	150
3.6.1.3	Research Instrument for Sustainability	151
3.7	Pilot Study	155
3.8	Validity and Reliability of the Instrument	157
3.8.1	Validity Test	158
3.8.1.1	Convergent Validity	159
3.8.1.2	Discriminant Validity	159
3.8.2	Reliability Test	160
3.8.2.1	Internal Consistency Reliability (CR)	161
3.8.2.2	Indicator Reliability	161
3.9	Data Analysis	162



3.9.1	Justification of Using SMARTPLS-SEM in the Study	164
3.9.2	Data Preparation	166
3.9.3	Mediation Effect Testing	167
3.10	Chapter Summary	168
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS</b>	<b>169</b>
4.1	Introduction	169
4.2	Data Collection Process and Response Rate	169
4.3	Demographic Details of Respondents	171
4.4	Descriptive Statistics	174
4.5	Preliminary Data Screening	176
4.5.1	Missing Data Analysis	177
4.5.2	Data Normality	177
4.5.3	Common Method Bias	177
4.6	Measurement Model Assessment	178
4.6.1	Indicator Reliability	178
4.6.2	Internal Consistency Reliability (CR)	181
4.6.3	Convergent Validity	182
4.6.4	Discriminant Validity	182
4.7	Structural Model	185
4.7.1	Coefficient of Coordination ( $R^2$ )	185
4.7.2	Path Coefficients	187
4.8	Hypotheses Testing	187
4.8.1	Summary of the Direct Relationship Findings	192
4.8.2	Summary of the Indirect Relationship Findings	195
4.9	Chapter Summary	197
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>199</b>
5.1	Introduction	199
5.2	Overview of the Study	200
5.3	Discussion on Findings	202
5.3.1	The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Sustainability in the listed Property Development Companies in Malaysia	203

5.3.2	The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Organisational Culture in the Listed Property Development Companies in Malaysia	206
5.3.3	The Relationship between Organisational Culture and Sustainability in the listed Property Development Companies in Malaysia	209
5.3.4	The Mediating Effect of Organisational Culture on the Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Sustainability in the listed Property Development Companies in Malaysia	211
5.4	Implications of the Study	213
5.4.1	Theoretical Implications	213
5.4.2	Practical and Managerial Implications	217
5.5	Limitations and Future Research Recommendation	219
5.6	Conclusion	222

<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>223</b>
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<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	<b>292</b>
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## LIST OF TABLES

<b>TABLE NO.</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Table 2.1	Definition of the factors in the Four I's	35
Table 2.2	Lingmage of the Elements of Organisational Theory in the Study	104
Table 3.1	Table for Determining Sample Size from a Given Population	141
Table 3.2	Transformational Leadership Questionnaires Items	148
Table 3.3	Triple Bottom Line Questionnaire Items	153
Table 3.4	Results of Cronbach's Alpha for the Measures in Pilot Study	156
Table 3.5	Data Analysis Techniques	163
Table 3.6	Comparison of Covariance-based SEM and Variance-based SEM	165
Table 4.1	Respondents' Demographic	172
Table 4.2	Mean Score and Standard Deviation by Items – Transformational Leadership	174
Table 4.3	Mean Score and Standard Deviation by Items – Organisational Culture	175
Table 4.4	Mean Score and Standard Deviation by Items – Sustainability	176
Table 4.5	Measurement Model	181
Table 4.6	Fornell	183
Table 4.7	Cross Loadings	184
Table 4.8	The Direct and Indirect Relationships Among Constructs	188
Table 4.9	Results of Hypotheses Testing (Direct Relationships)	189
Table 4.10	Summary of Research Objectives, Questions and Hypotheses (Direct Relationships)	193
Table 4.11	Summary of Indirect Effects, Confidence Interval and T-Values (Indirect Relationships)	196
Table 4.12	Summary of Research Objectives, Questions and Hypotheses (Indirect Relationships)	197



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>FIGURE NO.</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Figure 2.1	Full Range Leadership Theory	34
Figure 2.2	Conceptual Framework by Yusof et al (2017)	52
Figure 2.3	Mediation Model by Pradhan, Panda and Jena (2017)	60
Figure 2.4	Conceptual Model by Panuwatwanich, Stewart and Mohamed (2008)	62
Figure 2.5	The Spiral Guidance by Fobbe, Lemke and Quarmyne (2016)	71
Figure 2.6	Tipple-Bottom-Line (TBL) Concept	75
Figure 2.7	Conceptual Model by Küçükoğlu and Pınar (2018)	87
Figure 2.8	Research Framework	130
Figure 3.1	Research Design and Follow Steps	136
Figure 3.2	Formula for Determining Sample Size by Krejcie & Morgan (1970)	140
Figure 3.3	Overview of Data Analysis	164
Figure 4.1	Results of Structural Model	186
Figure 4.2	Results of Hypotheses Testing (Direct Relationship)	190

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACEM	-	Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia
AGFI	-	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AIC	-	Akaike Information Criterion
AVE	-	Average Variance Extracted
CDI	-	City Development Index
CFA	-	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CIDB	-	Construction Industry Development Board
CIMP	-	Country Construction Industry Master Plan
CMB	-	Common Method Bias
EDP	-	Environmental Adjusted Domestic Product
EF	-	Ecological Footprint
EFA	-	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EPI	-	Environmental Performance Index
ESI	-	Environmental Sustainability Index
EVI	-	Environmental Vulnerability Index
GBI	-	Green Building Index
GFI	-	Goodness of Fit Index
GPI	-	Genuine Progress Index
GS	-	Genuine Savings Index
HDI	-	Human Development Index
IC	-	Individualised Consideration
II	-	Idealised Influence
IM	-	Inspirational Motivation
IS	-	Intellectual Stimulation
ISEW	-	Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare
KeTTHA	-	Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water
KLIA2	-	Kuala Lumpur International Airport Terminal II
LPI	-	Living Planet Index
MLQ	-	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
NEM	-	New Economic Model

NEP	-	New Economic Policy
NFI	-	Normed Fit Index
NNFI	-	Non-Normed Fit Index
OCI	-	Organisational Culture Index
PAM	-	Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia
RMSEA	-	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SEM	-	Structural Equation Modelling
SME	-	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for Social Science
TBL	-	Triple Bottom Line
UNCED	-	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
VIF	-	Variance Inflation Factor
WCED	-	World Commission on Environment and Development
WI	-	Well-Being Index
11MP	-	Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020

## LIST OF APPENDICES

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Appendix A	Property Companies Listed in Bursa Malaysia – Annual Report 2016	292
Appendix B	Questionnaire	297
Appendix C	Letter for Data Collection	303
Appendix D	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Copyrighted Instrument	304
Appendix E	Property Companies Listed in the Official Portal of National Housing Department, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Malaysia	305



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the background of the study that relates to variables of this study which are transformational leadership, organisational culture and sustainability. It covers twelve sections. The first section discusses the background of sustainability and its relations with transformational leadership and organisational culture while the second section discusses the background of property development and sustainability issues in Malaysia. The next sections explain the problem statement of the study, research questions, aims of the study, objectives of the study and scope of the study. Then, the significance of the study is clarified including the significance to knowledge, to the industry and to the nation. After that, the conceptual and operational definitions of each variable are explained. Lastly, the chapter presents the organisation of thesis.

### **1.2 Background of Sustainability and its Relations with Transformational Leadership and Organisational Culture**

The terms sustainability has been gaining attention from the world today on the need for conscious use of resources for current and future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development Report, 1987) where it is widely discussed in conferences, meetings, congresses and campaigns in both scientific and non-scientific areas (Küçükoğlu and Pınar, 2016). The challenge of achieving

sustainability is faced by all societies and across nations, whether industrialized or developing. Feyerherm and Parker (2015) explained that sustainability is by nature an interdependent and multi-faceted phenomenon that integrates the traditional and predominant economic bottom line with social and environmental imperatives. It refers to the ability to ensure the balance of conserving the natural resources, protecting the environment and social fairness while chasing economic growth. In order to achieve sustainability, the three elements of protection of the environment, economic efficiency and social fairness must be combined. This combination is also referred as TBL or the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1999). Elkington (1999) argued that in order to achieve long-term successful results of sustainable development, all total concept of sustainability considering the perspectives environmental, social as well as economic, needs to be implemented in organisations' core business. In the Brundtland Report, the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development captured this combination of elements by proposing a balanced approach to development (Donaires et al., 2018). Furthermore, to remain sustainable, today's leaders are not only responsible in managing the performance of the organisation but also its social, environmental as well as financial performance (Rittner and Wirkus, 2016).

Initially, the United Nations General Assembly highlighted the beginning of worries about the environment from the international community in 1971 (World Commission on Environment and Development Report, 1987) which led to the publishing of a report of 'The Limits to Growth' by a private international association. It discussed about the current economic development and how it affects the planet's long-term protection. The United Nations believed that this is a noble concept protecting the planet and its inhabitant in the midst of human seeking economic growth and since then, sustainability concept has been accepted all over the world (World Commission on Environment and Development Report, 1987). After the Brundtland Report, more countries are drawing up interest in the concept of sustainability. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, Rio Summit, Rio Conference, and Earth Summit was a major United Nation conference held in 1992 to discuss about development and the care for the environment (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992). After the Rio conference of 1992, comes the Kyoto Protocol created in 1997

(United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1997). The adoption of Agenda 21, as stated by As Pisello et al. (2014), is important historic move towards sustainability around the world. In 2015, countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goal which covers all aspects of economic, environment and social aspects. In 2016, the Paris Agreement on climate change entered into force, addressing the need to limit the rise of global temperatures (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2016).

In the context of Malaysia, the journey towards sustainability echoed the worldwide phenomenon in the 1970s when the New Economic Policy (NEP) to eradicate poverty and restructure societal imbalances was launched (Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals - Voluntary National Review, 2017). Since then, all subsequent five-year National Development Plans have highlighted the elements of sustainability, encompassing sustainable economic growth, environmental conservation and balanced development for all society (Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals - Voluntary National Review, 2017). In 2009, Malaysia formulated the New Economic Model (NEM) which further cemented its commitment to pursue sustainability reflecting the three elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda), encompassing economic, social and environmental elements. The NEM provides the basis for Malaysia's development plans until 2020. The current plan, the Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016–2020 (11MP), is thus premised on the three goals of NEM. Critically, the 11MP is aligned to most of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In other words, Malaysia is not starting anew on its pathway to sustainability, but is building on a process already in motion for decades (Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals - Voluntary National Review, 2017).

With all the struggles towards sustainability worldwide since 1970s described above, leadership is believed to be one of the key success factors to achieve the targets (Feyerherm and Parker, 2015). Previous literatures have indicated that one of the attributes of sustainability today is the role of leadership (Chan and Chan, 2005; Müller and Turner, 2010; Yang et al., 2011, Müller et al., 2012, Meng et al., 2015, Robertson,

2017 and Muralidharan and Pathak, 2018). Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) stated that, not only leadership can instil control, leadership will also enable collective intelligence and informal dynamics in human systems. Meanwhile, Dess and Picken (2000) suggested that the demands of the changing environment present a complex set of challenges thus a shift in focus is required where leaders need to meet the challenges by stimulating innovation, creativity, and responsiveness, and learning to manage change without losing strategic focus or spinning out of control. Muralidharan and Pathak (2018) also highlighted the importance of the role of leadership in developing and implementing agendas for sustainability that in turn maximizes the goals of sustainable development of society. They argued that transformational leaders that instill sustainability practices into the fabric of society and also quoted Avolio et al. (2009) that the transformational leaders “raise followers’ aspirations and activate higher order motives (of sustainability), such that followers identify with the leader and his or her mission or vision. Meanwhile, Robertson (2017), Robertson and Barling (2017a), Graves et al. (2013) and Robertson and Barling (2013) also argued that leaders can encourage their subordinates to engage in workplace pro-environmental behaviors by focusing the four transformational leadership behaviors.

In the meantime, organisational culture is also insisted to be needed for an organisation that strives to achieve sustainability (Sanyal and Pal, 2017). The development of a sustainability-oriented organisational culture is essential to ensure sustainability goals are achieved (Crane, 1995). At the same time, researchers like Bate, Khan and Pye (2000), Carrillat, Jaramillo and Locander (2004) and Smith (2004) argued that transformational actions respond to culture and structure in the overall leadership process. They also affirmed that transformational leadership drives organisational change that leads to organisational culture. Transforming characteristics include focus of attention, goal-directed activity with systematic monitoring and assessment of progress, modelling of positive behaviour and human development and empowerment (Schein, 1991; McAdams and Zinck, 1998). In other words, employees will follow leaders towards achieving organisational goals if the leader is seen as trustworthy. Employees, having shared values and norms, create an organisational culture essential to achieve common goals (Wallach, 1983).

Based on the above background, the issue of sustainability and the need of leadership towards achieving sustainability could be further examined in this research. Transformational leadership (Bass 1985), organisational culture (Wallach, 1983) and sustainability (Elkington, 1999) are the three variables analysed in this research with the aims to add empirical findings in the context of the listed property development companies in Malaysia. The research also presented literature review, research methodology as well as discussions of findings and research recommendation. For the following discussion for this particular chapter, the background of the study are discussed including the problem statement, aim and significance of the study, research questions and research objectives, scope of the study, conceptual and operational definitions of the study variables as well as the overall organisation of thesis.

### **1.3 Background of Property Development and Sustainability Issues in Malaysia**

Property development has played a major role in country's economic growth like Malaysia (Muhammad Najib and Yasmin Mohd Adnan, 2015) because property development companies is driven by demand and supply thus has become the catalyst in countries' development process. Sustainability in property development industry reflects on the capacity of regeneration strategies to meet social, political, economic and environmental goals which as argued by Zainal Abidin (2016) that all dimensions of sustainability deserve attention. Property development companies perceive environmental elements as most important to attract the customers in relations to draw the target sales and target profit for the success of property business in the high competition markets the natural environmental elements bring better value of housing property and it typically increasing the value of the property (Ullah, 2016). The eco-friendly environment is most demandable among everyone especially the educated and high income earners in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong as a consequence the property price becomes double and the double price habitually brings more profit to property developer (Glindro et al., 2011). Meanwhile, the social impact of sustainability is also

important as the process of enhancing the quality of life in urban areas through improvements in the vitality and viability of its activities related to social, economic, physical and environmental problems (Brown, 2006; Hudson, 2005). This is because healthy, attractive and economically-successful environments are usually regarded as sustainable places. Paying attention to the social element of sustainability means being concerned with improving living conditions and thus the creation of more diverse and socially inclusive places (Zainal Abidin, 2016).

Unfortunately, research found that the main contributor of global environmental degradation is the real estate sector. This leads to growing concern on sustainability issues among real estate sector players such as contractors, designers, engineers, researchers, governmental authorities and clients (Lutzkendorf, 2007). Major concern highlighted was on the amount of resources and energy that is used in property development companies itself (Bugl et al., 2009). Kibert (2007) also highlighted several factors that can affect sustainability including in material extraction process, product manufacturing, and structure of buildings, maintenance of systems as well as waste production. These real estate development project activities contributed to environmental degradation. Similarly, Keeping et al. (2007) highlighted the same concern on how the property development companies has contributed to environmental issues. Building structures contributed up to 50% of carbon emissions, 40% of energy use, 16% of water usage, 40% of waste, 50% of raw materials and 71% of electricity consumption. Studies by Newell and Manaf (2008), also stressed on similar issues. Their findings revealed that buildings constructions activities contributed up to 50% of carbon dioxide emissions, 40% of energy requirements, and 16% of water usage, 40% of solid landfill waste, 50% of raw materials and 71% of electricity consumption. These activities have major impacts on the environment (Wilkinson et al., 2011).

Moreover, implementing sustainable development in Malaysia is heavily based on the encouragement of low impact materials and energy efficiency but lack of attention in the scope of social aspect of sustainability (McGee, 2011; Ismail and Said, 2015; Chamhuri et al., 2015; Zainal Abidin (2016). In other words, property

development leads to not only environmental issues but also social well-being of people (Seetharam and Yuen 2010; Muhammad et al., 2013). Therefore, the property business organizations actually have great responsibility to save all three elements of sustainability in terms of the property business, natural environment and social considerations. Although property developers in Malaysia have tried to be environmentally and socially responsible on the design and supply of housing and buildings, the issues explained above still exist. As a growing industry in Malaysia, property sector is not only contributes to the nations' economy but it also comes with environmental and social responsibilities (Ullah, 2016).

Due to the above concerns, the Malaysian government has taken initiatives to create awareness among the industry players and a monumental change during the last three years (Kamar et al., 2010). Despite the challenging support from the industry players initially, and the future challenges in terms of implementation in the future, construction players have started to take proactive action regarding green management. For instance, the Malaysian Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) has put efforts to standardise and modernise the construction industry. CIDB also boosted awareness among the players in the industry by organising many conferences and seminars each year at the local and international level. One of the examples is the International Construction Week 2012 with theme "Transformation" at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching, Malaysia attended by thousands of stakeholders. This shows the commitment of the industry on implementing green construction. Moreover, the Country Construction Industry Master Plan (CIMP 2005-2015) sets a significant standing of green management for the Malaysian construction industry. Also, the Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia (ACEM) and Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM) managed to develop the Malaysian Green Building Index (GBI) to promote sustainability in built environment in Malaysia. The industry players in building construction now face new challenges with the introduction of the rating and assessment systems (Kamar et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, even with the government initiatives to create awareness among the industry players, Malaysia is clearly behind in environmental conservation or green

management (Sim and Putuhena, 2015). This is despite of Malaysia's national policies on global sustainable development goals in ensuring balanced growth in building its nation by pledging its commitment to support and implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in 2015. Malaysia has pledged to manage the natural resources and conserve the environment while mitigating the effects of climate change through the implementation of Green Growth strategy under the 11th Malaysia Plan (Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals - Voluntary National Review, 2017). The construction industry generally perceived as contributor to environmental degradation mainly due to pollution and not on green management as the principle of conserving the environment. Thomson and El-Haram (2014) stated that project management can actually ensure sustainability by developing related action plans from the very beginning of the project. In fact, Malaysia is actually one of the earliest nations in the world to advocate sustainability goals through the enactment of the Environment Quality Act way back in 1974. In his speech at the United Nations Framework on Climate Change Conference, the Prime Minister of Malaysia has highlighted the country's commitment to reduce the carbon dioxide emission by as much as 40% (Copenhagen Summit). Subsequently, Malaysia has introduced the Green Technology Roadmap to groom the country in becoming a green-based economy country. Unfortunately, Sim and Putuhena (2015) argued that these efforts and awareness in Malaysia regarding sustainability are still insufficient.

It is not just in terms of environment, Malaysia SDGs also attempt to improve the nation's economic and social sustainability (Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals - Voluntary National Review, 2017). The six strategic thrusts outlined to attain the SDGs as contained in the 11th Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) aim to enhance inclusiveness towards an equitable society, improve well-being for all, accelerate human capital development for an advanced nation, apart from pursuance of green growth for sustainability and resilience, strengthen infrastructure to support economic expansion and re-engineer economic growth for greater prosperity (Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2015). Noteworthy, Malaysia has attained some of the SDGs like eradicating extreme poverty, according to UN and World Bank studies and the 11MP (Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2015; Hanis, 2016). Furthermore, Malaysia has equally



transformed itself from a raw material-producing economy to a diversified economy and a leading exporter of high-tech products (Dauda and Nik Hasan, 2018). Malaysia was even categorized as a highly open, upper-middle income economy with an inclusive economic growth (Eleventh Malaysia Plan, 2015; World Bank, 2015). Still, Malaysia has been strongly criticized for poor development planning, weak environmental regulation, and human rights violations on palm production and timber logging (Amanda, 2015). These earned huge foreign exchange for Malaysia but with heavy costs in terms of excessive health risks and environmental degradation and pollution. Hence, “the main challenge” for Malaysia as it faces the SDG era will be to find a path to grow without sacrificing the health and welfare of individuals and the environment” (Amanda, 2015).

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

Sustainability is considered as a significant issue that is widely discussed in conferences, meetings, congresses and campaigns (Küçüköğlü and Pınar, 2016). Shifting organisations towards sustainability in terms of ecological, economic and social became of the important issues which swept global attention since over the last 30 years (United Nations General Assembly, 1987; Fobbe, Lemke and Quarmyne, 2016). However, there are challenges which are considered as barriers for achieving sustainability, particularly in property development companies (Keeping et al., 2007; Lutzkendorf, 2007; Bugl et al., 2009). One of the main factors that influence sustainability is the role of leadership as a key to the success or failure of an organization (Chan and Chan, 2005; Müller and Turner, 2010; Yang et al., 2011, Müller et al., 2012 and Meng et al., 2015). Leaders motivate individuals to achieve their targeted goals (Northouse, 2015). From the academic perspective, broad variety of theories on leadership and leadership development have been developed over the past decades, aiming to explain the role of a leader in complex and changing environments (Dinh et al., 2014). However, although a wide range of theory has been developed, Dinh et al., (2014) insisted that there are still more challenges yet to be explored.

As a middle-income country that has only recently transformed from a mere producer of raw materials to a multi-sector economy, Malaysia aspires to reach a high-income status by 2020 (CIA, 2014). The country has emerged in the international business arena as a stable Islamic country in which the business practices have demonstrated an international outlook, yet the leadership is still guided by Asian values (Kennedy, 2002). In fact, researchers argued that there is a lack of empirical knowledge on leadership in Malaysian culture. Since there are not many studies on leadership are done in Malaysia (Mahfooz et al., 2004; Jogulu and Ferkin, 2012; Lim, 2016), thus this study intends to analyse the nature of leadership in Malaysia, and to emphasize more about the relationship between leadership in organisations and how organisational outcomes could help the organisations to succeed in achieving sustainability.

Due to the demands of the changing environment which bring along a complex set of challenges, some researchers found that improvement in organisations depends first and foremost on the leadership type and behaviour (Dess and Picken, 2000). Nevertheless, scholars discovered the emerging display of transformational leadership in Malaysian settings (Arham et al., 2013; Ananthan, 2014; Tahsildari, 2015; Hussain et al., 2017; Lim, 2016; Khan, Sentosa and Salman, 2018). Furthermore, Bass (2006) pointed out that developing countries are required to rely on transformational leadership more than any other leadership styles. This is because, transformational leadership provides new inspiration and new direction for their organisations. Darshan (2011) also confirmed that transformational leadership is important to increase followers' satisfaction, more than non-transformational leaders. Moreover, there is a growing emphasis on the practice of transformational leadership as a way to understand how leaders play a significant role in building organisations, and influence the elements of sustainability (Chan and Chan, 2005; Graves et al., 2013; Robertson and Barling, 2013; Kwasi Dartey-Baah, 2014; Meng et al., 2015; Feyerherm and Parker, 2015; Muralidharan and Pathak, 2018). However, there is still lack of empirical effort to specifically link each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership to sustainability in Malaysia (Lee and Kamarul Zaman, 2009). Due to this constraint, this study aims to investigate the influences of transformational leadership and its

dimensions (4I's) on sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia.

It is essential to ensure that organisational culture which carries a set of key values, assumptions, understandings, and norms that is shared by members of an organisation (Daft, 2005) managed by leaders, who are capable to direct the course of their organisations (Smirch, 1983). There were studies that demonstrate the link between organizational culture and sustainability and organizational performance (Soares, Oliva, Kubo, Parente and Tanaka, 2018; Al-Sada, Esmael and Faisal, 2017; Ibrahim, Mahmood and Bakar, 2018). However, few studies investigated the relationship of transformational leadership and effectiveness through mediating role. In general, there is a growing attention on the moderating and mediating variables related that effect transformational leadership on the other variables (Antonakis et al., 2003; Zhang and Tjosvold, 2011; Tafvelin, 2013). The mediating variables explain why and how transformational leadership affects organisations in general and employees in particular (Tafvelin, 2013). This mechanism of transformational leadership has not attracted research attention recently, further studies are needed to highlight on how transformational influences outcomes (Avolio et al., 2009; Tafvelin, 2013). Therefore, this study was undertaken to identify organisational culture (bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture) as an important mediator between transformational leadership and sustainability, where through their influence, the role of organisational culture could be identified.

There is also growing emphasis to understand the role of transformational leadership in achieving organisational change, and to realize their process, and the way leaders build organisational culture towards sustainability (Ofori and Toor, 2008; Jeannotte and Andrew, 2012; Muhammad Najib and Yasmin, 2015). Researchers revealed that there is a need for more research on individual and contextual antecedents of transformational leadership despite the previous research linking transformational leadership and organizational culture (Basset al., 2003; Bommer et al., 2004), and that most researches focused on a little set of outcomes such as motivation, job satisfaction

and performance (Tafvelin, 2013). Therefore, more studies are needed on a wide set of outcomes to investigate the influence of transformational leadership.

In Malaysia, Sim and Putuhena (2015) found that initiatives to create awareness and implement sustainability efforts are still insufficient. For instance, property development companies need to balance their acts to address the resources and energy used in their business activities (Bugl et al., 2009). Although studies have found that leadership is needed to influence sustainability (Chan and Chan, 2005; Müller and Turner, 2010; Yang et al., 2011, Müller et al., 2012 and Meng et al., 2015). Therefore, due to the lack of empirical studies on the relationships between transformational leadership, organisational culture and sustainability, this study aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership on sustainability, and the impact through mediating factor of bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture. This study contributes to the leadership literature by illustrating that transformational leadership at the property development companies can be an important foundation for promoting sustainability, and will add to recent research on the dynamics by how transformational leadership affects outcomes, through documents that organisational culture mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability. Moreover, it is aimed to prove that transformational leadership promotes sustainability, which research model in this study supported through three main theoretical foundations of Transformational Leadership Theory by Bass (1985), the Organisational Culture Theory by Wallach (1983) and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory of Sustainability which developed by Elkington (1997).

## 1.5 Research Questions

Based on the problem statement, this study seeks to focus and address the following main research questions at the listed property development companies in Malaysia:

1. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
2. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and bureaucratic culture at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
3. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative culture at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
4. What is the relationship between transformational leadership and supportive culture at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
5. What is the relationship between bureaucratic culture and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
6. What is the relationship between innovative culture and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
7. What is the relationship between supportive culture and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
8. Does bureaucratic culture mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?
9. Does innovative culture mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?; and

10. Does supportive culture mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia?

## **1.6 Aim of the Study**

This study aimed to determine the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability among the management level at the listed property development companies in Malaysia, through the mediating effect of organisational culture that would lead to sustainability in terms of environmental, economy and society. From the analysis of the relationships, the relevance of research structural model was also assessed. This model would be beneficial to the listed property development companies in Malaysia as a developing country, as property development companies drives the economy and growth of the nation, as it provides insight on the role of transformational leadership and organisational culture in promoting sustainability.

## **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study stated above was to be achieved by the following objectives:

1. To study the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;

2. To examine the relationship between transformational leadership and bureaucratic culture at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
3. To examine the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative culture at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
4. To examine the relationship between transformational leadership and supportive culture at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
5. To understand the relationship between bureaucratic culture and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
6. To understand the relationship between innovative culture and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
7. To understand the relationship between supportive culture and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
8. To analyse if bureaucratic culture mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia;
9. To analyse if innovative culture mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia; and

10. To analyse if supportive culture mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia.

## **1.8 Scope of the Study**

This research examined the relationships between transformational leadership and sustainability and the mediating effect of three types of organisational culture namely bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture on the relationship between transformational leadership and sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia. In order to achieve the research objectives, the scope of the study is the listed property development companies in Malaysia. According to the official portal of National Housing Department, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, there are 6,424 property development companies (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2018). However, for the purpose of the study, the companies registered on the Bursa Malaysia were chosen as the study population.

The companies were selected based on their sustainability efforts that they reported in their Annual Report. The choice of such sample was due to the reason that large companies would have more resources to disclose information voluntarily, whereas small companies may not have the same resources although they may be willing to disclose and that large companies could be considered as industry leaders which in becoming an example to other smaller companies, they would disclose more information voluntarily (Othman et al., 2009). Large companies refers to companies with sales turnover of more than RM 50 million or with the full time employees more than 200 as per guidelines published by the SME Corporation Malaysia (2013) which defines micro companies, small companies, and the medium sized companies (Chin, 2016). SME Corporation Malaysia's (2013) definition of micro companies, small



companies, and the medium-sized companies (SME) also excludes public-listed companies (SME Corp, 2016). The samples obtained from Bursa Malaysia were the listed property companies who declared sustainability efforts in their Annual Report in 2016. The number of samples was 100 companies.

The respondents from each company were selected from top management. This was due to their role in decision-making at the management-level of the companies and their responsibilities to nurture their organisation's vision and programs with sustainability elements, and their experiences in dealing with the challenges on embedding organisational culture. Top management refers to senior-level leaders including presidents, owners, and other high ranking executives such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO) and senior-level managers (Al Shobaki, Abu Amuna and Abu Naser, 2016). It was also commonly refers to relatively small group of most influential senior managers at the top of the organization (Olie, 2001). Appelbaum (1998) opined that top management has the authority to establish strategies in order to interconnect people working in organization and its process (Imran and Asghar, 2010). At the same time, top management plays pivotal role as a leader (Abu Naser et al., 2010, Naser et. al. 2016).

Top management is the highest decision maker within an organization and as the highest officials or executives in the organization, they are responsible for achieving goals through and with other members (Wheelen and Hunger, 2006). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the top management staffs were grouped as individuals from senior managers to high ranking executives such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Director and Managing Director of the selected and listed property development companies in Malaysia. They are positioned at the top of the organization and involved in leadership and decision-making and knowledgeable about leadership, sustainability and organisational culture of the company.

The scope of this study focused on the variables of transformational leadership (4I's individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influenced), organisational culture (bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture) and sustainability (Triple Bottom Line – environment, economy and society). The dimensions were measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), the Organisational Culture Index (OCI) and Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Reporting Questionnaire.

## **1.9 Significance of the Study**

Due to the challenges highlighted in the background of the study, the problem statement and aims and objective of the study, it was believed that the research findings could provide empirical contribution to the academic world on the knowledge of transformational leadership, organisational culture and sustainability. The findings also were expected to provide practical contribution to the listed property development companies in Malaysia and finally to the nation as it strives towards sustainability. From the perspective of it is, the importance of the study was divided into two different fields as follows:

### **1.9.1 Contribution to Knowledge**

It has been recorded that empirical efforts to specifically link each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership to sustainability in Malaysia are still lacking (Lee and Kamarul Zaman, 2009). Therefore, this study strived to examine the variables of the transformational leadership's 4I's and sustainability because although there were studies done on the effects of transformational leadership on sustainability (Kwasi Dartey-Baah, 2014; Meng et al., 2015; Feyerherm and Parker, 2015), this study focused on the effects of transformational leadership's 4I's on sustainability with the mediating roles of organisational culture. For instance, a study of transformational

leadership and sustainability conducted by Ng and Kee (2018) focused on transformational leadership, entrepreneurial competence and technical competence on firm performance *via* innovativeness. Meanwhile, among other studies on transformational leadership and sustainability, they focused on the variables of culture and society (Muralidharan and Pathak, 2018), governance and accountability (Baldo and Baldarelli, 2017), leadership competencies (Tabassi et al., (2016) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Abd Rahim, 2016). Therefore, this study has the potential to make a contribution to the theory of transformational leadership 4I's, organisational culture and sustainability by filling this gap, which is the effects of transformational leadership's 4I's. Furthermore, even though there are researchers who have argued that there is a constant interplay between organisational culture and leadership, empirical studies exploring the relationship between these two components are still limited (Hickman and Silva, 1984; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1985; Sergiovanni and Corbally, 1984; Smith and Peterson, 1988; Trice and Beyer, 1993) and despite the previous research linking transformational leadership and organizational culture, there is still a need for more research on individual and contextual antecedents of transformational leadership (Bass et al., 2003; Bommeret al., 2004).

There is also an expressed need for future research to analyze the type of organizational culture required to foster the relationships among transformational leadership (Para-González, Jiménez-Jiménez and Martínez-Lorente, 2018). Besides, Baumgartner (2009) also opined that studies on the connection between organisational culture and sustainability could filling the gap between culture and sustainability. Therefore, since this study examined the links between the variables of transformational leadership, organisational culture and sustainability, this study also addressed the gaps and needs as per highlighted.

### **1.9.2 Contribution to the Industry**

It was believed that the study is important to the industry due to the challenges of sustainability faced globally. Previous researchers have found empirical evidences

on the issues related to sustainability like shifting organisations towards sustainability, considering the competitive advantage of pursuing sustainability as compared to the financial benefits and balancing the elements of TBL in work practice (Elkington, 1997; Morledge and Jackson, 2001; Cooper, 2002; Keeping et al., 2007; Kibert, 2007; Lutzkendorf, 2007; Sim and Putuhena, 2015; Bugl et al., 2009; Sev, 2009; Kamar et al., 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2011; Gond et al., 2012; Haanes et al., 2012; Thomson and El-Haram, 2014; Feyerherm and Parker, 2015; Muhammad Najib and Yasmin, 2015; Fobbe, Lemke and Quarmyne, 2016; Küçükoğlu and Pınar, 2016).

Furthermore, property development, which was the scope of the study, posed one of the highest impact on sustainability, where researchers like Keeping et al. (2007), Kibert (2007), Lutzkendorf (2007), Bugl et al. (2009), Kamar et al. (2010), Wilkinson et al., 2011, Thomson and El-Haram (2014), Muhammad Najib and Yasmin (2015) and Sim and Putuhena (2015) have opined that the biggest contributor to the global environmental degradation is the real estate sector. Specifically in Malaysia, despite the initiatives taken by the government to address sustainability issues in its policies and plans, the country is still behind in terms of implementation and assessment of the implementation (Saadatian et al., 2011).

The importance of this research lies on the understanding of how transformational leaders in the listed property development companies in Malaysia promote sustainability, through the mediating effects of organisational culture. Sustainability means companies need to ensure the balance of the three aspects in their development including economic, social, and environmental (Elkington, 1999). In social context, sustainability reflects in the company's determination to take accountability for the impact of its choices and actions on society. Meanwhile, it is also the environmental responsibility of the industry players particularly property developers to continue their efforts in supporting sustainability by incorporating green initiatives, eco-friendly products, design and systems on its development projects to ensure reliable energy savings and waste management for residential, commercial, or industrial premises. These sustainability measures are to be integrated into the daily activities of the companies throughout the industry and embedded in the companies

organisational culture stakeholders. Therefore, the results of the study may contribute to the understanding of the relations of transformational leadership, organisational culture and sustainability in the context of the listed property development companies in Malaysia.

## **1.10 Conceptual and Operational Definitions**

The definitions of the important variables used in this research are essential to get a clearer description of the variables used for this study. The conceptual and operational definitions were defined as follows:-

### **1.10.1 Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership refers to leaders who raise the consciousness of followers by appealing to higher ideals and values (Sarros and Santora, 2001), nurturing effective employees in organisation through motivation, focusing, and implementing common goals (Bass and Riggio, 2006). The term transformational leadership refers to leaders at the listed property development companies who are responsible to provide direction, new inspiration and values as well as having the ability to make changes and influence to the property development companies. The leaders should also be able to motivate their staffs to embrace challenges towards achieving targeted goals for the company. They are usually referred as ‘top guns’ who are responsible in making decision related to management, sustainability efforts and the culture or practice within the company.

The operational definition of transformational leadership for this study referred to the four elements or the “*Four I’s*” which are individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influenced by Bass and Riggio (2006) as follows:-

- i. “Individualised influence” (representing charisma) being a role model to the employees in the organisations;
- ii. “Inspirational motivation” the level of motivation that the leader should have to inspire employees to formulate a shared mission and vision for organisation;
- iii. “Intellectual stimulation” encourages followers towards participation, creativity, thinking out of the box in problem solving, and accept challenges; and
- iv. “Individualised consideration” related with treating individuals as important contributors to the work place

First of all, the study referred to the ability of the leaders to be role models through the first dimension of transformational leadership which is idealised influence. Here, the leaders instil pride in others, they go beyond self-interest for the good of the group and possess influential characters that can inspire the staffs. At the same time, they demonstrate power and confidence. The leaders also like to share their valuable thoughts with their employees and motivate them continuously to have a strong sense of purpose. They consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions and emphasize the importance of having a collective sense of mission.

The second dimension referred to in this study was to measure how the leaders encourage creativity and innovation in their followers. This is when leaders seek different perspectives for problem-solving. As the staffs are creative and innovative, the leaders would be able to obtain variety of opinions generated from different observations which could help them to find solutions to solve the problems they are facing. The third dimension in the operational definition is individualised consideration where the leader concerns about followers’ needs by spending time teaching and coaching them. They treat others as valuable individuals rather than just as workers working for the group. They also help others to develop their strength. Finally, inspirational motivation dimension refers to leaders who are able to provide vision and mission as guidelines for the followers. They talk optimistically about the

future and talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished together. The leaders also articulate a compelling vision of the future and express confidence that the set goals are achievable.

The 4I's factors in the leaders at the listed property development companies defined above were measured through short-form (MLQ-5X) by Bass and Avolio (1995). The justification of using the MLQ-5X were discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### **1.10.2 Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture refers to a value system which determines attitude (Schein, 1985, 1990; Peters and Waterman, 1982) and a shared understanding of how things work in terms of beliefs, values, norms and philosophies (Wallach, 1983). Is a system of shared values, rules or behaviour which is unique that implementing in the is implemented by the organization so that the for employees to understand on how to behave and influence other people. Organization culture also reflects by what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, the language and symbols, the procedures and routines and the definitions of success that make an organization unique (Cameron and Quinn, 2011).

The operational definition of organisational culture for this study referred to the three types of culture which are bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture by Wallach (1983) as follows:-

- i. Bureaucratic culture refers to a very organized and systematic culture with clearly defined responsibilities and authority based on power and control;
- ii. Innovative culture refers to company culture that is creative, results-oriented and challenging work environment; and

- iii. Supportive culture refers to a culture of teamwork and people-oriented where encouraging and trusting, collaborative and encouraging work environment is displayed

First of all, this study referred to bureaucratic culture in the listed property development companies in Malaysia as a culture that has clear lines of responsibility and authority where work is highly organized and systematic. The information and authority flow is hierarchical, based on control and power. This type of culture is matured, stable, and cautious. It is measured by the criteria of a culture that is structured, ordered, regulated, established and solid. The culture is also seen as cautious, power-oriented, hierarchical and procedural. Meanwhile, the innovative culture in this study referred to creative work environments where challenge and risk-taking are norms. In this type of culture, employees are consistently stimulated and challenged but often burn out under stress and pressure. Innovative culture is seen as a risk-taking, pressurized and challenging yet stimulating and encourage creativity. It is also enterprising, driving and results-oriented. Lastly, supportive culture in this study referred to the work environment that is friendly and the workers tend to be supporting each other. The environment is open, trustworthy, and equitable. Humanistic principles are basic to this culture. Here, personal freedom and equity is valued. The culture is also seen as safe collaborative, trustworthy and relationships-oriented. It also refers to an encouraging and sociable type of culture.

The three types of culture in the listed property development companies defined above were measured through the Organisational Culture Index (OCI) by Wallach (1983). The explanation of research instrument is in the next chapter.

### **1.10.3 Sustainability**

Sustainability refers to a process of change in which the use resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are balanced and enhanced both for current human needs and



future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, United Nations General Assembly, 1987). Sustainability is also defined as the ability of an organisation to adapt change in the business environment to capture contemporary best practice methods and to achieve and maintain superior competitive performance (Zairi and Liburd, 2001) and for an organisation to maintain its competitiveness, it has to consider conserving the planet as part of the core businesses (Zairi, 2002). According to Elkington (1997), for business organisations to be sustainable, they must deliver prosperity, environmental quality and social justice which lead to the triple bottom line (TBL) concept of social, environmental and financial performance. TBL is directly tied to the concept and sustainability goals as they are highly inter-related and are of equal importance (Cooper, 2002).

The operational definition of sustainability for this study referred to the TBL practice in the listed property companies in Malaysia which are of social, environment and economy by Elkington (1997) as follows:-

- i. Environmental aspect where activities undertaken by a company in consideration of environmental conservation green building and energy savings;
- ii. Economic aspect where the company's business practices give impact on the economic system and survival of the company for the sake of the future generations; and
- iii. Social aspect where the company conducts beneficial and fair business practices to the labour, human capital, and to the society.

In this study, the listed property development companies were measured by their three bottom lines. Firstly, sustainability in terms of environment refers to the company's business practices focus on environmental issues and the management makes the most efficient use of resources available in the environment. Their business are also based upon environmental monitoring to make sure that the stability of biological and physical systems at a local and global scale is the focus of environmental sustainability. Biological diversity is the main concern, but all aspects

of the biosphere such as man-made environments like property development, might be included in the interpretation of which systems to preserve. Secondly, sustainability in economic terms refers to maximizing the flow of income by using scarce resources in an efficient and optimal way. Here, the company's sustainable business practices rest on economic considerations and focus on survival in the marketplace. The companies also saved money at the beginning of implementation to ensure sustainability. Lastly, sustainability in a social context aims at preserving the stability of social and cultural systems. This is a measure in some shape or form of how socially responsible an organization has been throughout its operations. Therefore, the companies take current activities in the community into account and consider the social well-being of society as a whole. They also focus on social such relational or societal aspects in their business practices.

The sustainability aspects for this study were measured through the Triple-Bottom-Line questionnaire by Hogevoold et al. (2015). The research instrument covered the TBL elements and explained in detail in the next chapter.

## **1.11 Organisation of Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters namely Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Data Analysis and Conclusions and Recommendations. Chapter 1 or Introduction provides an outline of thesis contents, including the introduction of the study, background on property development companies and in Malaysia, the problem statement, the significance of the study, also provide the aims and objectives of the study, research questions, and the conceptual framework, as well as presenting the research hypothesis and the organisation of thesis.

Chapter 2 or Literature Review introduces a comprehensive literature review on transformational leadership, organisational culture and sustainability. It critically

reviews the leadership theory and describes the components of organisational culture, namely bureaucratic culture, innovative culture and supportive culture, in achieving sustainability. It further discusses the transformational leadership, namely the 4I's, the nature of property development and the pillars of sustainability, environment, economy and society, which are looked at in this study. After this, it conceptualizes the relationships of transformational leadership and sustainability. Followed by the mediating effects of organisational culture in leadership and sustainability relationship.

Chapter 3 or Research Methodology describes the methodology applied for this study and the research design used – quantitative method. This chapter explains the population and sampling method used for each of the study objectives. It also include the pilot study that is conducted to evaluate the chosen questionnaire, followed by the scores produced by reliability and validity test for the questionnaire.

Chapter 4 or Data Analysis presents the empirical data and quantitative findings which include the analysis of the demographic data on the respondents using statistical program (SmartPLS) of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method.

Lastly, Chapter 5 or Conclusions and Recommendations discusses the findings based on the objectives of the study. It also suggests recommendations for further improvement on the practice of transformational leadership and sustainability for the listed property development companies in Malaysia, followed by limitations and suggestions for future research. It ends with a conclusion of the overall findings and solutions.

## **1.12 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the important basic aspects that need to be clarified in a research. It includes an introduction of the study which describes the emergence of the idea for the study, which centred on transformational leadership and organisational culture in promoting sustainability at the listed property development companies in Malaysia. Research questions were derived from the problem statement where research gaps in this scope of study was notified, objectives of study then formulated and conceptual and operational definitions clarified.

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