LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR AND UNIVERSITY CULTURE ASSOCIATED WITH LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS FOR ACADEMIC WORK IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR AND UNIVERSITY CULTURE ASSOCIATED WITH LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS FOR ACADEMIC WORK IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

This study examined the leadership behaviour and university culture associated with leadership effectiveness for academic work in Malaysian public universities. Using a cross-sectional survey research design, the data for the study was collected from 420 academic staff in 20 public universities in Malaysia using a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four sections comprising a demographic section, and three sections which measures leadership behaviour, university culture, and leadership effectiveness for academic work of vice-chancellors (VCs) and deputy vice-chancellors (DVCs). The findings indicated that the academic staff perceived their vice-chancellor's and deputy vice-chancellors' behaviours as more toward managing process rather than focusing on relating to people. This implied that vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors in Malaysian public universities were task-oriented leaders. The findings of the study also revealed that currently the dominant culture type in Malaysian public universities was the hierarchy culture. The academic staff also indicated that they were satisfied with their vice-chancellor's and deputy vice-chancellors' leadership effectiveness for academic work in the creation and implementation of strategy and vision. The results of Pearson products moment correlations showed that there were statistically significant linear relationships between the four factors of the leadership behaviours (relating to people, leading change, managing process and producing results) and the overall leadership effectiveness and seven factors of leadership effectiveness for academic work. Thus, it could be concluded that leadership behaviours had a strong and positive correlation with leadership effectiveness for academic work. The study also found statistically significant positive relationship between the two culture types (clan and adhocracy cultures) and the overall leadership effectiveness and seven dimensions of leadership effectiveness for academic work. Likewise, clan culture also showed strongest relationship with them. Moreover, the multiple regression analyses showed that relating to people was the strongest predictor in determine the overall leadership effectiveness of vice-chancellors and deputy
vice-chancellors. The results of multiple regression analysis also revealed that hierarchy culture was the strongest predictor in predicting the overall leadership effectiveness, although there was a negative relationship between hierarchy culture and overall leadership effectiveness. Overall, it could be concluded that leadership behaviours and university culture were strongly influence leadership effectiveness for academic work.

*Keywords:* Leadership behaviours, university culture, leadership effectiveness for academic work.
ABSTRAK

PERKAITAN ANTARA PERLAKUAN KEPIMPINAN DAN BUDAYA UNIVERSITI DENGAN KEBERKESANAN KEPIMPINAN DALAM URUSAN AKADEMIK DI UNIVERSITI AWAM DI MALAYSIA

menunjukkan hubungan yang paling kuat dengan mereka. Tambahan pula, dapatan analisis regresi berganda juga mendapati hubungan dengan orang merupakan peramal yang paling kuat dalam menentukan keberkesanan kepimpinan naib cancelor dan timbalan naib cancelor secara keseluruhannya. Keputusan daripada analisis regresi berganda juga menunjukkan bahawa budaya hierarki merupakan peramal yang paling kuat dalam menentukan keberkesanan kepimpinan secara keseluruhannya, walaupun terdapat hubungan yang negatif di antara budaya hierarki dengan keberkesanan kepimpinan secara keseluruhannya. Secara keseluruhannya, dapat disimpulkan bahawa perlakuan kepimpinan dan budaya universiti kuat mempengaruhi keberkesanan kepimpinan dalam urusan akademik.

Kata kunci: Perlakuan kepimpinan, budaya universiti, keberkesanan kepimpinan dalam urusan akademik.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Recently, all public universities in Malaysia are urged to undergo the transformation process that need changes in terms of university's management processes, university's leadership processes, university's vision and mission, university's recruitment of academic staff, and university's involvement in research and development (R&D) projects. Transforming all these facets of universities is critical to develop Malaysian universities into "world-class universities". However, an excellence leader from the top management level, such as vice-chancellor or deputy vice-chancellors, is needed for all these transformation which will lead to institutional effectiveness. As stated by Sheppard (1996), leadership and institutional effectiveness are inextricably interwoven. In public universities, vice chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors constitute the core of academic leadership and are in charge of managing and
leading the institution to be recognized as the best university or college in the country. This
group is in charge of maintaining high standards in academic programs in the midst of
fluctuating or shrinking resources (Austin, Ahearn, & English, 1997; Allen-Meares, 1997;
both cited in House, Fowler, Thornton, & Francis, 2007). In order to achieve educational
excellence, university's leaders must build collaborative environments, support teaching and
learning, and use leadership behaviours that ensure the effectiveness of academic work in the
universities. The general populace, as well as leadership scholars, have increasingly
recognized the important role that a leader's character plays in his or her leadership activities
and effectiveness (Barlow, Jordan, & Hendrix, 2003; cited in Kisling, 2007). The leaders of
this new century must recognize that each person, group, organization, and society are all part
of an indivisible whole, and one must look to a unification of knowledge and systemic
understanding to move an organization forward (Capra, 1996; cited in Keenan, 2005).

1.1 Background to the Study

The Malaysian higher education system is relatively young; opening its first university,
University of Malaya, in 1961. According to the National Higher Education Action Plan
2007-2010 (2007), the higher education capacity in Malaysia has grown from the formation of
the country's first university, University Malaya in 1961, to the 2007 enrolment of 942,200
students in 20 public universities, 32 private universities and university colleges, four branch
campuses of international universities, 21 polytechnics, 37 public community colleges, and
485 private colleges. The development of mass higher education institutions has not only
altered the purposes and organization of higher education, but also brought about concerns for
standards and quality (Armour, 1994; cited in Tsui, 2002). In order to improve and strengthen
the standards and quality of the Malaysian higher education institutions, an action plan namely “the National Higher Education Action Plan” was developed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The action plan stresses that the five key areas that should be strengthened are (1) governance, (2) leadership, (3) academic, (4) teaching and learning, and (5) research and development (National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010, 2007).

According to Anuar Hassan (n.d), the vision of the Government is to make Malaysia a centre of education excellence. However, the study conducted by Shanghai Jiao Tong University revealed that none of Malaysian universities is on the list of the world’s top 500 universities, and in order to achieve world-class status, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) has been recently granted an Apex status. According to Mohamed Khaled Nordin (2008), USM is chosen as Apex University based on their success in fulfilling both quantitative and qualitative criteria set by the selection committee under the accelerated programme for excellence (APEX). The assessment criteria of the universities are consisted of university’s state of readiness, transformation plan, and preparedness for change. USM’s transformation plan, entitled “Transforming Higher Education for a Sustainable Tomorrow”, will implement the “Blue Ocean Strategy” which aims in exploring unknown potential of market space, and focus more research in the areas of health biotechnology and molecular medicine, fundamental research, biodiversity and environment and engineering research (Dzulkifli Abdul Razak & Ramli Mohamed, 2008). An Apex university is a conceptual construct that in due time will stand atop the pyramid of institutions (National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010, 2007).

As preconditions of its success, Apex universities must contain the key elements such as the best leaders, the best faculties, the best students and the best facilities. According to the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 (2007), the best leaders need to be
visionary, intensively motivated and committed to the ideals of excellent scholarship. They are expected to be excellent managers, administrators and leaders who bring talents to bear on the optimal management of human and other assets of the university. The best leader should also be a great communicator endowed with an excellent command of the English language, morally upright and of impeccable integrity, and a great motivator who is able to spur others to excel (Zawawi Ismail, 2008).

However, universities worldwide, and likewise public universities in Malaysia today face overwhelming responsibilities and challenges in the competitive educational environment which demands the higher education institutions to be responsive. As a developing country, higher education in Malaysia has been exposed to an array of sophisticated issues such as performance and funding, resource allocation, graduate employability, research, consultancy and innovation, and internationalism (Mohd. Anuar Mazuki, R. Ravindran, & Syed Musa Alhabshi, 2008). According to Mohd. Anuar Mazuki et al. (2008), the changing education landscape, which is the result of the interplay of the forces of globalization and internationalization of higher education, has led to new demands on institutions of higher learning in many countries, particularly in the developing countries, which are keen to position themselves in the highly competitive global higher education market. Therefore, in order to be competitive in the global arena, public higher education institutions in the nation are undergoing a transformation process under the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007. This transformation must be supported by ample financial commitment and able players in the institution (Ahmad Saat, 2008), such as faculty members, institutional leaders and administrators. Faculty member will mainly be involved in re-evaluating and restructuring of programs offered, and in internationalizing the curriculum (Ahmad Saat, 2008). Ahmad Saat
(2008) also states that the roles of institutional leaders and administrators are inevitably important, especially where infrastructure transformations and formulation of internationalization strategic plans are concerned, as well as where they are involved in generating or finding financial sources to implement the transformations. According to Ahmad Saat (2008), many studies have shown that much is expected out of institutional leaders in leading their institutions to become globally recognized international higher education institutions.

Sheppard (1996) indicates that leadership and institutional effectiveness are inextricably interwoven. Leadership, the subject of sustained human interest for more than 2,500 years, is in fact vital to the survival and success of organizations (Bass, 1990). Without efficient and effective leadership, an organization may face failure in no time. For instance, a lot of colleges, especially private colleges, have encountered the problem of maintaining the performance of their college which finally pushed their college to be dysfunctional. This is due to poor leadership and management skills of the top management of the institution, who fail to lead the institution to become more dynamic, competitive, and to be able to face the challenges of a changing world. Raja Suzana Raja Kasim and Nik Maheran Nik Muhammad (2010) believe that organizations with a strong leadership, risk taking and pre-established delegation of authority to the lowest level of the organization tend to achieve success and adapt more quickly in the face of unforeseen events. Harris (2004) also states that while the education challenges in schools are considerable and the route to reform is complex, the potential of leadership to influence pupils and school performance remains unequivocal. Therefore, the management and leadership of the university's leader play an important role in the development of a strong faculty and university organization to assure a competitive future.
Universities now require leaders who thrive on the challenges of change; who can foster environments of innovation; who encourage trust and learning; and who lead themselves, their constituents, and their units, departments, and universities successfully into the future (Brown, 2001). Sorenson and Machell (1996) believe that successful educational leaders must understand their own belief system, learn about the collectively held beliefs of members in the organization to facilitate the examination of the organizational covenant, and lead others to work toward accomplishing goals which are developed consensually. Gedney (1999) also defines an effective leader as someone who motivates a person or a group to accomplish more than they would have otherwise accomplished without that leader's involvement.

Numerous studies indicated that leadership and culture have a strong relationship among them, some saying that a leader is able to influence culture. Schein (1985) supported the idea of leader influences culture by stating that culture and leadership are two sides of the coin and what leaders do is to create and manage culture. An academically effective university is distinguished by its culture such as structure, process and climate of values and norms that channel staff and students into successful teaching and learning (Purkey & Smith, 1981/1982). Schein (1985) defines the culture of an organization as the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization. Positive organizational cultures have been linked to increased staff alignment, resulting in enhanced organizational effectiveness, heightened consensus regarding strategic direction, increased employee productivity, and advanced levels of employee commitment (Barney, 1986). The leader's contribution to culture is paramount among other functions because the essence of culture enables people to work comfortably, to concentrate on their priorities, and to behave predictably based on these organizational assumptions and beliefs.
The goals of universities are based on the desired academic outcomes. In a successful university, the objectives chosen to achieve the goals are reflected in the planned curriculum. Within this framework, both the administrative and teaching staff transmit an air of expectation of success that, in turn, influences students' self-confidence and motivation which are translated into behaviour that support success (Bamburg, 1994). Thus, in order to achieve an effective learning environment, the university's leadership must be seen as part of the effort to achieve success, which motivate and encourage staff by recognizing their efforts and providing constructive and timely feedback on their performance.

Therefore, it is important to understand the current competitive environment of higher education and the key factors, which affect university effectiveness, and this can be done by examining the management's leadership behaviour, university culture, and leadership effectiveness for academic work. In order to be more effective under the present circumstances, universities must know how to measure and assess management's leadership behaviours, university culture and leadership effectiveness and how to promote healthy change, manage internal resistance, and facilitate an effective teaching and learning environment in the university.

1.1.1 Leadership Issues in Malaysian Public Universities

Leadership in universities, as Brown (2001) has pointed out, presents unique challenges because of the different settings to which leadership must be applied, for example, across administrative departments, academic departments, and in student and faculty organizations (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). Leadership in universities is usually known as academic
leadership. Within academic leadership, there are important differences between departmental, faculty-level, and university-level leadership (Turnbull & Edwards, 2005). Departmental leadership, due to its largely temporary and obligatory nature, tends to be collegial, because otherwise it would be difficult to return to a faculty position once the chair had concluded (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). At the faculty-level leadership, Rowley and Sherman (2003) describe the role of the dean, though sometimes temporary and obligatory, relinquishes all teaching and research responsibilities to become a full-time administrator. While at the university level (president, chancellor, vice-presidents, vice-chancellor), Rowley and Sherman (2003) suggest that the leadership might be seen as equivalent to top-level managers in large corporations.

Massification of higher education within the landscape of globalization and the internationalization of higher education have created dramatic changes in the attitudes of university managers toward the importance of higher education around the world. As universities in Malaysia strive to achieve world-class status, the transformation of higher education is triggered and encouraged by MOHE. This transformation plan aims to produce holistic capital development, to develop Malaysians who are intellectually active, creative and innovative, ethically and morally upright, adaptable and capable of critical thinking (National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010, 2007). The transformation plan focuses on five institutional pillars and five critical agenda programmes. One of the institutional pillars to strengthening the Higher Education Institutions is leadership. Leadership becomes an essential foundation to successfully implement the higher education transformation envisioned by the Government. According to National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-
2010 (2007), in conceptualising the leadership pillar, the MOHE considers the following as crucial:

- Identifying and defining the required leadership roles at HEIs;
- Institutionalising the right processes in the areas of selection, development, evaluation, and renewal; and
- Developing a pipeline of talents (grooming and succession planning).

The action plan also states that to achieve the desired transformation, outstanding educational leaders must emerge and the key leadership roles will be entrusted to Vice-Chancellors or Rectors. The National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 (2007, p. 21) also mentions that:

*In realizing this transformation plan, these leaders must fully understand their institutions’ roles, craft their institutions’ visions and missions, and rally their constituencies to meet and even exceed expectations. At operating level, HEI leaders must recognize the shifting importance of core businesses and support functions. In top-tier universities in particular, functions like R&D commercialization and fund raising must, for example, be given renewed focus as they may create viable opportunities for substantial non-governmental funding.*

In the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007 – 2010, MOHE has identified enhancing research and innovation as one of the thrust to be emphasized. To develop as a world-class higher education system, utmost attention and consideration must be given to the development of academic entrepreneurship