

Leadership Styles and Gender Relationship among Public Higher Institutions in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender-based differences in the leadership style of academic leaders in public higher institutions Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to determine if there is any significant difference between the leadership style of male and female academic leaders and to examine the leadership styles of male and female academics leaders in public higher institutions Malaysia. The scope of this study is academic leaders who hold positions as Dean, Deputy of Dean and Head of Program from selected faculties of public universities. The research incorporated the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI-IC) survey self response instrument, as well as a descriptive question that will be distributed to selected academic leaders. Due to the fact that Malaysian literature on gender differences and leadership styles is not being enriched, there is an urge for a researcher to produce robust and rigorous research examining the relationship between gender and leadership style among academic leaders. Thus this research is of practical significance because the leadership style could bring positive or negative impact on the quality of administration at the university level.

Keywords: academic leaders, gender, leadership styles,

INTRODUCTION

According to Alice (2001), whether men and women behave differently in leadership roles is a much debated question. Although there is general agreement that women face more barriers to become leaders than men do, especially for leader roles that are male dominated, there is much less agreement about the behavior of women and men once they attain such role. Differences in styles can be consequential, because they are one factor that may affect people's view about whether women should become leaders and advance to higher positions in organizational hierarchies.

Statement of the problem

There are many studies which have been conducted resulting in the development of some important theories and concepts of leadership but mainly in the area of business and industry organization (Yuki, 1989). As mentioned earlier on, there are few research have been conducted in the academic field and comparatively little research been measuring the leadership style of academic leaders.

Most of the researches in leadership styles and gender differences have been conducted in other countries such as in United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia, Europe and United Arab Emirates. However, there are very little research in this field been conducted in Malaysia. In the previous research, Carless (1998) states that referring to the employment of transformational leadership there is a notable lack of evidence on gender differences. On the other hand, Komives (1991) found that there is no significance difference in the rating of residence hall directors across seven university campuses with respect to the exercise of transformational or transactional leadership. Further, a comparison of leadership style self perception of male and female secondary head teachers in the UK have shown very little differences. Maher (1997) also support that there is no significance differences in the evaluation of males and female supervisors their use of transformational and transactional leadership.

In Malaysia, the scenario of leadership in academic field especially in a higher education management level has been emphasized by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Furthermore, the Director General of the Department of Higher Education, Professor Datuk Dr. Hassan, has commented that there is a need to evoke a culture where academicians strive for an excellence. Leadership qualities and accountability must be aligned in order to realize a conducive learning environment, (New Straits Time, 2008). Leadership is critical to organizational excellence. In addition, strategic leaders are enmeshed in an intricate network of

competing constituencies and cooperative endeavors that extend beyond the universities. In order to fulfill this mission, the strategic leaders must be an expert in his or her field, have a focus and organize with the future in mind and position the management for a long term success (New Strait Tim, 2008).

Due to the fact that Malaysian literature on gender differences and leadership styles is not being enriched, there is an urge for a researcher to perform a robust and rigorous research by examining the relationship between gender and leadership style among academic leaders. Thus this research is of practical significance because the leadership style could bring positive or negative impact on the quality of administration at the university level.

This study is aimed to determine if there is any significance difference between the leadership styles among academic leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Styles

According to Gardiner (1995), "the greatest challenge the leaders face is to bring about significant and lasting changes in a large and heterogeneous group". Leadership style is by definition leadership behavior with two clearly independent dimensions: task dimension that includes goal setting, organization, direction & control, and the relationship dimension involving support, communication, interaction and active listening (Hersey & Blanchard,

1998). As such, the following leadership theories provides visions and introduce leadership behavior that helps academic leaders in managing different situation in the course of their work and in their interactions with others.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational theory suggests that effective leaders create and promote a desirable vision or image of the institution. Unlike goal, task and agendas, which refer to concentrate and instrumental ends to be achieved, a vision refers to altered perceptions, attitudes and commitments. The transformational leader must encourage the college community to accept a vision created by his or her symbolic actions (Bensimon, Neumann & Birnbaum, 2000). Transformational leadership is theorized to comprise the following five first-order factors: (a) Idealized influence (attributed) refers to the socialized charisma of the leader, whether the leader is perceived as being confident and powerful, and whether the leader is viewed as focusing on higher-order ideals and ethics; (b) Idealized Influence (behavior) refers to charismatic actions of the leader that are centered on values, beliefs, and a sense of mission; (c) Inspirational Motivation refers to the ways leaders energize their followers by viewing the future with optimism, stressing ambitious goals, projecting an idealized visions, and communicating to followers that the visions is achievable; (d) Intellectual Stimulation refers to leader actions that appeal to followers' sense of logic and analysis by challenging followers to think creatively and find solutions to difficult problems; and (e) Individualized Consideration

refers to leader behavior that contributes to followers satisfaction by advising, supporting and paying attention to the individual needs of followers, and thus allowing them to develop and self-actualize (Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, 2003).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional Leadership is an exchange process based on the fulfillment of contractual obligations and is typically represented as setting objectives and monitoring and controlling outcomes. Transactional leadership is theorized to comprise the following three first-order factors; (a) Contingent Reward leadership (i.e., constructive transactions) refers to leaders behaviors focused on clarifying role and task requirement and providing followers with material or psychological rewards contingent on the fulfillment of contractual obligations; (b) management by exception active (i.e., active corrective transactions) refers to the active vigilance of a leader whose goal is to ensure that standards are met; and (c) management by exception passive (i.e., passive corrective transactions) leaders only intervene after noncompliance has occurred or when mistakes have already happened (Antonakis, et al, 2003). Other studies have examined the success of using transformational and transactional leadership in other positions and found similar results about the importance of blending both approaches (Komives, 1991). Bensimon (2000) examined the differences in effect between the transformational and transactional leadership styles and found that a blend of the two approaches appeared to be more effective.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-Faire Leadership represents the absence of a transaction of sorts with respect to leadership in which the leader avoids making decisions, abdicates responsibility, and does not use their authority. It is considered active to the extent that the leader “chooses” to avoid taking action. This component is generally considered the most passive and ineffective form of leadership (Antonakis, et al, 2003). Laissez-Faire leadership also termed a non-leadership style. The Laissez-Faire leader avoid accepting responsibilities, is absent when needed, fails to follow up on request for assistance, and resist expressing his or her views on important issues. The Laissez-Faire leader gives the majority of control in the decision making process to the followers. Laissez-Faire leadership assumes that followers are intrinsically motivated and should be left alone to accomplish tasks and goals. The Laissez-Faire leader does not provide direction or guidance (Jones, et al, 2007)

Academic Leaders and Roles

Academic leaders create learning environment that include cultural awareness, acceptance of multiple intelligences and ways knowing, strategic thinking, engagement and a sense of collective identity as collaborators in developing knowledge and active into practice (Marilyn, 2006). Principal leadership has been identified as a major factor in school effectiveness (Thomas, 1997). Research studies have demonstrated the importance of the principal as an instructional leader, with

this role being an indicator of student achievement (Gullat & Lofton, 1996). Spending majority of time as instructional leaders rather than as managers, the principal can effect change and concentrate on program improvement. The field of education is facing a lot more challenges (Jones, 2000). According to Gunter (2001) the responsibility of education leadership is to facilitate the learning activities and providing for an environment that is enabling and supportive for knowledge and related activities. Butcher, Moon & Bird (2000) recognized the importance of leadership for professional development in education.

Gender Differences in Leadership

The relationship between gender role and leadership style is the association of masculinity with task-oriented leadership styles and femininity with relationship-oriented ones (Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003). Two opposite current are constantly encountering women swimming in the middle when they have to decide what leadership styles need to be adopted in the work place. According to Rizzo & Mendez (1998), the same few influence strategies that proved to be successful for men are repeatedly used by women.

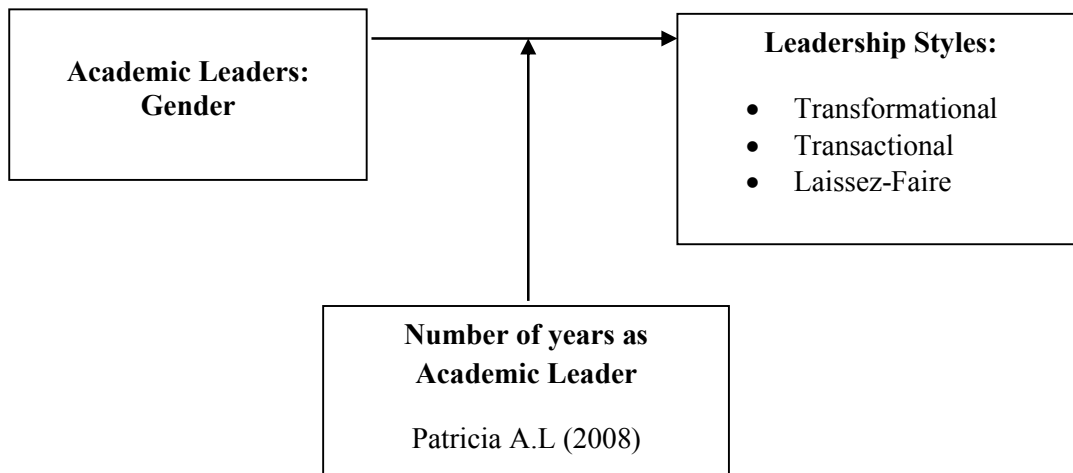
Historically, leadership has often been associated with the behaviors exhibited by males, particularly before the influx of women into the workplace. The Great Man Theory (Gehring, 2007) and Benevolent Paternalism (Ayman & Chermers, 1983) support the predominance of masculine traits in describing effective leaders. With more women occupying supervisory position

in various organizations, the identification of female leadership traits has become a focus on research inquiry. Furthermore, investigation into leadership qualities and characteristic related to gender has appeared in numerous studies in journal articles (Owen 2004).

Supervisors, managers and employees perceptions of males and females traits often play role in determining leader's effectiveness (Chemers, 1993). Male orientation has been related to aggressiveness, high self-confidence and low emotionality linked to initiating structure behavior or those related task

accomplishment and women as emotionality, kindness and nurturance linked to consideration behavior or those linked to developing relationship (Lewis, 1998). Assumptions in an organization concerning female and male leadership behaviors may be based on similar beliefs and perceptions. Further, research suggests that there are no differences in intelligence between men and women (Halpern & LaMay, 2000) in Johnson, et al, (2008). In a recent study on informal leadership, Neubert & Tagger (2004) in Johnson, et al, (2008) found that general mental ability more strongly predicted informal leadership for women than men.

Conceptual Framework



METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire will be adapted with minor modification from previous studies to suit the study setting. The sample will be selected from the list of directories which consist of academic leaders holding the position of the Dean, Deputy

of Dean and Head of Program in selected faculties of these selected public universities. In this study the sample size is the total of academic leaders in selected faculties in these selected public universities. The sampling frame is chosen because it provides the number of current

academic leaders in these universities. In this study, 80 percent from the population will be taken and the sample size will be 50 percent respondents consist of male academic leaders and 50 percent female academic leaders from selected faculties from selected public universities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study is expected in making a significant contribution to the existing literature by further exploring the impact of leadership styles and gender through an empirical analysis. It is to be noted that using the transformational style of leadership style and appropriate and effective communication competence should lead to increased job satisfaction among employees. This in turn could result in enhanced performance among employees, commitment, productivity, working climate and encourage employees to stay in the university and contribute to greater organizational effectiveness.

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