MEASURING THE LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AMONG MIDDLE ADMINISTRATORS IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract- This article aims to measure the level of leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. The stratified proportionate random sampling technique was used to collect the quantitative data. A total of 500 self-administered questionnaires were distributed by surface mail to the selected respondents throughout Malaysia and the 25-item Leadership Practices Inventory was used to examine leadership practices of the respondents. The final response rate was 47.4% and data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 for windows. Judging from the mean scores, the study suggested that the overall score of leadership practices among respondents was of high importance. Lastly, this paper discussed some suggestions for future research in this field.

IndexTerms- Leadership Practices, Middle Level Administrators, Malaysian Public Universities.

I. INTRODUCTION

As an endless changing global environment and the rising expectation of the stakeholders, the Malaysian public service is facing an increasing complex challenges. No doubt, with the aim for the progressive nation, education segment, especially the public higher institution, always has a crucial role in this country. According to Second Malaysia Plan [1], the objectives of the education system, which focused on four elements, have been employed as a main guideline in all national development plans. Recognizing this trend, higher education always plays a primary role in developing the youngster's knowledge that might promote national economic activities. Indeed, knowledge-based economy needs education systems that impart higher skills to a bigger number of the workforce.

In spite of this, the inconsistent performance of the public higher institution in Malaysia has caused dissatisfaction in some quarters over the issue in the past few years, especially after a study on the universities ranking conducted by The Times Higher Education [2]. In this report, the ranking of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia went up from 289 to 185 while the ranking of Universiti Malaya plunged from 169 to 192. Meanwhile, in 2009, Universiti Malaya moved its ranking from 230 to 180 while none of the other public universities were in top 200 world universities [3]. Subsequently, UKM was the only university placed in Asia University Ranking top 100 [4]. At the same time, the Ministry intends to place two public universities in the top 50 by 2020. No doubt among other factors, outstanding leadership and managerial competency are compulsory in order to promote public universities to a recognized international standard [5].

Besides the academic staff, there is also the administrators who have significant roles toward the achievement of national higher education goals. Even though the group has been proven to have important roles for the development of higher education institutions, however, there appears a complete ignorance for an administrator's job, and worse still, in most cases their contributions are not well recognized [6]. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to examine the level of leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Certainly such knowledge is very beneficial for both academic and managerial purposes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Submit Besides a number of crucial issues have been emphasized in this segment, many believe that leadership is one of the critical success factors in the higher education transformation effort all over the world [5][7]. Based on the literature, the research on leadership has dated back to more than a thousand years ago, as ideas regarding leadership can be observed in the western classics and the eastern as well, particularly in the Chinese philosophy [8][9]. Due to its complexity, none of the single approach is sufficient to describe the concept of leadership thus far.

Basically, there are four major classifications of leadership theory across over for more than 80 years, namely trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, and integrative leadership theory [10][11][12]. The trait theory was based on the belief that leaders are born, not made. The theory attempts to identify a set of personal traits or characteristics that differentiated between effective leaders from ineffective leaders, or leaders from followers.

Meanwhile, the behavioral leadership theory started from the 1940s until early 1970s had shifted its paradigm from trait theory to concentrate on what the leader did. Subsequently, in early 1960s contingency leadership theory has emerged because scholars believed there was none best leadership style in all

situations. In other words, successful leadership styles can differ from place to place [10]. The integrative leadership theory attempts to combine the trait, behavior, and contingency leadership theories to describe a successful influencing leader-follower relationships [10][13][14].

In the meantime, Gardner (1990) argued leadership is something to do with the achievement of a common objective, which is by effective leader, but also an entrepreneur, innovator, and a thinker, by the accessibility of organizational resources, and by questions of value and collective harmony. While, Wu [12] asserted strong leadership behavior as a key element for the successful organizations is reflected by the effective coordination use of human resource towards accomplishing organizations' mission and goals.

Additionally, Kouzes and Posner [16] say leadership is a set of behavior that anyone in a leadership capacity can be taught, become skilled, and able to achieve excellence on their position. Apparently, numerous researches on leadership have been conducted over the decades and scholars have recognized several manners of leadership styles that leaders assumed in managing organizations [17][18][19].

However, despite no unanimous definition of leadership, there are several leadership theories describing the nature of the leadership phenomenon [20]. Current literature on effective leadership suggested transformational leadership theory and visionary leadership theory has obtained prevalent acceptance among scholars and practitioners as well [8][21][22][23]. In recent years, Higgs [24] suggested many leadership studies emphasize on the ability of a leader to effectively manage an organization and promotes substantial organizational transformation process.

Consequently, House and Aditya [14] proposed that these are ordinary type theories and contain several general characteristics. First, these theories attempt to describe how individuals are able to lead toward successful organizations.Second, these theories also try to show how some leaders are able to maintain remarkable motivation levels of the follower, respect, trust, admiration, loyalty, dedication, commitment, and high performance. Third, these leaders observe emotionally appealing leadership behaviors, such as supportive behaviors, risk taking, empowering, role modeling, environmental sensitivity, visionary, and intellectual stimulation. Lastly, these leaders encourage follower motivation, self esteem, satisfaction, and outstanding performance.

Apparently, Kouzes and Posner's [22] leadership practices or transformational leadership model belongs to this group [20][25]. Initially, Kouzes and Posner [16] have conducted numerous studies to gather personal *best experiences* and found the characteristics appeared to show some similar pattern of behavior. Meanwhile, Herbst & Maree [25] have also examined over 1,200 personal best leadership experiences of executives and managers from numerous industries in the United States. Subsequently, Kouzes and Posner [16] have recognized five major practices of leadership consist of ten strategies used to encourage the followers and increase organizational performance.

Kouzes and Posner's [26] approach have become prevalent among scholars, practitioners, and widely utilized for management development programs all over the world.Interestingly, the authors strongly believe that leaders are not born, but can be trained, suggesting these five practices are common criteria found in successful leaders.
Considering its popularity, the Kouzes and Posner's model will be used in this study to examine the level of leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Finally, this is an attempt to examine the issue from the Malaysian context.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to examine the level of leadership practices among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Data were collected using a cross-sectional self-administered questionnaire, developed specifically for the individual level unit of analysis.
The Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory was used to measure leadership practices [27]. The scale consists of a list of 25 items. A 5-Point multi-item Likert-type scale format was employed, ranging from 1 (rarely or very seldom), 2 (once in a while), 3 (sometimes), 4 (fairly often), and (very frequently or almost always).

The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) for this scale is 0.95. Proportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample. This procedure ensured each sub-population that existed in the total population is well represented. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to the middle level administrators in public universities. Subsequently 289 usable replies were obtained. Subsequently, The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 for Windows was used to generate descriptive statistics.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 289 usable questionnaires were returned, giving 57.8% response rate. The frequency of respondents are 10.73% (northern region), 47.75%

(central region), 19.38% (southern region), 11.76% (eastern region), and 10.38% (East Malaysia). Most of the respondents, 60.55% have been working for less than 10 years, 21.11% between 11 - 15 years, 7.27% between 16 - 20 years, 6.57% between 21 - 25 years, and 4.50% for more than 26 years. Of the respondents, 15.57% are less than 30 years old, 30.80% between the ages of 30 - 35 years, 17.65% between 36 – 40 years, 17.65% between 41 - 45 years, 6.57% between 46 – 50 years, and 11.76% above 51 years. Most of the respondents are well educated, with 70.93% holding at least a bachelor's degree. A total of 58.48 percent of the respondents are women and 41.52 are men. A profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Respondents' profiles	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Region		
Northern	31	10.73
Central (Kelang Valley)	138	47.75
Southern	56	19.38
Eastern	34	11.76
East Malaysia	30	10.38
Tenure of service (year)		
≤ 10	175	60.55
11 – 15	61	21.11
16 – 20	21	7.27
21 – 25	19	6.57
≥ 26	13	4.50
Age (year)		
< 30	45	15.57
30 – 35	89	30.80
36 – 40	51	17.65
41 – 45	51	17.65
46 – 50	19	6.57
≥ 51	34	11.76
Education level		
Bachelor's degree	205	70.93
Postgraduate degree	71	24.57
Other qualifications	13	4.50
Gender		
Male	120	41.52
Female	169	58.48

Table 2 indicated both the mean and standard deviations of leadership practices scale. In examining the level of leadership practices, the ranking of importance as suggested by Rosli [28] and Rosli and Ghazali[29] were used as a reference. The authors suggest the following four categories based on rank of importance: mean value of 2.59 and below is indicating as *less important*, mean value between 2.60 to 3.40 is indicated as *moderate importance*, mean value ranging from 3.41 to 4.20 is indicated as *high importance*, and mean value of 4.21 and above is indicating as *great importance*.

Subsequently, based on the findings, eight items which scored mean value 4.21 and above (*I treat others with dignity and respect, I develop cooperative relationships with the people I work with, I create an atmosphere of mutual trust in the projects I lead, I am clear about my own philosophy of leadership, I make certain projects that I lead are broken down into manageable steps, I make sure that people are recognized for their contributions to the success of our projects, I praise people for a job well done,* and *I give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions*) were implied as great importance.

Meanwhile, seventeen items scored the mean value ranging from 3.41 to 4.20, were ranked as high importance. The items are *I seek out challenging opportunities that test my skills and abilities, I stay up-to-date on the most recent developments affecting our organization, I challenge the way we do things at work, I look for innovative ways we can improve what we do in this organization, I ask 'what can we learn?' when things do not go as expected, I describe to others the kind of future as their own, I clearly communicate a positive and hopeful outlook for the future of our organization, I show others how their long-term future interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision, I look ahead and forecast what I expect the future to be like, I involve others in planning the actions we will take, I give people a lot of discretion to make their own decisions, I spend time and energy on making certain that people adhere to the values that have been agreed on, I let others know my beliefs on how to best run the organization I lead, I am consistent in practicing the values I espouse, I take the time to celebrate accomplishments when project milestones are reached,* and *I find ways to celebrate accomplishments.*

The result also suggested that no item score lower than that.

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Items	Mean	SD
I seek out challenging opportunities that test my skills and abilities.	4.08	0.68
I stay up-to-date on the most recent developments affecting our organization.	4.21	0.58
I challenge the way we do things at work.	4.14	0.64
I look for innovative ways we can improve what we do in this organization.	4.07	0.68
I ask 'what can we learn?' when things do not go as expected.	4.07	0.73
I describe to others the kind of future I would like for us to create together.	3.88	0.77
I appeal to others to share my dream of the future as their own.	3.79	0.81
I clearly communicate a positive and hopeful outlook for the future of our organization.	3.97	0.76
I show others how their long-term future interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.	3.85	0.81
I look ahead and forecast what I expect the future to be like.	4.02	0.65
I involve others in planning the actions we will take	4.13	0.72

…continued

Items	Mean	SD
I treat others with dignity and respect.	4.43	0.62
I give people a lot of discretion to make their own decisions.	3.99	0.72
I develop cooperative relationships with the people I work with.	4.52	0.52
I create an atmosphere of mutual trust in the projects I lead.	4.40	0.54
I am clear about my own philosophy of leadership.	4.26	0.60
I make certain projects that I lead are broken down into manageable steps.	4.29	0.55
I spend time and energy on making certain that people adhere to the values that have been agreed on.	4.14	0.62
I let others know my beliefs on how to best run the organization I lead.	4.04	0.69
I am consistent in practicing the values I espouse.	4.14	0.62
I take the time to celebrate accomplishments when project milestones are reached.	4.00	0.75
I make sure that people are recognized for their contributions to the success of our projects.	4.26	0.58
I praise people for a job well done.	4.46	0.57
I give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions.	4.43	0.60
I find ways to celebrate accomplishments.	4.15	0.73

The findings indicated a high mean value among middle administrators in Malaysian public universities. Subsequently, observing from the score which illustrate a high mean concentration, it may be suggested that middle administrators in Malaysian public universities show their leadership practices at the workplace. All these practices have been well employed by the respondents of all genders, length of service, age groups, and education level across the public universities.

One of the possible reason is with constant in-service development programs conducted by their respective universities, this group of middle administrators are more conscious of their obligations and know to act as it should independently. Another probable reason could be this group is considered quite educated and therefore they not only aware of the challenges faced by the public universities, but also realise how to carry out their duties at the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Use either SI (MKS) or CGS as primary units. (SI units are strongly The results obtained show that the middle level administrators in public universities have indicated quite a high level of leadership practices at the workplace. Some of the possible factors such as assimilation, a comprehensive on the job training, and lastly their education level could be the reasons why this group are more aware of their duties, which in turn, motivate them to act appropriately at the work place. The findings of this study add to the literature on leadership practices, particularly in the context of Malaysian public universities. Since the present study only emphasizes on the public universities, future study could also include all levels of employees (lower, middle and top administrators) working at public universities in Malaysia.

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