TRUTHS AND MYTHS OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG MIDDLE LEVEL MANAGEMENT AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN MALAYSIA

Abd. Rahim Romle[1], Abdul Shukor Shamsudin [2] and Ilias Said[3]

ABSTRACT

Public institutions of higher learning are given an important and huge responsibility to produce graduates to enables a sustainable and continuous development of the country. Consequently the institutional require hard working, high commitment and competent staff members. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine empirically the relationship between management practices on job satisfaction among middle level management at public institutions of higher learning in northern region in Malaysia. Specifically, the dimension of management practices examined was leadership practices, communication practices and decision making practices. The respondents of the study are 133 management and professional staff members of various service schemes in grade 41 (under Malaysian Remuneration Scheme). The Pearson Correlation analysis suggested management practices have significant correlation with job satisfaction. Multiple Regression analysis indicated that leadership practices were the only predictor in explaining the respondents' job satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Basically the pattern of the administration in Malaysia (Malaya before the formation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963) could be seen in three following stages: the traditional, the colonial and the responsible-democratic era (Milne & Mauzy, 1980). The civil service in Malaysia evolved from the British Colonial civil service. Originally the British Bureaucracy in the country consisted of the British East India Company and later in 1858 the responsibility was passed to the British Crown. As a former British colonial, the Malaysian civil service was a legacy of the British administration in Malaya since 1896, instituted by Sir Frank Swettenham when he was appointed as Resident General on July 1, 1896 (Emerson, 1979). Mohd Nor (1970) discussed some basic criteria of the Malaysian civil service. The fundamental characteristic of the civil service which followed the British Bureaucratic origin was the predominant of the generalist-administrators whereby the administrative group continues largely to occupy administrative position in the ministries, central departments and agencies and in many semi-autonomous public bodies.

The second characteristic was the breakdown of the service according to the portfolios of the ministries rather than base on strict functional relationship basis. Currently there are 25 ministries forming the administration core of government, responsible for planning, policy formulation, regulating and controlling the operations of the departments, agencies and other administrative unit of the public service (INTAN, 1991).

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[1] *Abd. Rahim Romle, Faculty of Public Management and Law, Universiti Utara Malaysia.*
[2] *Abdul Shukor Shamsudin, Registrar Department, Universiti Utara Malaysia.*
[3] *Ilias Said, PhD, School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia.*

The third feature was its political neutrality and always liable to the misinterpretation. Civil service should serve to the government in power with loyalty, dedication and should not favor to any political parties (Mohd Salleh, 1984 and Public Service Department, 1993). On the other word, civil servants should be 'uninterested' and 'impersonal'. General Order, Caption D spelled out the prohibitions and limitations to deter active involvement of the civil servant in socio-political matters.

Finally was the principle of security of tenure. Once appointed to the permanent and pensionable service, a government servant cannot be removed from his/her positions unless by due process of law and in accordance with article 135(2) of the Federal Constitution (Mohd Salleh, 1984). To some people, this is the generic feature that invites charge of and a tendency to lethargy, complacency and apathy among government servant.

A rapid growth of higher education in Malaysia can be seen for the last 40 years. The growth is multidimensional containing infrastructure, faculty and staff recruitment, student enrolment and the diversity of curricula. The introduction of new programs reflected the diversity of objectives and directions pursued in achieving socioeconomic development (Noran Fauziah & Ahmad Mahdzan, 1999).

Five-year economic development plans practiced since obtaining independence in 1957, reflecting the country philosophy that economic development should not be left entirely to market forces. At the early stage of socioeconomic development (in the 1960s and 1970s) the government focused on the rural sector, which aimed at uplifting incomes, employment and educational opportunities. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Malaysian Government emphasizes on the development of manufacturing, industrial and service sectors. While for the decade onward greater emphasis is given on developing and applying information technology and producing knowledge workers. The country has 17 public universities/university colleges thus far, besides many more private colleges, to drive the country towards the stated goal.

The research rests on the premise that management practices such as leadership, communication and decision-making process have much impact on employees' satisfaction in exercising their job. Yet the problem has not been addressed thoroughly in the country, and the issue has direct outcomes on employees' productivity as research by McNeal (2003) found faculty members productivity have correlation with satisfaction. Somehow, dissatisfaction will affect the quality of their job. Gaziel (1993) noted that teacher lack of intention and focuses on instructional task would drive to the question whether they are able to deliver quality instruction.

Frequently the performance of the government agencies are compared to the private sector, it has a ground to do so and normally government agencies are affiliated with low performance. The factors contributed to the problems are the agencies are not clustered properly to suit it function, imbalances between organizational structure, professional staff and job description and centralized authority (Ahmad Sarji, 1996a and Halim, 1997). Worst still, too many check and control eliminate the agencies being manages creatively and effectively. Size, climate and out of date office tools also decrease the spirit of the staff and does not assist them to deliver good performance. Lastly it is reported the system and attitude of the officers who are focused most on procedure compliance rather than goal attainment essentially in time and cost context (Berita Harian, 26 September 1989, Utusan Malaysia, 6 Jun 1994 and The New Straits Times, 3 April 1994).

Ahmad Sarji (1996b) also expressed some of the problems in the public services because of the huge number of government servants, functional and structural issues. Therefore the government has launched some reformation in the public service like client charters to improve the weaknesses and offer better services to the people. He added government agencies were instructed to nurture good values and work culture base on shared values with priority given to increase performance, quality and productivity. However some observation found out that the problem still exist because some staff fail to comply with the standard determined, ineffective communication, less conducive working environment and job description does not promote creativity (Mahmood Nazar et al., 1997).

Mohammad Noor (1999), former Vice Chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia when delivering his keynote speeches to the administrative officers in Langkawi stressed the university has to review and look into at least five particular areas to become world-class university. The areas were the right structural, information system, human resource practices, organizational cultural and leadership before could move toward the mission. The changes and revamp is deemed necessary in order to become global player. It is necessary to reduce the bureaucracy and red-tapes ties, information sharing in the organization, human resource practices, inculcate and nurture the quality culture to all level of staff and finally credible leadership at all level of management. Dato' Ahmad Fawzi Mohd Basri, when he was appointed as Vice Chancellor to replace Dato' Mohammad Noor Haji Salleh, expressed more or less the same views (Utusan Malaysia, 6 June 2001).

The former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in responding to the question raised by one of the participants in the Malaysian Incorporated Summit at Kuala Lumpur, has asked the private sector to offer reasonable salaries in order to stop brain drain from public sector to joint private sector (The Star, 25 July 2000). He added some people still get job satisfaction even though the pay is rather less. The Prime Minister also joked that as the chief executive of Malaysia Incorporated he only receives RM 16,000 compared to others who receive RM 40,000 a month. He also called the civil servants to increase productivity and prosper the country so that the government has sufficient revenue to pay the salary.

Public Services Department Deputy Director-general, Datuk Ismail Adam called civil servants to increase productivity instead of request for more pay rise (The Star, 6 May 2003). The government has revised the salary of civil servant during the past few years. He said, on the other hand they had been given 10% salary increase twice since the year 2000. Furthermore, he added, all civil servants already enjoyed better pay under the Malaysian Remuneration Scheme (MRS), which recently replace the New Remuneration Scheme (NRS).

Dr. Ong Hean Tatt in his column argued money is not the only motivating factor (The Star, 16 August 2001). He discussed motivating factors, a quality of management where employees are motivated in successful organization, excitement and challenge about new target, recognition of achievement by superior's peer and subordinates, comradeship with other peer system, helping them, convincing them, instilling desire to succeed and showing them by example and lastly shared company vision (not imposed). On the other hand, he said feeling of being cheated or taking ride, feeling of being discriminated against for examples less qualified being promoted over you, decision questioned by superiors, superiors not understanding situation and interference from superiors. As a conclusion he summarized factors that encourage and discourage motivation as fair play where the absence is the major cause of discouragement,

respect where its presence is the major basis of encouragement and money is the least important of all factors.

In the meantime according to Bedeian and Glueck (1983) normally in most organizations there are three management levels: first line management, middle-level management and top management. For the middle management, their role is to manage activities of other managers and to act as a link between top management and lower level. Basically this level involves in less physical activities, more paperwork and attending meeting more than supervisors. They added middle management is a prime training ground for future top management. Study indicates middle managers spend most of their time organizing, facilitating and coordinating work activities.

Robbins (1988) indicates amount of time give to each management functions by the three management levels (top, middle and first level). For middle management 18% of the time goes to planning, 33% for organizing, 36% allocates for leading and 13% spend on controlling. While Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (1995) show study by Fayol and Katz have recognized three basic skills necessary for every managers in doing their function: conceptual, human and technical, whereby for the middle management human skill is the primary needed.

According to Johnsrud and Rosser (1997) midlevel administrative staff in the university are typically those employees who hold non-academic positions below the dean's level and may be classified as administrators, professionals and technical staff members. These employees include the numerous advisors, technicians and professional staff who work nature to support the primary missions of the institution (University of Arizona, 2001). Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser (1998) identify the nature of their role, lack of recognition for their contribution and limited opportunity for career advancement are the three sources of midlevel frustrations.

Hence it is important to for the institutions to know the impact of the management practices and employees' job satisfaction. It may provide some good input in formulating policy on human resource relations and training programs for the employees' inline with the institutional goals. On top of that, the institutions could advocate the right practices among administrative officers. However due to the several limitations, the purpose of the research is to explore and understand the relationship between management practices and job satisfaction among middle level management at public institutions of higher learning in northern region of Malaysia.

OBJECTIVES

The specific aims of this study were as follows:
1. To determine the relationship between management practices and job satisfaction.

2. To identify management practices that predicts job satisfaction among middle level management at Public Institutions of Higher learning in Northern Region.

Limitation of the Study
Respondents selected are focused on administrative officers (non-academic management and professional group) in grade 41 working at public institutions of higher learning in Northern Region regardless appointed on permanent, contractual or temporary basis. Currently there are

17 public universities/college universities in the country and the sample is selected from three of them. Therefore the sample cannot be generalized to all administrative officers working in the Malaysian universities or higher learning institutions. The limitation is due to the problem of manageability, financial and time.

The study only attempts to understand the relationship between management practices and job satisfaction among the middle level management at public institutions of higher learning in Northern Region. Employees concern about job satisfaction when they manage to fulfill their basic need as mentioned in the motivational theories discussed before. However due to the constraints stated above, the study only concentrates on the management practices at one particular time only.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the study is 372 management and professional staff members of various service schemes in grade 41 (under MRS) working in public institutions of higher learning in northern region. Based on proportionate stratified random sampling procedure, the total of 191 management and professional staff members from six campuses are selected to participate in the study. The sample number derived from table developed by Krejcie and Morgan *in* Sekaran (2000; 2003). The reason for adopting the procedure is the homogeneity of the population (Sekaran, 2000; 2003).

In collecting the data, questionnaires were used. Application letters were forwarded to all public institutions of higher learning in northern region to acquire the name list of the group and permission to conduct the study. Response rate was 69.63% whereby out of 191 set of questionnaires distributed, 133 questionnaires were returned (excluded the 5 questionnaires was incomplete).

The data was analyzed using the *Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows Version 13.0 (SPSS)*. The analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study has a total of 133 respondents. There are altogether 71 males (53.4 %) and 62 females (46.6 %) responded to the questionnaires. Table 1 shows that 36 respondents (27.1 %) were aging below 30 years old, 37 respondents (27.8 %) were 30 – 35 years old, 24 (18.0 %) were 36 – 40 years old, 20 (15.0 %) were 41 – 45 years old, and 16 respondents (12.0 %) were older than 46 years old. In term of working experience, 45 respondents (33.8%) have served less than 5 years, 36 respondents (27.1%) work with the institutions between 5 to 10 years, followed by 11 to 15 years (26 respondents or 19.5%), 15 (11.3%) respondents have been working between 16 – 20 years and the balance 11 respondents (8.3%) have been working in the institutions for more than 21 years. Most of the selected respondents have married. According to the analysis, 113 or 85% of the respondents have married, meanwhile 19 or 14.3% of the respondents are single and out of the number only one or 0.8% of the respondent was divorced. Malays are the dominant group working in the public institutions of higher learning in northern region. Out of the total number of respondents, Malays represent 97.7% or 130 of the respondents, two respondents are Indian (1.5%) and only one (0.8%) respondent is Chinese

Table 1   Profile of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	71	53.4
Female	62	46.6
Age		
Below 30	36	27.1
30-35	37	27.8
36-40	24	18.0
41-45	20	15.0
46 and above	16	12.0
Tenure		
Below 5 years	45	33.8
5-10 year	36	27.1
11-15 year	26	19.5
16-20 year	15	11.3
21 and above	11	8.3
Marital Status		
Married	113	85.0
Single	19	14.3
Divorced	1	0.8
Race/ethnicity		
Malay	130	97.7
Chinese	1	0.8
Indian	2	1.5

By analyzing the Pearson Correlations analysis through the hypotheses testing, it is concluded that all the three independent variables (Leadership Practices, Communication Practices and Decision Making Practices) are correlated among each other.

Table 2   Hypotheses Testing

Alternate Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Result
HA 1: There is a relationship between leadership practices and job satisfaction	0.65	0.01	Significance and supported
HA 2: There is a relationship between communication practices and job satisfaction	0.66	0.01	Significance and supported
HA 3: There is a relationship between decision making practices and job satisfaction	0.65	0.01	Significance and supported

Correlation is significant at 0.05 confidence level (2-tailed)

The multiple regression analysis (entered method) is applied to measure the variables that explained the variance in the overall job satisfaction. Table 3 illustrated the multiple regression analysis results of the independents variables against dependent variable.

Table 3   Multiple Regression Analysis

	B	Beta	t	sig.
Leadership practices	.14	.29	2.70	.01**
Communication practices	.26	.23	1.66	.10
Decision making practices	.25	.24	1.85	.07*

R=.70	R^2=.49	Adjusted R=.48
F=41.03	F significant=.00	

**P<0.05

*p<0.01

The above table exhibited that correlation of the independent variables against the dependent variable is 0.70 with R square is 0.49. The F statistic is 41.03 and is significant at the .00 level. Thus, this means that 49% of the variance in job satisfaction is significantly explained and influenced by the independents variables. Beta value is used to identify which of the three independents variables is more important in explaining the variance in job satisfaction. As suggested in the above table, leadership practices score the higher value, 0.29, which is significant at the .01 level. At the mean time the result indicates communication practices and decision making practices are not significantly correlating in explaining staff satisfaction.

The analyses outcome indicated all practices which employ as independent variables: leadership practices, communication practices and decision making practices have significant relation to job satisfaction. Overall observation shown communication practices appear the highest significant level of r=.66, p<.01, followed by leadership practices at the significant level of r=.65, p<.01 and decision making practices at the significant level of r=.65, p<.01. Unlike age and tenure, both moderating variables do not show any relationship with job satisfaction. Each variables recorded the significant level of r=-.01, p<.01 and r=-.10, p<.01. Basically all the practices are among manager's roles in the organization (Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert, 1995). Therefore should the managers play their role effectively and dealing with employees tactfully it would bring good outcome to the organization.

The result is corresponding with Orpen (1997) that indicates quality of communication within the organization have positive impact on managers' job satisfaction and work motivation as well. He suggested whereas improving the transmission and reception of information within organization should increase managers' motivation and job satisfaction. This is in line with Oshagbemi (1997 and 2002), Ilizor, Ilizor and Carr (2002) and Porter and Robert (1993). According to Pool (1997) job satisfaction significantly associated with consideration leadership and initiating structure leadership styles. This is in accordance with Loke (2001), Eklund and Hallberg (2000) and McNeese-Smith (1997). Meanwhile the study by Tang, Singer and Robert (2000) and Li (1996) supported the findings on participation in decision making.

Generally, in the multiple regression analyses only leadership practices is found statistically correlated to the job satisfaction. In the analysis, leadership practices explained 49% of the job satisfaction. The findings are in accordance with Pool (1997) who found leadership styles were one of the predictors on job satisfaction. However the finding also was contradicting with study by Li and Tse (1998) suggesting participation in decision making was among the three predictors to hotel industry expatriate job satisfaction. They added some hotel managers indicated although parent companies gave them too much decision making autonomy, but

provided little support. For this group of expatriate, knowing their inputs to decision making being valued should increase their satisfaction. The result also is not corresponding with the study by Kline and Boyd (1991) on the effect of participative decision making climate and job satisfaction. The inconsistent in the findings perhaps is due to the organizational cultural differences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kouzes and Posner (1997) strongly believed leaders are not born, but can be groomed. On the other word they suggested leadership comprises a set of practices, it is learnable and observable to anybody who interested to know about it. Therefore, specifically, top-level management can make a difference by introducing and enhancing formally the five leadership behaviors: modeling the way, inspire a shared vision, challenging the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart. The continuous use of the five leadership practices should constantly encourage. Another thing to consider is, seniority and qualification should not be the sole and main criteria in organizational promotion, but those who display set of leadership behavior effectively in work place, talent and high commitment should be considered for a promotion to higher managerial level.

It is believes that all negative and positive aspects concerning job have an influence on job satisfaction, where employees with high level of satisfaction would show a positive attitude while those who are dissatisfied would possess negative attitudes at work. Based on the findings, management practices do have an impact to employees' job satisfaction. There are many factors contributing to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This study attempts to find out the effects of management practices on job satisfaction among middle management of public institutions of higher learning in northern region.

In this study managements practices is limited and referring to leadership practices, communication practices and decision making practices. As suggested by many scholars, work, pay, promotion, supervision and co-workers are the five common characteristics of job satisfaction adapted in this study.

The result of the study shows all the independent variables have significant correlation to job satisfaction. While multiple regression analysis indicates leadership practices is the only predictor to job satisfaction.

Finally, it is insufficient for top-management to provide supportive environment to influence organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity and organizational commitment. Hence it is important to all level of management to undergo training and retraining to incorporate in enhancing their management skills. Since the higher learning sector continues and always facing new challenges, adapting the appropriate practices in management is important and unavoidable.

This study was carried out in three public institutions of higher learning in northern region. Therefore the results may not generalize the management practices and job satisfaction for the overall public institutions of higher learning through out the country. In order to get the higher degree of consistency, similar study should be done to all public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Lastly, demographic variables other than those tested in this study possibly

may have an impact to the job satisfaction of the respondents. Some other variable should be explore are job characteristics, race, level of interpersonal skill and more.

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