

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND LEADERSHIP IN EMPLOYABILITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will explore the importance of emotional intelligence and leadership in relation to the employability issue especially in the Malaysian cultural context. The application of emotional intelligence and leadership in the western countries can be integrated into a model of practice for Malaysia. Experts believe that no matter whether the person is an employer or an employee, there is a need to have capabilities not only in the technical area, but also soft skills such as emotional intelligence and leadership. We will discuss the importance of emotional intelligence and leadership as an added value that will lead to employability especially in the Malaysian cultural context. Some guidelines and suggestions will be given on how to capitalize on this issue to enhance employability among college community students.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this 21st century, Globalization has taught us the importance of learning new skills and competencies especially in Education field of Malaysia. Asia buffer itself in global economic down in 1997 when large company in United State and Europe also downturn. Globalization is diversified and change is needed to emerge the economic (Dekrey &Griffin, 2010). A path from that, Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (MOHE) highlights one of thrusts in “The National Higher Education Strategic Plan” (PSPTN), which aim in building human capital, with ‘first class mentality’ of National Assets that lead Malaysia for a bright future (PSPTN, 2007; Sirat, 2012; Idrus et al., 2009).

Our Prime Minister, Y. A. B. Dato’ Seri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Razak did stated that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is important to form a group of potential worker to perform and contribute to the economy grow (Seng, 2012; Dasmani, 2011; BHIPGA, 2011), and that is why

Community Colleges was formed (JPKK, 2012). Community College is one of the platform to upgrade students with certificates level of vocational courses either by full time or part time lifelong learning courses. A total of 33% of certificates level students in Institution of Higher Education in Malaysia are actually graduates from community college in Malaysia (KPT, 2010) whom are marketable and employable in local or international industry (BHIPGA, 2011). Nowadays, a college certificate or diploma has become an important qualification for students to get into any job in the local market (Gates & Gates, 2009).

In the PSPTN, one of the highlighted issues is that 75% of graduates need to be employed six months after their graduation. This is due to the demand of technical kind of work at market. However, many graduates unemployable due to lack of soft skills that needed by employer at work area nowadays (Idrus et al., 2009; Bardan, 2009; Rasul & Puvanasvaran, 2009; Sulaiman & Burke, 2009; Graduan, 2007; Hassan, 2002), especially the character of interpersonal and leadership (Rasul & Puvanasvaran, 2009) as well as emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatziss & McKee, 2002). Instructors from Community College also facing challenges in integrating elements of employability skills as no contents of employability skills included in syllabus and students and curriculum designed not emphasised on employability skills (Madar & Buntat, 2011).

In identifying the employability issues in Malaysia, few local researchers had done their study in this field, but the outcome are not consistent with different elements of soft skills that needed by employee at work area such as able to work efficiently (Madar & Buntat, 2011); problem-solving skills (Sulaiman & Burke, 2009); generic skills (Sirat et al., 2012); interpersonal and leadership (Rasul & Puvanasvaran, 2009). However, interpersonal and leadership were found not related to employability issues in Malaysia by Ismail (2011).

At the same time, studies also shows that a successful individual should high in leadership with high emotional intelligence component in their working performance (Khosravi *et al.*, 2011; Yunus et al., 2010; Chen et al., 1998). This is because “emotionally intelligent leaders have the ability to perceive, understand better, and regulated emotions more effectively” (Yunus et al., 2010). In line with these, researcher try to discuss and focus on emotional intelligence and leadership as soft skills elements that needed especially by community college students and to be integrated into a model of practice for Malaysia.

## **WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?**

Everybody does not being born with emotional intelligence, but people might born with tendency to organize their thinking. We learn how to be emotional intelligence as it is a cognitive behaviour. If we look back to the basic theory, Jean Piaget was the first that founded the Theory of Cognitive Development in 1954. In this theory, Piaget stated that each person thinking may differs to one and another, especially between adult and children (Woolfolk, 2004). Psychologists determine that everybody has their own development and changes which are to result in behaviour. It can be called as social development when the changes are related to the way individual behave; or cognitive development when the changes are related to how the individual thinking. Such changes emerge over time in affected by the way that the individual learning and interact with the environment (Woolfolk, 2004).

Meanwhile, human intelligence was found over thousands of years and emotional intelligence is one of the intelligence that conceptualized differently by different researcher. Intelligence is often defined as our intellectual potential or something we are born with and a capacity that is difficult to change. In recent years, we used to hear that intelligence is defined as intellectual quotient (IQ). However, the theory of multiple intelligences was then proposed by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner which included emotional intelligence or known as EQ as one of the multiple intelligences.

The founder of emotional intelligence were Salovey and Mayer in the year of 1990 but it was not well known until the book entitle 'Field of emotional intelligence' by Goleman in 1995 get the bestselling book around the world, which tells everyone what emotional intelligence is about (Caruso, 2008). Salovey and Mayer introduced emotional intelligence as one of the social intelligence that involved ability of one's self to monitor others' emotion and control the emotion in terms of making any decision or action (Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004). Basically, 4 importance abilities in the Model of Emotional Intelligence, which included the ability to identify and express emotions; the ability to generate emotions of thought; the ability to understand emotions; and the ability to manage emotions for intellectual growth (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

In the same theory of Piaget, he defined organization as 'ongoing process of arranging information and experience into mental system and categories (Woolfolk, 2004). An individual that involve in certain organization will first involve in the "assimilation" stage, that is the process of understand some new information and fitting the information into their own self. After some times, the individual with goes up to the next stage of "accommodation", that is giving response to the information that they can fit in. When both these stage can be done accordingly, it shows that the person already in the stage

of “adaptation”, which means they can adapt to their environment and manage to organize their psychological structure.

The same concept goes with emotional intelligence. People are born with his own level of intelligence and emotions. Human behaviour is related with the terms of stimulus and response (S-R), in which learning occurred if S-R connection was made. Modern behaviourism, B.F. Skinner stressed that behaviour response to stimulus on environmental consequences. Individual respond with emotions when the stimulus related had come to some level of acceptance of that person. He or she need to assimilate the stimulus before accommodate or adapt with it. Intelligence takes part in between to adapt to that situation. The person that can use his or her intelligence to lower the level of emotions that had faced indirectly shows the adaptation and the level of emotional intelligence. Goleman (1998) argues that a person who high in emotional intelligence are more kind to others as he or she can adapt easily with the environment; it is an essential talent to identify own cognitive capacities and manage own emotions (Dekrey & Griffin, 2010)

### WHAT IS SELF-LEADERSHIP?

The goal of our education system is to produce individual who can manage their own life in varieties way beside to become an educated person (Woolfolk, 2004). Social psychologist Albert Bandura did prove to us that human behavior improves by the principle of reinforcement and punishment that link to self-efficacy (Braun, n.d.). It was known as social learning theory which founded by Bandura in the year of 1977 that emphasizes learning through observation. Individual learn how to perform a behavior by efficient learning process overtime which includes the elements of paying attention, retaining information, producing behavior and motivated (Woolfolk, 2004).

This theory is related to self-leadership theory where the individual learn how to become a leader indirectly by observation and motivation. Basically, Self-leadership is the leadership that found on individual which involves behavior and cognitive strategies which can increase that individual performance (Houghton, 2000; Houghton, Dawley, & DiLiello, 2012). In the self-leadership, there are three different strategies which show how an individual behave and perform (Houghton, Dawley, & DiLiello, 2012; Braun, n.d.; Houghton, 2000) that can be found in table 1.

Table 1

*Strategies of Self-Leadership.*

Strategies	Description
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Behavior-focused	behaviors that produce desirable outcomes and reduce undesirable behaviors that lead to poor outcomes  <u>Includes</u> : Self-goal setting, Self-reward, Self-punishment, Self-observation, and Self-cueing.
Natural reward	the use of external rewards, adding rewarding elements to a task
Constructive thought pattern	thinking patterns and mental processes which have significant impact on individual performance  <u>Includes</u> : Visualizing successful performance, Self-talk, and Evaluating beliefs and assumptions

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When a person strengthen by his or her self-leadership, self-efficacy also being shown and improve leadership performance (Braun, n.d.) as self-leadership strategies very helpful in managing unpleasant behaviours and for long-term goal attainments (Houghton, Dawley, & DiLiello, 2012). For example, students can manage their own time, homework, and project in studies time to achieve their target results by the end of their studies. They will not only perform well in academic performance, but also in building the leadership in self by participating group discussion or work project with their friends.

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYABILITY**

Leadership can be learned by daily experience and education (Dekrey & Griffin, 2010). Goleman (1998) stated that leadership is emotional intelligence as individual with leadership can influence self and others, high self confidence, good team skills and high in achievement. Leader who fail to perform those action were tense to failure, defensive, and lack of empathy. Leadership is knowledge skills that include practice; and outlook of a person that include personality and interpersonal skills (Dekrey & Griffin, 2010). So, we can say that leadership is the process that involved social influence which individual will support others in accomplishment of goals that had been set by the organization. Leader have to observe, diagnose the situation and giving rewards to his or her follower in order to improve relationship, opportunity, and performance besides eliminating weaknesses that had been faced.

Dekrey & Griffin (2010) argues that 31% of the company with development programs ranked Number 1 in Asia, in which each company develop leadership talent that perform well to accomplish goals and objectives that had been set. Asia is different from Western countries which based on traditional theories. Leadership is the universal element that affecting employee loyalty across Asian cultures. Leader with sophisticated analytical approach and soft skills is needed in today's competitive environment (Dekrey & Griffin, 2010). Leadership is not about training individuals to lead the team, but is related to polishing interpersonal relations.

In this study, emotional intelligence and self-leadership is important to a student in order to prepare themselves for employment. When we turning back, we still can remember how Western countries try entering Asian markets back to the 1980s. However, the trend has reversed for Asian companies are now acquiring Western Countries Company for larger market. So, it is the same with application of emotional intelligence and leadership in employability. Leaders need to "look globally and act locally" (Dekrey & Griffin, 2010). Leadership is about future where we must learn from others and learn from the mistake. When come across any problem in the organization, a high emotional intelligence person has higher potential to understand and solves problem, especially in controlling emotions or stressful work demands appropriately; A success leader is an optimistic person and view problems as exciting challenge (Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004). Emotional intelligence is one of the important elements of a quality leader; who can control emotion in the organization (Lazovic, 2012).

### **PATHWAYS TO CAREER READINESS**

For a normal student, attending class and studies by formal education is a must nowadays in preparation as a knowledgeable and workable worker for a bright future. High level achievers are satisfied with their performance and are more likely to persist. However, some students might crush their interest in learning when attending lecturing classes more than six hours of seat time (ACTE, 2010). For these special students, they may learn and interpret knowledge in the classroom by relevant engagement of technologies and other tools that related to the academic knowledge (ACTE, 2010), and that is why community college in Malaysia is formed in preparing a place of study by using the method of 70% hands-on and 30% theory classes (JPKK, 2012). By using this method, students can develop their confidence and skills.

According to article and report by Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) in the year of 2010 and 2011 at United State, all students

need to be college- and career-ready by application of various career readiness knowledge and skills such as academic skills in relevant field of studies, employability skills, and technical skills. Practical applications, such as hands-on activities, project, and internships are needed as the students will have competitive by other college students' especially in finding suitable job. The issue about the success of education system in ensuring students are "college- and career-ready" not only concern by United State (ACTE, 2011), but also Malaysia as the unemployed graduates from Malaysia Higher Education increase every year (Sirat et al., 2012). However, only 38.7% of Community College students are unemployed in the year of 2008 but decrease to 14.5% in the year of 2012 with application of the Employability Program started Jun 2011 (Ishak, Ahmad & Fajri, 2012).

We can learn that Employability Program is so important in increasing the human capital in Malaysia while decreasing the unemployment community college students while facing both local and global challenges. In United State, the foundations for strengthening career readiness had already place in their education system and showing higher level of employability skills and leadership among their students. The program known as Career and Technical Student Organizations Career and Technical Education (CTSOs). This program teaches the students about how to achieve organization goals by participation related leadership organizations which includes leadership development, academic and career achievement, professional development, and community service. Students learn their leadership by giving speeches, participating and organizing events; while employability skills with teamwork among themselves, career awareness, and social development (ACTE, 2011).

Meanwhile, The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) had been applied successfully in United State and Canada through finding the students expectation beside other information such as socialization experiences that can be used towards enhancing student in learning process (Kuh, 2007). The application of BCSSE helps the educators to know their students better and applying different method to motivate the students in fulfilling more A+ result students. Feedback by feedback is used to make sure the educators also can have quality work as well as success rate of college students.

Some studies shows that college educator often have different views about content and skills that needed by the students (Gates & Gates, 2009). Some students even become employee after graduation without knowing the skills that needed to success at work (CVWF, 2010). By seeing the successfulness of CTOSs and BCSSE that applied at western countries, community college in Malaysia should organize survey for their students before they graduate, and offer soft skills program as a preparation and added value for the employability skills. This in line with Corporate Voices for Working Families at Washington (CVWF, 2010) that stated educators,

community leaders, and employers should sit and work together to ensure the opportunity that can develop employability skills that needed at the market. This can stronger the readiness of the students for work. For example, by organising programs such as Apprenticeships, College awareness programs, Internships, Job fairs, and Summer programs (CVWF, 2010).

When we turn into the society, we can see individual especially some youth involved in crime when they dropped out from college. Students whom success graduate from college can be a successful employee but also can be an unsuccessful employee that ended up with low income job due to poor job performance or psychology problem. They cannot manage their problem well and they are lack of emotional intelligence. Students should be ready in terms of cognitive strategies, which means they have to learn and think analytically and logically; content knowledge, which focus on structure of knowledge in field they learn; self-management skills (Conley, 2008). By using these strategies, students can overcome any learning barriers.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this twenty-first century, educators can assist students maintaining good personal development and success in the college by setting high expectations and supporting them every step of the way. Evaluation on students' skills and abilities can equip them with learning beyond the classroom. So, when emotional intelligence and leadership been recognise as important elements in employability issues, students that haven involve themselves in work life should have learn how to be an emotional intelligence and high in leadership too. Other than that, employability skills such as listening skills, negotiating skills, management and adaptability should be self-develop in the mist of organization change. Under the human capital theory, encourage growth of human capital lead to globalised society (Yorke, 2006).

From this study, researcher suggests that Community College in Malaysia may try to follow the action by applying The Malaysian Community College Survey of Employability Skills (MCCSES) to ask about their college experiences; how college prepared them as a good employee beside examine the level of emotional intelligence, leadership, and employability skills that they have before entering the work environment.

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