The Relationship between Management Practices and Job Satisfaction: The Case of Assistant Registrars at Public Institutions of Higher Learning in Northern Region Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Universities were known as the production of qualified manpower. This is a view we have already encountered, in which universities are seen as a process or in which students count as 'products', as output and having a utility value on the labor market. Consequently, the institutional require hard working, high commitment and competent staff members in order to deliver the services to their customers. 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 data were analyzed through descriptive analysis, ANOVA, T-test, Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression by using SPSS Version 14.0. Suggestions for further research and recommendation for decision makers have been forwarded.

INTRODUCTION

The Khir Johari Report of 1967 (in Sufean, 1996) defined higher education as any professional or academic study that requires as a prerequisite the minimum academic qualification of a Higher School Certificate or its equivalent for admission into an institution at university level, and a Malaysian Certificate of Education or its equivalent for admission at college level. Therefore based on the report, a person needed 11 years of schooling before he/she can be admitted into a college or polytechnic, or 13 years to enter a university.

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 and Ahmad Mahdzan, 1999).

According to Second Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1971) the objectives of the education system, which focused on four aspects, have been used to guide all national development plans. There were to:

- Consolidate the education system to promote national integration and unity.
- Orientate and expand education and training program towards meeting the manpower needs of the country.
- Improve the quality of education for the building of a progressive society oriented towards modern science and technology; and
- Improve research, planning and implementation capability to meet the above objectives.

Therefore, the objectives of Malaysia's higher education system can be concluded as to promote national integration and unity, to meet the high-level manpower requirements of the country and to build a progressive society, oriented towards modern science and technology (Noran Fauziah and Ahmad Mahdzan, 1999).

Personnel

In term of personnel, from 1969 to 1972, 26,266 officers were recruited into Malaysian civil service. In 1974, the figure was increasing to 29,449. For the year 1985 to 2000, Malaysian civil service personnel demonstrated an extensive growth, meaning the size of civil service was getting huge. For the year 1985, Malaysian civil service employed 819,500 personnel attached to various ministries, department, agencies and so fourth. The number increased to 850,000 in the year 1990, showing an increased of 3.72% or 30,500 new jobs were generated during the period. In 1995 the figure keep increased to 869,500, meaning an increased of 2.29% or 19,500. For the year 2000 the government projected Malaysian civil service sector will require 879,000 personnel, indicating an increase of 1.09% or 9,500 personnel (Malaysia 1991; 1993).

Based on the number of Malaysian civil servant keeps increasing, the growth is actually less favorable. This is much due to the economics downturn and changing in government policies such as privatization, right sizing, office automation, the rapid growth of information technology and so fourth (Malaysia, 1999 and Ahmad Sarji, 1996b).

According to Public Service Department (2004), in term of personnel of the 17 public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, the total strength for the year 2003 stood at 37,324. The figure comprised the premier grade, management and professional group and supportive staff. The number did not taking into account employees hire on contract and temporary basis. For the premier grade and management and professional group comprises of academic staff (lecturers, associate professor and professor) and non-academic staff (administrators, engineers, doctor, librarian and many more to mention here).

Problems Statement

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 Malaysia, 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 (1993) called heads of department to demonstrate good example and practices good value in their leadership. He later urged the heads of department to always work with honesty and sincerity because if they failed to show good example, their subordinate will not respect and dare to violate the ethical code outlined. All these attitudes will drive to the bigger problems and the agencies would not meet the targeted goals.

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' Dato' Mohammad Noor Haji Salleh, expressed more or less the same views (Utusan Malaysia, 6 June 2001).

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.

Mintzberg (1979) proposes five basic components in every organization. The components are the technical core, technical support, administrative support, top management and middle management. Environment, technology and several other factors influence the size and important of the components. Daft (2001) explains at the department level, middle management is responsible for implementation and coordination. Traditionally, it is the duty of middle management to mediate between top management and the technical core such as passing information and implementing rules.

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.

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.

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, ANOVA, Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study has a total of 113 respondents. There are altogether 71 males (53.4 %) and 62 females (46.6 %) responded to the questionnaires. Table 1 shows that 35 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	Percentage
Gender		
Male	71	53.4
Female	62	46.6
Age		
Below 30	35	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	18	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

T-test analysis is conducted to examine the differences between gender and job satisfaction. The result of T-test is exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2. t-Test Between Gender and Job Satisfaction

	n	mean	SD	t	DF	p
Male	71	3.48	.77			
				2.30	131	0.02
Female	62	3.29	.75			

P<0.05

As illustrated in the above table, the result of the test indicated that the mean score for men and women are almost the same, 3.48 and 3.29 respectively with standard deviation of .77 (men) and 0.75 (women) on overall job satisfaction. The table also demonstrated the t value = 2.30 and p = 0.02 (p < .05). Thus there is a significant difference between gender and job satisfaction.

Oneway Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is performed to determine the differences in job satisfaction between working experience and respondents' age to job satisfaction.

Table 3. Results of ANOVA Test on Respondents' Age and Job Satisfaction

Age		Sum of Squares	df Squares	Mean	F	p
< 30	Between group	229.42	4	57.36	.74	.57
30-35	Within group	9933.32	128	77.60		
36-40	Total	10162.74	132			
41-45						
> 46						

p<0.05

As exhibited in the Table 3, the F value is 0.74 and is not significant at the level of significant 0.05. Therefore there is no significant difference between respondents' age and job satisfaction.

The Table 4 below illustrated the results of ANOVA test on tenure and job satisfaction.

Table 4.   Results of ANOVA Test on Tenure and Job Satisfaction

Tenure		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
< 5	Between group	245.65	4	61.41	.79	.53
5-10	Within group	9917.09	128	77.48		
11-15	Total	10162.74	132			
16-20						
> 21						

p<0.05

Tenure in this study refers to the length of service she/he is working in the institutions. Back to Table 4, the F value is 0.79 and p value is 0.53 and not significant at the level of significant 0.05. The finding suggested there is no significant difference between tenure age and job satisfaction. Therefore, both variables (age and tenure) did not indicate the significant differences to job satisfaction.

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 5.   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 6 illustrated the multiple regression analysis results of the independents variables against dependent variable.

Table 6.   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 0.00 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 0.01 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=0.66, p<0.01, followed by leadership practices at the significant level of r=0.65, p<0.01 and decision making practices at the significant level of r=0.65, p<0.01. Unlike age and tenure, both moderating variables do not show any relationship with job satisfaction. Each variables recorded the significant level of r= -0.01, p<0.01 and r=-0.10, p<0.01. 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 t-test also indicated gender does have significant difference on management practices and job satisfaction, meaning male and female show significant relation to the independent and dependent variables. The finding was contradicts with the study by Loke (2001), whereby she indicated there is no significant difference in the scores between female and male respondents. However in term of this was in line with finding from study done by Aidura (2003) whereby male shown higher level of job satisfaction compared to female.

However in some cases gender shown no differences in job satisfaction (Hill, 1983). According to Hill, there was little different in job satisfaction between the two (male and female) although it showed they have different expectation concerning the job. The common reasons for the different level of work satisfaction sometimes reported for male and female is that female normally have different expectations with regard to job.

The Oneway ANOVA test demonstrated age and tenure do not have significant difference on management practices and job satisfaction. Generally this indicates that the staff is happy with their job across age and tenure. The finding was contradicts with the study by Aidura (2003) whereby male shown higher level of job satisfaction compared to female. She also suggested there were significant difference between working experience and employees job satisfaction. However the result was in line with finding from study done by Loke (2001), whereby she indicated there is no significant difference in the scores between female and male respondents.

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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