The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Practice among Middle Administrators

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Abstract

The recent challenges facing by the Malaysian higher education institutions have compelled the staff to equip themselves with skills such as leadership quality. Past studies, among others indicated that effective leadership was influenced by emotional intelligence. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practices among middle administrators in Malaysian public universities. In total 500 questionnaires were distributed and 273 completed. The results suggested that only the dimension of regulation of emotion was significantly related to leadership practice. Several recommendations were made for future research.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; leadership practices; Malaysian public university.

1. Introduction

Generally, Malaysia is capable to offer a relatively excellent international standard of education at an affordable cost (Lim, 2009). In line with the development in Malaysian higher education, the Ministry has announced the Government decision to make the country as a center of higher education excellence in this region (Malaysia, 2006). Subsequently, it is a significant characteristic of the internationalization process of the Malaysian higher education segment (Morshidi, 2008). In Malaysia, higher education opportunities are provided by 20 public universities, 27 polytechnics, 42 public community colleges, 68 private universities/university branches/university colleges, five foreign university branch campuses and 403 private colleges (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011).

Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006 to 2010), the Malaysian Government has continued to place enormous emphasize on the national education agenda. Basically, the five-year development plan focused on five major thrusts, one of which is to increase the capacity for knowledge and innovation and to nurture a first class mentality (Malaysia, 2006). Besides that, the Government is planning to turn the country as an educational hub in this region (Morshidi, 2008) since the move has a significant impact on economic growth (Simrit Kaur, 2005). Consequently, the Malaysia needs to remain competitive in providing excellent quality of higher education services that is recognized locally and internationally (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

Traditionally, learning institutions played the role of institutions to promote moral and intellectual development and function as a center to promote civilization. In the meantime, the main current challenges for the higher education institutions are to ensure academic and training programs provided to the people are market driven and able to respond to the dynamic of various economic sectors (Malaysia, 2010). Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say with fast changing global economic situation, presently the institutions are seen more utilitarian with emphasis on professional training (Mohamed Khaled, 2009). **Judging from the above arguments**, higher education always

plays a major role in developing the youngster's knowledge that might boost national economic activities. Indeed, knowledge-based economy needs education systems that impart higher skills to a bigger number of the workforce (Malaysia, 2010).

However, the performance of the public universities has raised the public attention in the past few years, especially after a study on the universities ranking conducted by The Times Higher Education (2006). 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. However, in 2009, Universiti Malaya escalated from rank 230 to 180 while none of the other public universities were in top 200 world universities (The Times Higher Education, 2010).

This report has caused public dissatisfaction over the quality of local public universities. 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 maneuver public universities to a recognized international standard (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008; Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

Recognizing the new challenges, the Ministry has launched the National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020 and the National Higher Education Action Plan (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). Therefore, it is important for all those involve with the administration of public universities to fully understand and grasp the fundamental point of both higher education transformational plans. Top management of the higher institutions is required to give full commitment to the objectives of these plans and must ensure that all staff members have been made aware of these plans (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). Similar to other organizations, planning without effective implementation is unworkable and the universities need the right kind of care, where the right combination and utilization of rational, intellectual, logical, and critical thinking produces confidence in the leadership and inspires them to attain the heights of excellence (Northouse, 2007; Snodgrass & Schachar, 2008).

Although several crucial issues have been highlighted, however, many believe leadership is one of the critical success factors in the higher education transformation effort all over the world (Bolden et al., 2008; Ministry of Higher Education, 2007; Rosser, 2004). No doubt, this new landscape needs a person who can lead themselves, faculty, and university, thrive on the change, encourage innovation, promotes learning, and finally bringing the organization into the future successfully (ACRULeT, 2007; Bolden et al., 2008; Brown, 2001; King, 2008). Parallel with the global higher education phenomenon, the government has given great attention on the issue of leadership in public higher institutions (Mohamed Khaled, 2009; Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). Although there were numbers of study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010; Zagorśek, Jaklic, & Stough, 2004; Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010), however, very few studies were conducted on the issues among middle administrators especially in Malaysian public university context.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice among middle administrators working in Malaysian public universities.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many of past research indicated that effective leadership was influenced by several factors such as emotional skills, leader's attribute and demographic characteristics, culture, and business model (Alston, Dastoor, & Sosa-Fey, 2010, Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000; Hur, 2008; Judeh, 2010; Schafer, 2010; Wright & Pandey,

2010). However, many scholars suggested that emotional intelligence is getting great attention in the study of leadership (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Goleman, 1998; Weinberger, 2009).

Generally, emotional intelligence is something to do with the ability to identify, manage and perceive emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Many scholars are likely to observe emotional intelligence as a possible factor which contributing to positive behaviors, attitudes, and organizational outcomes (Carmeli, 2003). Meanwhile, based on existing evidence, emotional intelligence could be explained as either personality traits (Schutte et al., 1998) or ability (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In addition, emotional intelligence can be taught and improve over time (Mayer et al. 2004).

For the past decades, the contemporary emotional intelligence theory has been observed from two main perspectives (Weinberger, 2009). The first perspective is based on an ability-based model, which describes an emotional intelligence as a group of distinct abilities, while the second perspective is most likely based on a mixed model that explains emotional intelligence from personality characteristic perspective (Fernàndez-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

Meanwhile, leadership topic has been an unending discussion for many decades (Kouzes & Posner, 2000; Lussier & Achua, 2007). Leadership is very important and considered a crucial part in industrial and organizational psychology (Bohn & Grafton, 2002). Initially, there are four main classifications of leadership theory, namely traits, behavioral, contingency, and integrative leadership theory (Lussier & Achua, 2007; Mung, May, Kwang, & Songan, 2009). Recently leadership has been divided into three types, namely transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership style (Erkulu, 2008; Jogulu & Wood, 2008). Additionally, leadership practices model originated from the transformational leadership theory (Zagorśek et al., 2004).

In the meantime, the influence of emotional intelligence as a predictor of effective leadership has been explored remarkably (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Fowlie & Wood, 2008; Tang et al. 2010; Zagorśek et al. 2004). The literature demonstrated a growing number of studies were done on emotional intelligence and leadership behavior with inconsistent findings on the relationship between both variables (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010; Sosik & Magerian, 1999; Tang et al., 2010; Weinberger, 2009).

Although the middle administrative group has proven to have important roles for the development of higher education institutions, however, there appears a complete ignorance for an administrator's job, and in most cases they are less recognized (Rosser, 2004). According to Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser (1998), the primary sources of middle administrators' frustrations are the nature of their daily role, lack of recognition for their contribution, and very little opportunity for career advancement.

For now, several authors have observed that only a small number of articles dedicated to this group nationally and internationally thus far (Abd. Rahim & Abdul Shukor, 2006; Johnsrud et al., 1998; Whitchurch, 2004). Most of the past studies show a consistent relationship between emotional intelligence and effective leadership as well (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Mayer et al., 2004; Goleman, 1998). Although there were extensive studies on emotional intelligence and leadership, however, there is very little known about the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice among middle administrators in Malaysian public universities.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross sectional survey method and the unit of analysis is individual middle administrators in Malaysian public university. Therefore, this is non experimental and use a proportionate stratified random sampling. The instrument used was adapted from Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Schutte et al., 1998) to assess emotional intelligence, and Kouzes and Posner's (1993) Leadership Practices Inventory

(LPI-Self) to measure leadership practice. The four elements of emotional intelligence, namely appraisal of emotion (AoE), expression of emotion (EoE), regulation of emotion (RoE), and utilization of emotion (UoE) were used as an independent variables and leadership practice was the dependent variable. In total 500 questionnaires were distributed and 273 completed. The emotional intelligence and leadership practices exhibited an internal reliability value of .86 and 72 respectively. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 for windows. Finally the research framework was developed based on performance theory.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Correlation analysis output suggested that leadership practices found to have a positive and significant correlation with emotional intelligence (r =.556, p < .01). Further investigation revealed leadership practice has the significant correlation with all the emotional intelligence dimensions; regulation of emotion (r =.577, p < .01), expression of emotion (r =.442, p < .01), appraisal of emotion in self and others (r =.329, p < .01), and utilization of emotion in problem solving (r =.385, p < .01).

In the meantime, the multiple regression analysis indicated an F value of 26.965 (p < .001), R^2 of .286 (p < .001). Hence the model is considered good. Besides that, the results implied that 28.6 percent of the leadership practice variation was explained by the emotional intelligence dimension (R^2 = .286, adjusted R^2 = .267), whereas the rest 71.4 percent was determined by other factors untouched by the study. The further regression analysis suggested only a single dimension, regulation of emotion, was found significantly to the leadership practice. Initially, the results are consistent with the previous studies that demonstrated significant relationships between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style (Alston et al., 2010; Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Barling et al., 2000; Barbuto & Burbach, 2006). However, the finding of this study was contrary to the research conducted by Weinberger (2009) who found there was no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership style or leadership effectiveness.

It is very difficult to explain the actual reasons why only the regulating of emotion significantly predicted leadership practice among middle administrators in Malaysian public universities. Perhaps methodological and organizational cultural differences are the compelling possibility. Future research should consider the methodological approaches. Using longitudinal procedures for the similar group of participants may be better. Besides that, using multi-rating questionnaires in collecting data may lessen the possibility of biases.

6. CONCLUSION

Although the variables, emotional intelligence and leadership, have received much interest, however, there has been very little effort to investigate on the issue in non-western context, especially among middle administrator in Malaysian universities. Hence, this study was conducted to develop and validate a theoretical framework to further explain the structural relationship. This study has focused on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership practice. Consequently, this study has some encouraging implications for leadership development programs, particularly among middle administrators in public universities. Some directions for future research also has been discussed.

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