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Multi-dimensional leadership orientation of academic department heads and lecturer commitment in Malaysian polytechnics

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Abstract

This study examine the extent of Department Heads in Malaysian polytechnics employ multi-dimensional leadership, based on Bolman and Deal's leadership framework, and how it affects lecturers' commitment towards the polytechnics and students. This study analyzed the ratings of 76 heads of department and 841 lecturers 24 polytechnics. Hierarchical Linear Modeling was used to determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between the perceived leadership orientations of the department heads and the self-perceived commitment of polytechnic lecturers. The findings suggest that polytechnics' heads of departments practices multi-dimensional leadership, to which human resource dimension being the dominant frame. In addition, a significant positive relations were found between lecturers' commitment to their polytechnics and cultural leadership frame. However, no significant positive relationship were found between the department heads' leadership frame and the lecturers' commitment to the students.

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Keywords: multi-dimensional leadership; leadership frames; lecturer commitment; multilevel analysis; hierarchical linear modeling

1. Introduction

Malaysian Higher Education is responsible for developing human capital with the capability to compete in the global economy (Mohamed Khaled Nordin 2008). Polytechnics' contributions are significant to the development of first-class mentality human capital, therefore it needs to embark on changes in educational leadership (Imran 2009). The academic department is considered the basic decision-making units responsible for the institutional missions of teaching, research and public services (Bragg 2000). Leaders who incorporate several elements of leadership orientation are more flexible in carrying out multiple administrative tasks (Bolman & Deal 1991, 1997) and are competent in fulfilling the subordinates expectations. The purpose of this study is to determine to which extent do department heads practices multi-dimensional leadership orientations when carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the leadership orientations by the head of academic departments, in the aspect of structural, human resource, political, cultural and educational leadership styles.
2. To identify the relationship between the practice of multi-dimensional leadership of heads of academic department towards lecturer's work commitment.

2. Conceptual framework

Despite the differences in leadership theories and models, scholars generally agree that the multi-dimensional leadership theory is more appropriate in understanding educational leadership (Bolman & Deal 1997; Thompson 2000; Cheng, 2005; DelFavero 2006). Bolman and Deal's theory of leadership combines existing research and theories on organizations, leadership and management, and categorizes the information into four leadership frames. The four frames are structural leadership, human resource leadership, political leadership, and cultural or symbolic leadership (Bolman & Deal 1991). The structural leadership emphasizes on analytical skills and organizational management, and the human resource leadership refers to leadership characteristics that are supportive and participative. Political leadership refers to strengths that are related to power and political sensitivity, while cultural leadership is based on the leader's inspirations and charisma. This model helps to explain the variations in leaders' perspectives when defining organizational realities (Bensimon 1989).

Sergiovanni's (1984) Hierarchy of Leadership Forces shares some similarities with Bolman dan Deal's (1991, 1997) model. It includes leaderships in the aspects of technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural. In this study, the combination of Bolman and Deal's (1991; 1997) Leadership frames and Sergiovanni's (1984) Hierarchy of Leadership Forces Model will be used to explore the leadership orientation of academic department heads in polytechnics based on these five leadership orientations; structural leadership, human resource leadership, political leadership, cultural leadership and educational leadership.

Lecturers commitment is viewed based on the social exchange theory. Social exchange is a mechanism that eases social interaction and group structure, encouraging a sense of personnel responsibility, appreciation and trust (Blau 1964), which is used in this study to determine lecturers commitment towards the Polytechnic and their students. This exchange process begins with the leadership orientation of academic department heads in performing their roles effectively, thereby enhancing the lecturers abilities and skills to achieve organizations goals. At the end of this process, the lecturers shows their commitment to the polytechnic and their students.

3. Methodology

Multi-level modeling analysis using the Hierarchical Linear Model (Raudenbush et al. 2004) was used as an analytical approach to examine the relationship between academic department heads leadership orientations and lecturers' work commitment. Multistage cluster sampling and proportional stratified sampling were used to determine the number of department cluster, while respondents were randomly selected from each cluster. A sample of 96 department heads and 1044 lecturers were selected to participate in this study, and the response rate obtained was at 83%, were then analyzed. Questionnaires used are adaptation of *Leadership Orientation Survey* (Bolman dan Deal 1991), *Sergiovanni's Transformational Leadership Forces Model* (1984), and *Organizational Commitment Questionnaires* (Mowday et el. 1979). The reliability for the leadership dimensions scale ranged from 0.90 to 0.94, and the corrected item-total correlation scores ranged from 0.6 to 0.82. The reliability for the organizational commitment and students commitment scales was 0.93 and 0.91 respectively, with corrected item-total correlation ranged from 0.52 to 0.84.

3. Research findings

3.1 Academic department heads multi-dimensional leadership orientations

The department heads leadership orientations is categorized into three leadership types that indicates the degree to which perceptions of the behaviors of department heads reflected their balanced (or unbalanced) use of the five leadership dimension. A description of each of the three leadership types are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Department Heads Leadership Types

| Types of Leadership | | Details |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| a) | Balanced leadership | Leaders in this category scored above the overall mean in at least four leadership dimensions |
| b) | Moderately balanced leadership | Leaders in this category scored above the overall mean on any three leadership dimensions |
| c) | Unbalanced leadership | Leaders in this category scored above the overall mean on not more than two leadership dimensions |

Source : Thompson, M.D. (2000)

Department Heads Leadership Orientation. Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviations for the respondents’ ratings on the department heads leadership orientation. The overall mean of each leadership orientation as evaluated by the department heads and the lecturers was between 4.18 and 4.39, and 3.79 and 3.88 respectively. Inspection on the leadership orientation mean score, both lectures (81.8%) and department heads (75.1%) ratings exceeds the overall mean score for four or more frames, indicating that polytechnic’s department heads practiced a balanced multi-dimensional leadership orientation with human resource, political, cultural and educational leadership being the leadership combination frequently used by most department heads. Human resource leadership orientation has the highest overall mean score obtained by both, department heads (4.39), as well as lecturers (3.88), indicating that it was the predominant leadership orientation among the department heads. Whereas political and cultural leadership were the most least used leadership orientation as perceived by both.

Table 2 Mean Score and Standard Deviation for Leadership Dimension

| Respondents | Leadership Orientation | Minimum Score | Maximum Score | Overall Mean Score | Standard deviation |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Department Heads | Structural | 3.43 | 5.00 | 4.25 | 0.42 |
| | Human Resource | 3.43 | 5.00 | 4.39 | 0.40 |
| | Political | 3.14 | 5.00 | 4.18 | 0.46 |
| | Cultural | 3.37 | 5.00 | 4.19 | 0.43 |
| | Educational | 3.50 | 5.00 | 4.32 | 0.45 |
| Lecturers | Structural | 2.29 | 5.00 | 3.84 | 0.65 |
| | Human Resource | 2.57 | 5.00 | 3.88 | 0.56 |
| | Political | 2.43 | 5.00 | 3.80 | 0.61 |
| | Cultural | 2.17 | 5.00 | 3.79 | 0.63 |
| | Educational | 2.17 | 5.00 | 3.85 | 0.61 |

3.2 Department heads leadership and lecturer work commitment.

Leadership Orientations of Department Heads and Lecturer Commitment to Polytechnics. The findings indicates that the within- and between-group variance components of lecturer commitment to the polytechnic is 28.37 and 3.71 respectively (Table 3). The between-group variance for the lecturer commitment to polytechnic was significantly different from zero [$\chi^2(186.15)$; $p < 0.001$] as shown in Model 1A of Table 3. The intraclass correlation for commitment to polytechnic is 0.116, [$ICC = 3.71 / (28.37 + 3.71)$], indicating that 11.6% of the variance resides between groups. Thus, it shows that the level of lecturer commitment to polytechnics varied significantly between department heads.

Table 3 Relationship Between Department Heads Leadership Orientations And Lecturer Work Commitment

| Variables | Commitment to Polytechnic | | | Commitment to Students | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|----------|
| | Model 1A | Model 2A | Model 3A | Model 1B | Model 2B |
| <u>Level 1</u> | | | | | |
| Intercept (γ_{00}) | 39.28*** | 39.28*** | 39.28*** | 36.72*** | 36.72*** |

| <u>Level 2</u> | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-------------------|--------|-----------|--------------------|
| Structural (γ_{01}) | | -0.22 | | | -0.32 ⁺ |
| Human Resource (γ_{02}) | | 0.06 | | | 0.36 |
| Political (γ_{03}) | | -0.39* | -0.41* | | -0.43 |
| Cultural (γ_{04}) | | 0.31 ⁺ | 0.29* | | 0.19 |
| Educational (γ_{05}) | | 0.16 | | | 0.04 |
| <i>Within-group</i> variance (σ^2) | 28.37 | 28.38 | 28.38 | 18.99 | 19.00 |
| <i>Between- group</i> variance (τ_{00}) | 3.71 | 3.52 | 3.39 | 8.88 | 8.38 |
| <u>Variance of intercept</u> | | | | | |
| Chi Square (χ^2) | 186.15*** | 167.55*** | 171.18 | 466.01*** | 406.96*** |

Note : *** p < 0.001 ; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; + p < 0.1

The next step involved entering the level-2 predictors (structural, human resource, political, cultural and educational leadership dimensions) into the coefficient regression model (Model 2A). The results indicates that political leadership and cultural leadership are the only predictors that are significantly related to lecturer commitment to polytechnics. Political leadership showed a significant negative relationship [$\gamma_{03} = -0.39$; $p < 0.05$], where as cultural leadership had a significant positive relationship [$\gamma_{04} = 0.31$; $p < 0.10$] in lecturer commitment to polytechnics. Collectively, the two predictors account for 9%, [$R^2 = (3.71 - 3.39) / 3.71 = 0.09$] of the between-group variance in lecturer commitment to polytechnics (Model 3A).

Leadership Orientations of Department Heads and Lecturer Commitment to Student. Research findings as shown in Model 1B of Table 3 indicates that the within- and between group variance components for lecturer commitment to student was 18.99 and 8.88 respectively. The between-group variance for lecturer commitment to student is significantly different from zero [$\chi^2(466.01)$; $p < 0.001$]. The intraclass correlation of 0.32, [$ICC = 8.88 / (18.99 + 8.88)$], indicates that 32% of the variance in lecturer commitment towards students is between groups. Results for the group level model indicates that none of the leadership dimensions (level 2 predictors) are positively related to lecturer commitment to students (Model 2B). Results indicates that department heads leadership orientation is not positively associated with lecturers' commitment to their students.

4. Discussion

Lecturers and academic department heads in the Malaysian polytechnics agree that department heads used multi-dimensional leadership orientations as proposed by Bolman dan Deal (1991, 1997) and Sergiovanni (1984) which comprises of structural, human resource, political, cultural and educational leadership dimensions. Results indicate department heads in Malaysian polytechnics practice multiple leadership orientations in their administrative duties. This proves the capability of academic department heads to adapt their leadership orientations according to the needs and demands of the current educational environment that is constantly changing and becoming more complex. Lecturers and academic department heads generally agree that department heads are more inclined to use human resource, educational and structural leadership in their leadership orientations. These leaderships create a conducive and harmonious environment for the teaching and learning process to take place.

The leadership of academic department heads is not only crucial in determining the success of his department, its mission and programmes, but also in generating quality performance and commitment in their lecturers. The outcome of this research also shows that only the cultural leadership orientation led to an increase in lecturer commitment to polytechnics. This finding proves that activities and programmes carried out by department heads affected lecturer commitment and encouraged the lecturers to work towards achieving the aims of the polytechnic. However, there was differing feedback from lecturers regarding their commitment to students. Lecturers states that their commitment to students is not influenced by leadership orientations of department heads. This indicates that the leadership orientations of department heads neither significantly influences nor contributes directly to lecturer commitment to students.

5. Conclusion

This research was able to identify the multi-dimensional leadership orientations employed by department heads in Malaysian polytechnics from the perspectives of lecturers and academic department heads. The findings confirms that department heads employ multi-dimensional leadership orientations, at least four leadership dimensions with human resource leadership perceived as the predominant leadership orientation employed by department heads. In analyzing the relationship between department heads multi-dimensional leadership and lecturer commitment, it is found that cultural leadership has significant influence towards lecturers' commitment to the polytechnic. Further scientific studies and research using a larger population is needed to validate the findings of this research, is suggested.

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