

THE RELATIONSHIP OF LEADERSHIP STYLE, PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL, AND STAFF PERFORMANCE AMONG ACADEMICS HOLDING ADMINISTRATIVE POST IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN MALAYSIA: BRIEF REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Staff leadership especially among academics holding administrative post has long been debated in relation to level of performance. Notably, past studied rarely talked about the relationship of leadership styles and psychological capital in boosting the performance in which this study investigated. Through literature review, the leadership style of academic leaders predicts the performance while their psychological capital determines the impact further. Some insights were excavated from articles in various journal related to variables of study particularly among academia which become the context of this study. Full-Range Leadership theory drove the study to further entice the relationship of the variables. In the end, the study manages to gauge explanation why academic leaders' performance is differently affected by transformational leadership style as compared to transactional leadership style. The effect, however, can be regulated by the psychological capital of the academic leaders while performing their tasks.

Keywords: Employee performance, Leadership style, Psychological capital, Public higher learning institutions, Full-range leadership theory

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Public higher learning institutions in Malaysia have begun to feel the toughness of running the university as a result of reduced financial assistance to universities from the government. In order to get more funding, universities have to be competitive by securing good ranking. Not only such ranking will attract more students from around the globe but also able to incite more impactful research and collaboration from international higher learning institutions. This is part of the strategies by the Ministry of Higher Education to embed the sense of being globally competitive by placing themselves among the world top ranking university. This explains the reason behind the need for all public universities to gain good ranking in world class university league as discussed by Masron, Ahmad and Rahim (2012). Hence, the role of academic leaders referring to academic staff who holds administrative post is seen relevant to achieve this inspiring ambition.

The roles of academic leaders are essential to ensure the ambition and aspiration of university is manageable. This group of leaders plays the key role because their capability not only important to themselves and the organisation but also as the exemplary leaders for those academic staff under their leadership. Yee (2018) stated that the excellent performance of academic staff which has strong weightage in university ranking is partly initiated by the academic leaders. Thus, workable leadership style is needed to exert positive impacts to the academics.

Academic leaders are aware of the explicit and implicit challenges that they must face every day. They are not merely responsible to their performance but also to their subordinates. In fact, academic leaders are sometimes overburdened with the mounting obligation to continuously ensure the workloads of middle and high-level management of the university have been properly addressed. Hence, academic leaders have to garner a strong support from their subordinates in order to distribute inherited workloads properly. Consequently, such move will provide academic leaders to being capable of managing a well synergized support in improving university operation (Thian, Alam, & Idris, 2015).

In general, the performance of academic leaders is not only evaluated based on teaching, research and service but also in terms of managing the process related to the implementation of supervision, doing consultation, and knowledge transfer administration to the society apart from routine administrative works. Not forgetting, the ad-hoc tasks due to the pragmatic change of policy overtime. In other words, the performance of academic leaders is not only based on their formal tasks as stated in their job description, but also the impromptu duties as circulated by the organisation or the highest authority (Ambad, Kalimin, Ag Damit & Andrew, 2021). Thus, to elevate academic leaders' performance, developing the right leadership style and being psychologically adapted to the challenges need to be presence.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic leaders' performance

Staff performance is one of the key contributors to organisational performance. Performance can be defined as the accomplishment of the individual in completing the tasks assigned as the record of achievement during the specific time given (Nadarajah, Kadiresan, Kumar, & Nissa, 2012). Omar (2020) stated that it is from performance that anyone will know whether the given tasks have been completed or not. In view of this, academic leaders may have greater influence in getting staff to contribute more leading to reputable performance (Khan, Shoukat, & Waheed, 2019).

Academic staff can vastly contribute to the society in term of educational growth and the impacts from scientific research and consultation (Ambad et al., 2021; Jameel & Ahmad, 2020b; Durrah, Al-Tobasi, A'aqoulah & Ahmad, 2016). According to Durrah et al. (2016) and Jameel & Ahmad (2020a) staff performance may assist decision makers for university in the future as well as entrusted to perform other tasks and develop program that can increase overall performance of the institution. However, one of the most critical challenges faced by academic leaders is to complete managerial task along with maintaining the academic standards which have been drastically and regularly imposed by the university (Thian et al., 2015). Not forgetting that in higher education institution, the performances of academic staff are traditionally evaluated according to three major criteria: teaching, research, and services or consultancy. Recently, it has been extended to more dimensions, namely managing technologically based supervision, online consultancy and ad-hoc administration task (Aslan, Sahukat, Ahmed, Mad Shah & Mahfar, 2014; Cooper, 2019; Marino & Lo Presti, 2018; Masron et al., 2012). To fulfil the expectation, academic staff performance especially those holding administrative posts is seen challenging.

Leadership Styles: Transformational and Transactional

Leadership style has been identified as the important part in organizational performance as well as the employee performance which brings dynamic effects during individual and organizational interaction (Wahab et al., 2016). In other words, the ability of management

to perform planned objectives depends on leadership capability. In this study, leadership style construct refers to the academic leaders in public higher learning institution adopting transformational or transactional leadership style.

Transformational leadership is considered as the determinants of many organizational outcomes such as change management, knowledge management, employee satisfaction, employee commitment and employee performance (Le, 2020). Transformational leaders are described as able to produce support from subordinates by showing their charismatic character, as well as the ability to communicate the vision that creates followers' or subordinates' enthusiasm by sharing inspirational motivation, encourages divergent thinking and innovativeness within the organization known as intellectual stimulation, and provides individual encouragement and support through mentoring or coaching. Transformational leadership has also been known as one of the most effective leadership styles that resulting on the outcome to organization in the forms of knowledge capital, human capital and innovative performance (Lei & Leungkhamma, 2020).

On the other hand, transactional leadership is a more conventional style in which work is exchanged for resources. Transactional leaders influence subordinates using conditional rewards in exchange for their efforts in which employees were supervised closely and to be penalized with corrective actions if found negligently perform the expected tasks (Yuan & Lee, 2011). Bass and Avolio (2011) further asserted that transactional leadership was initially contrasted from transformational leadership by Downton (1973), in order to explain for the variations between revolutionary, rebellious, reform, and ordinary leaders. Later, the seminal of Burns (1978) on political leaders claims that political transactional leaders inspire followers through the exchange of benefits for work performed.

Past studies showed that implementing transformational leadership will produce high performance of academic staff (Jameel & Ahmad, 2020b; Ambad et al., 2021; Jamali, Bhutto, Khaskheli & Sethar, 2021; Khan, Idris & Amin, 2021). Hence, it shows that transformational leadership style has more impact than the transactional leadership in public higher education institution. Nevertheless, According to Orji, Malachy, Boman, & Emmanuel (2017) both leadership style are plausible in which the leadership attitude affects the needs and goals of employee. Therefore, this study proposed the examination of both leadership styles in investigating their effects academic leaders' performance.

Full-Range of Leadership Styles Theory (FRL Theory)

The full-range leadership styles theory includes transformational, transactional and passive/avoidant leadership styles (Bass and Avolio, 2004). The passive/avoidant leadership style might not fit the existing study since the academic leaders normally understand and willing to make changes once entrusted with the position. Instead, academic leaders could adopt the transformational or transactional leadership styles in relation to performance as driven by FRL theory.

Transformational academic leaders articulate the vision in a clear and appealing manner, explains how to attain the visions, acts confidently and optimistically, expresses confidence in the followers, emphasizes values with symbolic actions, leads by example, and empowers followers to achieve the vision (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003). It consists of four components namely ability to idealized influence (Aydogyu & Asikgil, 2011), capable of stimulate intellectuality among subordinates (Covey, 2007), being considerate to each one of his subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 1994), and ability to inspire or motivate subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Meanwhile, transactional academic leaders have to display behaviours associated with constructive and corrective transactions. The constructive style is labelled contingent reward and the corrective style is labelled management-by-exception. Transactional leadership defines expectations and promotes performance to achieve these levels (Bass & Avolio, 2004).

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital can be referred to as one's positive psychological condition which through time develops and transpires in one's individual growth and development (Luthans, 2004). Four attributes constitute psychological capital namely self-efficacy, resilience, hope and optimism (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007). Luthans et al.'s (2007) notion is that psychological capital regulates one's self-efficacy that enables one to exert a sufficient effort in completing a task. Consequently, one is confident in taking the responsibility. One also becomes more optimistic in the current or future endeavour. In addition, there is always positive hope due to the positive resistance that one is having due to the psychological capital.

In modern management concept, psychological concept has been considered as one of the factors to achieve highest level of performance (Durrah et al., 2016). In creating a positive organization behaviour, psychological capital shows an important role resulting on positive work attitude, high job performance and promising job satisfaction (Lei & Leungkhamma, 2020). Psychological capital can be considered as a positive input qualitatively through achieving positive results in the development of human resources and performance management (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008). In addition, psychological capital increases the pursuit of staff towards achieving organizational goals. Various scholars including Kim et al. (2017) and Ozsungur (2019) argued that psychological capital promotes innovativeness in which innovativeness is normally linked to organisational performance as the goal of any organisation.

From past studies, psychological capital should be given more attention because it is a positive behaviour that improves performance. Academic leaders should be given high value of flexibility in order to be able in facing the challenges that delay them and to introduce appropriate solution so that they can enhance their level of performance (Durrah et al., 2016). This argument indicates a relationship between psychological capital and employee performance in which engagement does exist and highly supported (Bakker et al., 2008; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan). In fact, psychological capital has a very strong link to psychological well-being.

3.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is to be carried out among academics holding administrative tasks at various levels in university. Literature review led to the formation of conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1 to illustrate the relationship between leadership style as the independent variable, psychological capital as mediator and employee performance as the dependant variable.

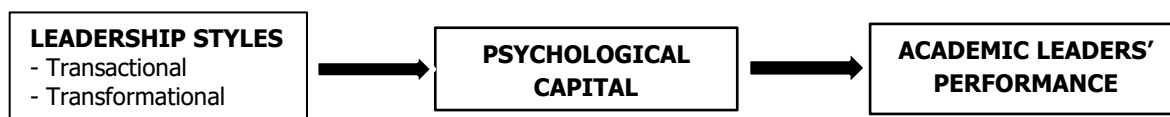


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

4.0 RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, sources of information were taken from online journals such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect and Emerald as well as ResearchGate. Keywords of relevant variables were used to find the right articles. The regulating context is on academic leaders such as deans, program heads and other administrative post that used to be hold by academics. The literature search also focused on the public universities.

Consequently, empirical research can take place in the future through a quantitative approach relying on descriptive correlational research approach that will explain the meaningful impact of the relationship between leadership styles and psychological capital towards academic leaders' performance in public higher education institution in Malaysia. It is from this brief review as well that the target sample population for such study are among academic leaders in which survey questionnaires can be self-administered to obtain information from the respondents. Related items in identifying factors that determine the academic leaders' performance in the public higher education institution are to be recognised further from the literature. Literature findings also opted out strata purposive sampling to be used in identifying representable respondents from the 20 public universities in Malaysia.

5.0 DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, academic leaders in public higher education institution play important role where those in the leadership seat should become role model to influence and motivate other staff not only academicians but also supporting staff to achieve the institutions' goals. The right style either transformational or transactional is applicable to spark the effective work momentum of oneself and the subordinates. Therefore, effective leadership style plays important role in enhancing the performance of employees.

Ineffective leadership style may also led to a bad performance of employees (Jameel & Ahmad, 2020b). This also supports the argument made by Ambad et al., (2021) that academic leaders need to perform their task optimally in order to increase institution quality in every aspect. Optimal refers to those direct tasks bestowed in the hand of the leader. Meanings, academic leaders are expected to perform their function at their best level. Hence, in the context of the current study, the right leadership style needs to be acquired by academics holding the administrative tasks at program, department, and upper management level in the university.

A Malaysian leadership styles study which was conducted by Amirul and Daud (2012) concluded that transformational leadership style is more practical and efficient. Additionally, transformational leadership entails not only performing responsibilities in order to accomplish organisational goals, but also developing followers into leaders, which is a positive sign of leadership development. Additionally, transformational leadership is more

applicable and relevant to Malaysia's multiracial population, as transformational leadership is more desirable and well accepted. Amirul and Daud (2012) further added that although transactional leadership has less score on leadership effectiveness, but it has a statistically significant positive association with it.

The need for academic leaders to adapt to the changing environmental conditions which require constant improvement of themselves may lead to the development in organization behaviour field. This is where the roles of individual and their psychological capital integrated. Psychological capital has increasingly becoming influential factor because it is an invisible and valuable assets of oneself that could contribute to higher levels of work efficiency and effectiveness (Wahab, Rahmat, Sukor, & Mohamed, 2016). Psychological capital consists of self-efficacy, hope, having positive belief to success or optimism and being resilient against challenges or being psychological resilience. The unstable momentum of psychological capital will endanger the effectiveness of the leadership style.

Briefly, this paper conceptualizes the framework of leadership styles, psychological capital and employee performance in the context of public higher education institution in Malaysia. The main aim to see which style in between transformational and transactional could determine academic leaders' performance is subject to the tasks uphold. Meanwhile, the related aim of this paper is to identify whether psychological capital mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance. Despite the little attention given to psychological capital in the context of higher education institution in Malaysia, the current study did see its importance in elevating or destroying academic leaders' performance.

6.0 LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In every study done by the researcher, limitations are foreseen. The limitation may be different from one study to another study. The limitations arise in the study are out of the researcher control. For every study no matter how well the conduct and construct by the researcher, there must be some limitations which are beyond the researcher control (Simon & Goes, 2013). As for this study, sources from journal that directly related will guide the study. In this study, ordinary sources of information are Google Scholar, ScienceDirect and Emerald.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Organization with good leadership styles will increase performance. The leadership attitude affects the needs and goals of employee. Therefore, as supported by literature review, leadership styles of transformational leadership or transactional leadership will respectively contribute to the acceptance of academic leaders in delivering their level of performance. Even though psychological capital's role which act as mediator may gear up or switch off the motivation of the academic leaders, the psychological capital should be emphasised more since it leads to a positive behaviour that improves performance. In brief, the study has conceptualised the significance effect of leadership styles and psychological capital towards performance of academic leaders in public universities in Malaysia.

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