

The Leadership Performance of Departmental Heads in an Institution of Higher Learning in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Higher learning institutions in Malaysia recently became a subject of scrutiny by stakeholders and the public at large. Its managerial and leadership performance were being assessed through various perspectives. A pilot study was conducted to measure the performance of the heads of department leadership, with an objective to identify factors that drive their leadership performance. One hundred and twenty two full-time managerial/professional and supervisory staff in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Terengganu, Malaysia, participated in this survey. The questionnaire was adopted from an international management survey to measure the effectiveness of the management capability of Malaysian organizations. The results from the survey showed that there were different perceptions between the academic and non-academic staff in UiTM of the ability of the heads of department leadership performance in developing the organization's capability. The survey also concluded that visionary & strategic leadership; and leadership skills & personality traits of these department heads were pivotal in shaping their leadership performance in UiTM Terengganu.

Keywords: Leadership Performance, Heads of Department, Organizational, Visionary, Personality and Skill

Introduction

The heads of department team is a collective entity of high-ranking officials in an organization, which include a university. They are responsible to impart policies and directives to operational managers and supervisors by providing clear sequence of information. Over the years, the administrative system has replaced and moved these senior officers around the university and its branches to develop managerial-leadership abilities. Studies showed that leadership abilities are important and leaders do contribute to key organizational outcomes (Day & Lord, 1988; Kaiser, Hogan & Craig, 2008).

Since its inception in 1975, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Terengganu, has seen changes of its leading chief and heads of departments. The achievements of UiTM in gaining and extending its managerial excellence, and hence physical development, can be accredited to these leaders and managers. However, the critical success factors (CFS) that drive these upper management leaderships of the organization are still not well identified. As a result, continuous monitoring of leadership performance in the organization remains unattended.

Researchers have argued that the actual influence of leaders on organizational outcomes was exaggerated due to subjective attributions about leaders (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987). Nonetheless, identifying the relationship between leadership and organizational outcomes is not easy because of the manner in which leadership performance is measured and linking it to organizational outcomes is rarely made (Kaiser *et al.*, 2008).

A good leadership performance will lead to strong organizational capabilities. These managers/leaders will be able to build organizational capabilities, a culture of research and innovation, and an organization dedicated to continuous *improvement*. Leadership performance will encompass an organization's values and cultures (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). When assessing performance, it is more appropriate to examine elements within the leader's control, such as specific behaviours that facilitate collective actions and goal achievements. Evaluating a leader in such a manner is important to identify predictors of leadership performance accurately (Kaiser *et al.*, 2008).

A leader's integrity plays an important role towards sound corporate governance. This motion is supported by Verhezen (2008) and proves that an administrator's ability to retain integrity will depend on the way principles are exercised in sustaining the organizational form of good

governance practices. An article by Garand and Glasier (2009) stated that among the top twenty characteristics of admired leaders, integrity was 90 percent firstly selected. An organization whose integrity strategy aligns economic objectives with ethical environmental goals may be able to foster organizational integrity as a valuable end as well as a beneficial means (Krell, 2006).

Hence, this paper investigated the impact of an identified set of leadership variables on leadership performance of heads of department team at UiTM Terengganu with the following objectives:

1. To measure and contrast the diverging perceptions between the academic and non-academic staff of the heads of department leadership in UiTM Terengganu.
2. To identify the critical success factors governing the heads of department leadership that influence the efficacy of their leadership performance that shape the organizational capability in UiTM Terengganu
3. To measure the contribution of each leadership dimensions of the heads of department on leadership performance.

Methods and Materials

Sampling

A field study was initiated to assess the perception of the performance of the upper level leadership in UiTM Terengganu by its academic and non-academic staff. The total population for this study was its 450 full time staff in the professional/managerial and supervisory level. They were 380 academics and 70 administrative staff. A sample size of 200 personnel was identified by referring to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table in determining the sample size from a given population. Data were collected by a disproportionate stratified random sampling. Respondents were selected due to the nature of proximity to their upper level superior as well as the frequency in making departmental and organizational decisions with their superiors.

Instrument

The survey questionnaire was adapted from MIM-AAMO Management Capability Index (MCI) survey (2008), which was an international source.

The questionnaire was subject to minor alterations to meet the requirement of this study. One hundred and twenty two forms were returned which was a 61 percent response rate. Respondents were guided to provide accurate feedback in all elements in the study based on a set of ordinal scale measurement shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale Measurement

Legend	Score	Current position of the organization
6	100	Yes, fully practised throughout the organization. Continually refined and improved as “The way things are done round here”
5	80	Yes, being practised consistently across the organization with further improvements being made.
4	60	Yes, being practised across most of the organization with further improvements being made.
3	40	Yes, being practised, but only in parts of the organization, part of the time
2	20	Yes, this has just started.
1	0	No, this is not in place.

Results and Discussions

Reliability Analysis

The test for reliability shown in Table 2 on the instrument used shows high positive value of Cronbach Alpha for all items (0.991). This indicates that all items in the survey did measure the same dimension. The alpha coefficients for different factors shown in the table below are well above 0.6 which confirmed that the elements for different factors did measure the corresponding dimension.

Respondents' Profiles

Table 3 presents the grouping of respondents to provide a distinctive picture of the demographic data. The demographic data showed that there were more female (68%) staff than the male (32%) in both academic and non-academic groups. In job category, the academic staff at managerial/professional level stood the largest portion (63%) as opposed

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha

Dimension	Alpha	No. Cases	No. of items
Overall (all items)	0.991	98	54
Visionary and Strategic Leadership	0.944	111	6
Leadership Performance	0.928	113	6
People Leadership	0.936	117	6
Personality and Skill	0.950	120	6
Organizational Capability	0.961	112	6
Application of Technology and Knowledge	0.968	118	6
External Relationships	0.980	116	6
Innovation	0.969	113	6
Integrity & Corporate Governance	0.964	114	6

to the non-academic, where the majority (23%) of the non-academic staff were worked in the supervisory level. The non-academic staff holding managerial/professional positions were only 11% out of the total respondents. The percentage of permanent staff exceeded the contract staff up to 91% of the total 122 respondents.

Table 3: Respondents in Several Groups

		Staff Category		
		Academic	Non-academic	Total
Gender	Male	23 19.0%	16 13.2%	39 32.2%
	Female	57 47.1%	25 20.7%	82 67.8%
Job Category	Managerial & Professional	76 62.8%	13 10.7%	89 73.6%
	Supervisory	4 3.3%	28 23.1%	32 26.4%
Service Status	Permanent	73 61.3%	36 30.3%	109 91.6%
	Contract	7 5.9%	3 2.5%	10 8.4%

Shown in Table 4, the respondents' age range spans from as young as 20 years old to as old as 61 years old with a standard deviation of nine years old. The overall mean age for these respondents was 37 years old. However many respondents were 39 years of age (mode). The positive skew indicated that the majority of the respondents were younger, aged below 37 years old (median).

Similarly, respondents said that their duration of service to the university spanned from two months to 32 years, with a standard deviation of eight years. The average service to the university was about nine years but somehow there was a quite high concentration of new staff (the mode) *i.e.* those serving around two years to the university. The large positive skew showed that majority of the respondents was moderately new employees at the university.

Table 4: Respondents' Age and Duration of Service

	N		Mean	Median	Mode	S.D.	Skewness	Min.	Max.
	Valid	Missing							
Age	117	5	37	36	39	9.0	.369	20	61
Length of Service	116	6	8.807	6.5	2.0	8.0	1.011	.2	32

Table 5 exhibits the respondents' evaluation on key elements (dimension) surveyed. Both academic and non-academic staff agreed that all evidences assessing leadership dimensions and practices were present and had been practically employed by the heads of department team in the organization.

The data clearly showed that no ratings were given in column (a) by both staff categories in the table. Closer examination on the trend of percentage agreement on the execution of leadership qualities/practices in the organization revealed that on the whole, majority (more than 50%) of non-academic staff gave much higher ratings (*i.e.* consistently practises) than the academic staff in most factors being assessed.

The mean analysis in Table 6 offers empirical evidences, suggesting that there were differences between the academic and the non-academic staff on their assessment of the heads of department team in displaying and executing leadership practises in the organization.

In summary, non-academic staff had furnished much higher mean score in all leadership dimensions of the study. Understandably, non-academic group of managers/supervisors interacted more frequently with

Table 5: Dimension Evaluated in Percentage

Dimension Evaluated by Staff in Category			Percentage					
			(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
Staff Category	Academic N = 81	Vision and Strategic Leadership	1.3	16.5	44.3	35.4	2.5	
		Leadership Performance			12.7	51.9	34.2	1.3
		People Leadership	1.3	11.4	54.4	31.6	1.3	
		Personality & Skill	1.3	17.5	38.8	40.0	2.5	
		Organizational Capability	2.5	21.3	36.3	40.0		
		Application of Tech. & Knowledge	1.3	16.3	38.8	36.3	7.5	
		External Relationship	3.8	21.3	30.0	38.8	6.3	
		Innovation	5.0	13.8	40.0	36.3	5.0	
		Integrity & Corporate Governance	1.3	12.5	36.3	47.5	2.5	
		Non- academic N = 41	Vision and Strategic Leadership	2.4	4.9	17.1	58.5	17.1
Leadership Performance				2.4	19.5	63.4	14.6	
People Leadership				7.3	17.1	56.1	19.5	
Personality & Skill				2.4	34.1	51.2	12.2	
Organizational Capability				4.9	22.0	53.7	19.5	
Application of Tech. & Knowledge				4.9	17.1	56.1	22.0	
External Relationship				9.8	17.1	46.3	26.8	
Innovation				2.4	31.7	41.5	24.4	
Integrity & Corporate Governance				4.9	17.1	58.5	19.5	

- a. No, this is not in place
- b. Yes, this has just started
- c. Yes, being practised, but only in parts of the organisation, part of the time
- d. Yes, being practised across most of the organization with further improvements being made.
- e. Yes, being practised consistently across the organization with further improvements being made.
- f. Yes, fully practised throughout the organisation. Continually refined and improved as "The way things are done round here"

their superiors as opposed to academic group managers/supervisors, which might explain the higher mean score of the latter group.

Table 7 presents a summary of all independent sample t-tests performed on each leadership dimension. In the analysis, the Levene's test showed that the variances in both categories of staff were equal, except for application of technology and knowledge.

This analysis showed that there was a significant difference ($p \leq 0.001$) between academic and non-academic staff in their perceptions of the

Table 6: Mean Analysis on Dimensions by Staff Category

Dimensions Evaluated in Assessing Heads of department Team Leadership	Staff Category				Group Total	
	Academic		Non-academic		Mean	SD
	Mean	SD*	Mean	SD		
Vision and Strategic Leadership	4.18	.72	4.80	.82	4.39	.81
Leadership Performance	4.22	.66	4.85	.70	4.43	.74
People Leadership	4.19	.69	4.82	.77	4.41	.78
Personality & Skill	4.17	.78	4.74	.73	4.36	.81
Organizational Capability	4.11	.81	4.79	.77	4.34	.86
Application of Tech. and Knowledge	4.28	.85	4.92	.72	4.50	.86
External Relationship	4.17	.95	4.84	.93	4.40	.99
Innovation	4.17	.90	4.81	.83	4.38	.93
Integrity & Corporate Governance	4.34	.77	4.89	.73	4.53	.80

* SD – Standard Deviation

Table 7: Independent Samples T-Test

Leadership Dimension Evaluated	n of Staff Category	Equal variances assumed	Levene's for Test of Variances		t-test for Equality Equality of Means		
			F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Vision and Strategic Leadership	a = 79 b = 41	✓	.003	.958
Leadership Performance	a = 79 b = 41	✓	.044	.835	-4.875	118	.000
People Leadership	a = 79 b = 41	✓	.159	.691	-4.498	118	.000
Personality & Skill	a = 80 b = 41	✓	.112	.738	-3.904	119	.000
Organizational Capability	a = 80 b = 41	✓	.661	.418	-4.434	119	.000
Application of Technology and Knowledge	a = 80 b = 41	✓	4.484	.036	-4.364	93.887	.000
External Relationship	a = 80 b = 41	✓	.332	.566	-3.675	119	.000
Innovation	a = 80 b = 41	✓	.055	.815	-3.840	119	.000
Integrity & Corporate Governance	a = 80 b = 41	✓	1.585	.210	-3.801	119	.000

a – Academic Staff

b – Non-academic Staff

organizational leadership dimensions, leadership performance, and personality and skill of their superiors.

Partial correlation analysis was performed among the leadership dimensions to detect if the relationship among variables was confounded by the two variables of interest of the study *i.e.* vision and strategic leadership, and leaders personality and skill.

Initial single linear regression test showed that leadership performance had a strong predicting ability $r^2 = 0.757$, $F(1, 119) = 370.84$, $p < 0.001$ over organizational capability and therefore the authors analysed the relationship just between this variable with the independent variables. Partial correlation studies were conducted where the two variables of interest were factored out simultaneously and the results can be observed in Table 8.

Table 8: Correlation and Partial Correlation

Independent Variables Heads of department- Leadership Dimensions	Intervening Variable: Leadership Performance				
	Zero-order (Pearson) correlations	Partial correlation (controlling for Vision & Strategic Leadership and Leader Personality & Skill)			
	<i>r</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>r</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	% change in <i>r</i>
Vision & Strategic Leadership	0.868	0.000			
Personality & Skill	0.864	0.000			
People Leadership	0.843	0.000	0.231	0.012	-73
Application of Technology & Knowledge	0.797	0.000	0.344	0.000	-57
External Relationship	0.758	0.000	<u>0.197</u>	<u>0.032</u>	-74
Innovation	0.763	0.000	0.254	0.005	-67
Integrity & Corporate Governance	0.758	0.000	0.194	0.035	-74
Average percentage change in <i>r</i>					-69%

r – Pearson’s correlation

It is evident in the analysis that all variables correlated significantly ($p < 0.001$) with the intervening variable (zero-order Pearson’s correlation). However, when the authors concurrently controlled the effect of both presumable ‘supporting’ variable in the analysis, the average strength of relationships ‘*r*’ in the model dropped significantly (69%), to an extent of causing two leadership dimensions (external

relationship $r = 0.197, p > 0.025$ and integrity & corporate governance $r = -0.194, p > 0.025$) losing their respective relationship initially established.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

To determine the power of the two variables of interest, two sets of hierarchical multiple regression analysis were conducted. The first one was on leadership performance as the first dependent variable and the second was organizational capability as the second dependent variable. By simultaneously removing the effect of vision & strategic leadership and personality & skill, it was to see if the independent variables were still able to predict the variance in the dependent variable.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumption of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Collectively, vision & strategic leadership and personality & skill were entered at step 1, explaining 83.8% of the variance in leadership performance, and 82.4% of the variance in organizational capability (Tables 9 and 10).

Analysis on Leadership Performance

Upon entering other independent variables in Step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole rose from 83.8% to 86.4%, $F(7, 112) = 101.48, p < .001$, a slight addition of 2.6% in the variance of leadership performance after controlling the two variables. R squared change = .026, F change $(5, 112) = 4.203, p = .002$ (Table 9). Hence, this result showed that heads of department’s vision and strategic leadership as well as their personality and skill still had a strong effect on leadership performance.

Table 9: Model Summary for Leadership Performance

Model	R	R Square	Change Statistics				
			R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.916(a)	.838	.838	303.173	2	117	.000
2	.929(b)	.864	.026	4.203	5	112	.002

a. Predictors: (Constant), Personality & Skill, Vision and Strategic Leadership

b. Predictors: (Constant), Personality & Skill, Vision and Strategic Leadership, Innovation, Integrity & Corporate Governance, External Relationship, Application of Technology and Knowledge, People Leadership

Analysis on Organizational Capability

Table 10 shows the results of the repeated similar second step for organizational capabilities. It was found that the total variance explained by the model as a whole rose from 82.4% to 87.1%, $F(7, 112) = 107.84$, $p < .001$, an additional increment of 4.7%. R squared change = .047, F change (5, 112) = 8.195, $p < .001$. Hence, this analysis again showed that heads of department’s vision and strategic leadership as well as their personality and skill too had a strong effect on organizational capabilities.

Table 10: Model Summary for Organizational Capability

Model	R	R Square	Change Statistics				
			R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.907(a)	.824	.824	272.990	2	117	.000
2	.933(b)	.871	.047	8.195	5	112	.000

- a Predictors: (Constant), Personality & Skill, Vision and Strategic Leadership
- b Predictors: (Constant), Personality & Skill, Vision and Strategic Leadership, Innovation, Integrity & Corporate Governance, External Relationship, Application of Technology and Knowledge, People Leadership

In the final analysis (Table 11) for leadership performance, only three (3) dimensions were statistically significant, with vision & strategic leadership recorded the highest beta value (beta = .368, $p < .001$), followed by personality & skill (beta = .265, $p = .001$), and finally application of technology and knowledge (beta = .170, $p \leq .05$)

On the other hand, in the final analysis for organizational capability, four dimensions were statistically significant, where personality and skill recorded the highest value (beta = .496, $p < .001$) followed by innovation (beta = .235, $p = .001$), vision & strategic leadership (beta = .204, $p = .002$), and finally, application of technology and knowledge (beta = .178, $p \leq .05$).

To summarize this, based on the statistical analysis given, the authors showed that vision & strategic leadership, as well as personality & skill, played a major role in their relationship with leadership performance and organizational capabilities. Drucker (1974) emphasized that developing a clear business vision and mission is the ‘first responsibility of strategists’. Since the heads of department are in strategic position to facilitate departmental/organizational goals, their capacity to demonstrate this ability becomes very important and thus contributes to employees’ evaluation

Table 11: Coefficients for Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Heads of department- Leadership Dimensions	Dependent Variable: Leadership Performance			Dependent Variable: Organizational Capability			Collinearity Statistics Tolerance (> 0.1)
		SC (Beta)	t	Sig.	SC (Beta)	t	Sig.	
1	(Constant)		3.656	.000		-.367	.714	
	Vision and Strategic Leadership	.491	8.115	.000	.324	5.118	.000	.377
2	Personality & Skill	.477	7.872	.000	.630	9.960	.000	.377
	(Constant)		2.116	.037		-1.230	.221	
	Vision and Strategic Leadership	<u>.368</u>	5.433	.000	<u>.204</u>	3.097	.002	.266
	Personality & Skill	<u>.265</u>	3.398	.001	<u>.496</u>	6.535	.000	.201
	People Leadership	.126	1.696	.093	.086	1.191	.236	.221
	Application of Technology and Knowledge	<u>.170</u>	2.457	.016	<u>.178</u>	2.635	.010	.253
	External Relationship	.006	.096	.924	-.109	-1.724	.087	.287
	Innovation	.021	.313	.755	<u>.235</u>	3.553	.001	.263
	Integrity & Corporate Governance	.071	1.130	.261	-.086	-1.417	.159	.311

SC – Standardized Coefficients

on their leadership performance. This argument was supported by Kanji (2008) in his studies where he summarized that it is important for leaders and managers to possess and exercise visionary and strategic leadership quality, as it influences people’s assessment on them.

On the other hand, personality is a permanent, organized and distinguished pattern of behaviour that illustrates an individual’s adaptation to a situation. It is a combination of quality that portrays the unique nature of a person. Allport (1937) proposed that personality is ‘the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment’. In short, a person’s judgment can be influenced by his personality.

Among the leadership dimensions presented by the model in Table 11, in this survey, the most influential factor that drove leadership performance were found to be the manager’s capacity to exercise his aptitude in conceptualizing the organizational strategic direction, as seen in the vision and strategic leadership dimension, which recorded the highest beta value of 0.368. However, the greatest contributor to the organizational capability were found to be the managers’ compelling personality and skill in leading their respective department in the organization, with the highest beta value of 0.496.

Application of technology and knowledge were found to have significant influence over both leadership performance and organizational capability. This is in line with research conducted by scholars. Technology is defined as the tools, techniques, and actions used by an organization to transform input into output (Debra & James, 2003). Leaders must be committed to up to date of knowledge and expertise relevant to their positions in the organization (Yielder & Codling, 2004). They need to be equipped with the current state of technology and develop new administration knowledge together with the educational technology skills to support future requirement in the era of IT (Eugene, 2009). The readiness of the manager-leader to the application of technology and knowledge will definitely support a competitive organization.

Nonetheless, innovation was found to have a significant influence in organization capability in this study. Innovation is a successful implementation of creative ideas in an organization (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby & Herron, 1996). According to Tushman (1997), patterns of innovation over time that can create sustainable competitive advantage is known as innovation streams. Innovation comes from great ideas and creativity. Creativity is the production of novel and useful ideas. Even though managers cannot command creativity from employees, they can motivate innovation by building creative work environments, in which workers perceive that creative thoughts and ideas are welcomed and valued. Amabile *et al.* (1996) said that creative work environments comprise of six components that encourage creativity, which are challenging work, organizational encouragement, supervisory encouragement, work group encouragement, freedom and lack of organizational impediments.

On the contrary, in this study, integrity and corporate governance, external relationship and people leadership were found to have no significant contribution over the effectiveness of leadership performance. With regards to integrity and corporate governance, the result obtained here did not support the study by Verhezen (2008), where he claimed that the success of a company was based upon the integrity of the management. When employees trust their management, especially senior managers, it gives tremendous impact on the organizations' turnover, productivity and profitability. He added that in the pursuit of non-financial objectives, integrity adds value to an organization while increasing its overall standing and thus its relevance in society.

External relationship is equally important to be considered by seeking feedback and opinion from customers. Sirgy (2002) highlighted that long-term survival and growth of the organization are facilitated by the relationship quality of the internal and external stakeholder. Therefore, managers must ensure that their organization follow the same trend in fending for organization that faces today's reality of competitive market environment. However, the findings of this study were not able to support the literature.

Other than that managers who present themselves with a certain degree of people leadership will facilitate employees' behavior around him and the organization that he leads. Yet, this study was not able to support Goleman's (1995) argument that effective leaders are those who demonstrate self-awareness, have high self-confidence as well as able to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusion

Based on these empirical grounds, the authors conclude that there is substantive evidence that vision and strategic leadership as well as manager's personality and skill of the heads of department team at institution of higher learning in Malaysia endure a critical role in shaping their leadership performance which in turn affect the organization's capability. This study also revealed that there are differences in perception between the academics and the administrative staff of Malaysian higher learning institution. Compared to the academics, the administrative staff perceived that the heads of department are more committed in practising leadership qualities. Two leadership dimensions, namely application of technology and knowledge, and innovation, were also found to have positive impacts on both leadership performance as well as organization's capability. Integrity and corporate governance, external relationships and people leadership were found to have no impact on leadership performance as well as organizational capabilities.

This study shows that the heads of department's vision and strategic leadership as well as personality and skill are the two most important leadership dimensions in institution of higher learning in Malaysia such as UiTM Terengganu. Therefore, managers must be able to portray themselves as having prescribed personality and skill, which in turn will directly impact their performance evaluation.

The findings of this study imply that the heads of department at institution of higher learning must acknowledge that academics require additional interaction, such as activities through which staff can make them closer to the management. Importantly, the heads of department team must realise that their critical success factors (CFS) are their visionary and strategic leadership qualities. These qualities, coupled with their personality and skill, would play a critical role in determining the staff perception of their performance.

Since this study is limited on a survey only in UiTM Terengganu, Malaysia, generalization of results to other institutions has to be done carefully. Therefore, further study must be conducted, involving other samples from different institution, both locally and abroad, to reinforce these findings before generalizations are attempted.

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