

Managerial Decision Styles of Deans: A Case Study of a Malaysian Public University

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ABSTRACT

It is often said that decision making style (DMS) is reflective of leadership style. Numerous studies in the area of Management and Leadership indicate that DMS is a key factor that contributes to the success of both managers and their organizational performance. Using the Decision Making Styles Inventory (DMSI) developed by Rowe and Boulgarides (1992), this paper examines the managerial DMS of deans in one of the Malaysian public universities. The scores derived from the DMS were categorized into four decision styles, namely directive, behavioural, analytical and conceptual. The findings revealed that a majority of the deans adopted at least one very dominant or dominant DMS, i mainly behavioural DMS, along with one or two back-up decision styles. Nevertheless, the overall individual results further revealed that the deans possessed more than one style implying that they have considerable flexibility in their managerial DMS and are able to change their decision styles from one situation to another with little difficulty.

Keywords: Decision Making Styles, Leadership, Deans. Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), Leadership Flexibility.

Introduction

Bensimon and Neumann (1993, cited in Wolverton et al., 2001) highlight that external changes which take place in the real world have affected the academic landscape of Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) all over the world. This has had an impact on the roles and responsibilities of leaders at all levels including deans. Initially, deans were regarded as managers of academic institutions and their duties focused mainly on the administration of students which include managing, planning, budgeting, advocating, fundraising and cultural perspectives (Wolverton et al., 2001). However, with the impact of the twin forces of globalization and internationalisation, the roles and responsibilities of deans in IHEs are far more challenging as they are required to act as both managers and leaders of change.

So where do all these roles lead to? A synergy between these two roles as manager and leader requires deans of IHEs to make decisions in the effort to build effective academic organizations that can provide quality education.

In such a scenario, the effectiveness of leadership can be measured in many ways. In measuring one's leadership, Boulgarides and Cohen (2001) have applied the leaders' managerial decision making styles inventory (DMSI) as a tool to measure and reflect leadership style. They indicated that leadership style is "a consistent pattern of behaviour displayed by a leader over time" (p.1). Hence, based on past empirical research, both scholars disclosed that "a leader's style is reflected in his style of decision making" (p.1). In the same vein, Jones (2005) emphasized that decision making is one of the important competency components in leadership. He noted that both decision and decision-making processes are explicitly "fundamental to all leadership and management processes" (p. 121). In relation to leadership, Drucker (1967, cited in Harrison, 1999) stated what determines an effective organization will always depend on an effective leader who is also an effective decision maker. Besides this, Leonard, Scholl and Kowalski (1999) agreed that decision making is the fundamental function in any organization. This is because the quality of decisions made would influence the effectiveness of the managers and consequently, affects the success of the whole organization. Similarly, Hammond (1999) advocated that the success in all the roles orchestrated by a manager in an organization reflects the decisions that he or she made. Above all, Rue and Byars (2000) stated that a manager must first be a good decision maker before he or she can be a good planner, organizer, staffer, leader and controller in any organization.

At this juncture, it is perhaps pertinent to question if deans in Malaysian public universities are equipped with the required skills such as effective managerial decision styles. Unfortunately, until now there is little empirical research conducted concerning deans in Malaysian public universities.

A recent study on Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for Governance of Public Universities in Malaysia stated that the literature agreed that deans should be able to lead and above all possess management skills in order to navigate effective academic organizations. The study further revealed that both groups of respondents consisting of deans and deputy deans along with heads of departments, ranked decision-making as the most important managerial skill required of effective deans. This is followed by other management skills such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, public relation skills, negotiation skills and ICT skills (Parmjit et al., 2009). Even though this study managed to illuminate empirical data on the most needed management skills among deans and top administrators in local IHEs, little is known about their managerial decision styles.

Besides the above, managerial decision making has usually been investigated in relation to organizational performance among corporate managers and leaders in private and business organizations worldwide. In addition, there are also a number of studies carried out among school principals at school levels globally but very little has been conducted in the local university setting particularly among deans of Malaysian public universities.

Considering the fact that one's decision making could affect the effectiveness of an organization, the researchers embarked on the current study with the aim of exploring and identifying the managerial decision making styles of deans in a Malaysian public university. A review of literature which examines a decision making model consisting of four basic styles, research framework, methodology and findings is also presented in this study.

Background

Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) affirmed that there is a need to measure decision making styles since "individual's decision styles form the backbone of effective decision making" (p. 22). Drucker (1966, cited in Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992) pointed out that effective decision makers will try to concentrate only on a few important decisions, to search for what is constant in a situation, and to think through what is strategic and generic rather than to solve problems. Above all, the notion of style flexibility is more effective than one best style only. This is because a flexible style can be adapted to suit the change in a situation, thus improving effectiveness.

Furthermore, decision making styles help to probe the structure of the mind and they also could display how an individual thinks based on his or her perceptions and values. In addition, decisions are built within the "unique frame of reference or psychological set of each individual" (p. 28) and this would transcend the subjective reality. Specifically, the decision making style inventory (DMSI) employed in the study was based on four driving forces and situations confronting decision makers as developed by Rowe and Mason in 1987. The scores derived from the inventory will categorize decision makers into four basic decision styles, namely directive, behavioural, analytical and conceptual. Having to measure an individual's style pattern is significant since this would predict how one will react to various situations. In an absolute sense, decision styles are the tabulated scores that one receives after answering a set of questions in the DMSI. However, in a relative sense, the decision style inventory is the "way" where style is utilized based on decision making situations. They further added that effective decision makers are those whose style matches the requirements of the decision situations. In other words, decision style is referred to as "the way in which a manager perceives information and mentally process that information to arrive at decisions" (Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992, p.28).

With this understanding, DMS is seen as an important variable since it can reveal whether academic managers have considerable flexibility or rigidity in changing their decision making styles based on situation warrants (Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992). Thus, this paper examines deans' decision making styles according to the DMS model and discusses the implications of such styles in relation to leadership.

Decision Making Styles

Due to complexities and variations, Rowe and Mason (1987, cited in Jacoby, 1996) proposed the term decision making style (DMS) as "the way a person uses information to formulate a decision" (p.5). In fact, they further emphasized that DMS is still a cognitive process which encompasses one's personality and is highly correlated to one's needs, values and self-concept.

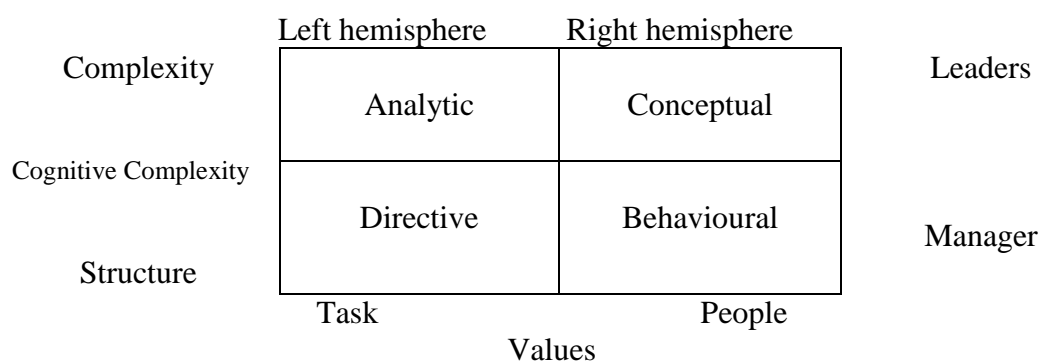
Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) asserted that “individual decision making styles form the backbone of effective decision making” (p.22). However, due to the complexity of individuals, one may not expect organizational leaders to “neatly fit into only one category of decision making style” (p.31). Indeed, typical organizational leaders have at least one dominant style with at least one and often two back-up styles. Therefore, the notion of one best style may not be ideal and this has been replaced with the idea of style flexibility that can be adapted to a specific situation. According to management scholars, flexibility in decision making style apparently can improve effectiveness.

Rowe and Mason’s Decision Making Style Inventory (DSI)

The Decision Making Style Inventory (DMSI) was developed in 1987 by Alan Rowe and Richard O. Mason. According to this model, there are four decision styles, namely directive, analytical, conceptual and behavioural. Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) clarified that decision making styles (DMS) builds on two key elements, values and perception. DMS describes the way managers make decisions. It involves factors such as the context in which a decision is made, the way the managers perceive and understand cues and what managers value and judge as essential. In brief, decision making style reflects the manner in which managers react to a situation. This includes how managers interpret and understand cues, what managers believe and how they respond to numerous demands and forces. These theorists stated that DMS can be measured using an instrument called the decision making style inventory (DMSI) which probes the structures of the mind.

Rowe and Mason’s DMSI reflects a person’s cognitive complexity and values. Figure 1 below shows the DMS model which has two components, cognitive complexity and values orientation. The lower half of Figure 1 indicates the directive and behavioural styles preferred structure and the upper half indicates preferred complexity. The cognitive complexity dimension separates the upper and the lower half as well as distinguishes managers from leaders (Zaleznick, 1970 cited in Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992). Based on the figure also, the values dimension separates the left and right halves and covers task and people dimensions. The left half of the figure indicates the analytic and directive styles that are task oriented. The right half indicates the conceptual and behavioural styles that are people oriented.

Figure 1 Decision Style Model (Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992).



A complete decision-style model by Rowe and Mason (1987) is shown in Figure 2 below. It is a more complete description of the DMS model. The model describes an individual's personality, self-competence, interpersonal competence, situation awareness and problem-solving capability. This model is divided into four styles. These are directive, analytical, conceptual and behavioural. Below is the description of each of the four styles.

Figure 2 Complete Decision Style Model by Rowe and Mason (1987, as cited in Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992)

		Left hemisphere (logical)	Right hemisphere (relational)		
Tolerance For ambiguity	Cognitive Complexity	Analytical Enjoys problem solving Wants best answers Wants best control Uses considerable data Enjoys variety Is innovative Uses careful analysis N-ACH, needs challenges	Conceptual Is achievement-oriented Has a broad outlook Is creative Is humanistic/artistic Initiates new ideas Is future-oriented N-ACH, is independent and wants recognition	Thinking (Ideas)	
		Directive Expects results Is aggressive Acts rapidly Uses rules Uses intuition Is verbal N-POW, needs power	Behavioural Is supportive Uses persuasion Is empathetic Communicates easily Prefers meetings Uses meetings Uses limited data N-AFF, needs affiliation		
		Task/Technical	People /Social	Values Orientation	

1. *Directive Style* - This decision style is characterized by autocratic and internal orientation. Individuals with this style have low tolerance for ambiguity and low cognitive complexity. The focus is on technical decisions which involve a need for speed, efficiency and limited alternatives. At the same time, they prefer specific information to be given verbally and like to dominate others. They are focused, structured, aggressive and rigid. Their orientation towards the internal organization is always short range with tight controls. They also have the drive to achieve results but concomitantly, they need security and status.

2. *Analytical Style* - This decision style is characterized by an autocratic bent. Individuals with this style have a much greater tolerance for ambiguity and more cognitive complex personality. They always need more information and consideration for alternatives since they focus on technical decisions. They are typified by the ability to cope with new situations. Therefore, they enjoy more problem solving and always strive to achieve the maximum. Position and ego seem to be important characteristics and they often reach top posts in a company or start their own company

since they need more control. However, they are not rapid in decision making but enjoy variety and prefer written reports. They also welcome and enjoy challenges and examine every detail in a situation.

3. *Conceptual Style* - This decision style is characterized by high cognitive complexity and people orientation. Typically, the people under this category are thinkers rather than doers. Hence, there is trust and openness in relationships. They share goals with subordinates, tend to be idealists, and emphasize more on ethics and values. They are also creative and can readily understand complex relationships. They tend to use data from numerous sources and consider many alternatives. They focus on long range with high organizational commitment. They are achievement-oriented, value praise, recognition and independence. They prefer loose control to power and exhibit participation.

4. *Behavioural Style* – This style is characterized by supportive and friendly orientation (concerned with subordinates' well being and are people-oriented). Individuals with this style have a low cognitive complexity scale but they have deep social concern for organizations and development of people. They normally provide counselling, are receptive to suggestions, communicate easily, portray warmth, are empathetic, persuasive, compromising and accept loose control. They focus on short term range and uses meetings for communicating. They tend to avoid conflict, seek acceptance but sometimes are insecure.

Mc Clelland (1962, cited in Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992) also described learned needs in terms of economic achievements and feelings that fit the categories of decision making styles. The terms used are as follows:

- need for achievement (N-ACH)
- need affiliation (N-AFF)
- need power (N-POW).

The amount that each of the decision making style intensity is used can be determined from the score specified on the decision making style inventory (DMSI). There are four levels of intensity. They are:

1. *Least preferred*

This level of intensity indicates that the individual rarely uses the style but when required could do so. For instance, under stress, a high analytic shifts to a directive style.

2. *Back-up*

This level of intensity indicates that the individual will use the style occasionally and reflects the typical score on the decision style inventory.

3. *Dominant*

This level of intensity shows that the individual will frequently use this style in preference to other styles. However, in general, individuals can have more than one dominant style and they can also switch from one to another.

4. *Very dominant*

This level of intensity indicates the highest level that describes the compulsive use of the style preferred by individuals. This level of intensity becomes the focus of individuals and will override other styles that have a lower intensity

level. However, there are individuals who have more than one very dominant style.

Table 1 below is used to determine the level of intensity for an individual's style based on the scores obtained on the DMSI instrument. The level of intensity is useful for interpreting the scores on the decision style inventory. For instance a person with a score of directive = 55, analytic = 95, conceptual = 80 and behavioural = 70 would have the following levels of intensity:

Directive = 55 marks : Least preferred
 Analytic = 95 marks : Back up
 Conceptual = 80 marks : Back up
 Behavioural = 70 marks : Dominant

Based on the example above, a person with the scores shown above has one dominant decision making style, i.e. behavioural, two back up decision making styles, that is analytic and conceptual and one least preferred decision making style, that is directive. Below is the guideline of interpreting what the scores on DMSI mean.

Table 1 Decision Making Style Intensity (DMSI) Levels

Style	Intensity			
	<i>Least preferred</i>	<i>Back-up</i>	<i>Dominant</i>	<i>Very Dominant</i>
<i>Directive</i>	Below 68	68 to 82	83 to 90	Over 90
<i>Analytic</i>	Below 83	83 to 97	98 to 104	Over 104
<i>Conceptual</i>	Below 73	73 to 87	88 to 94	Over 94
<i>Behavioural</i>	Below 48	48 to 62	63 to 70	Over 70

(Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992)

DMSI aims at testing one's preferences when approaching a decision situation. DMSI instrument consists of 20 questions. Each question consists of 4 responses that concern typical situations facing managers. Respondents are to rank behaviours in each question using the scale of 8, 4, 2, and 1. A ranking of 8 indicates the response is *most like you*, 4 indicates *moderately like you*, 2 indicates *slightly like you* and 1 indicates *least like you*. However, for the purpose of this research, those rankings of 8, 4, 2 and 1 were changed to 4, 3, 2 and 1 in order to avoid confusion among the respondents. Upon analysing the data, these values were then recoded to the original values.

Decision Making Style Inventory Scoring

Below are the steps to measure the score of Decision Making Style Inventory (DMSI):

- Total the scores in each of the four columns – I, II, III, IV.
- Total the sum of the score in the four column – I, II, III, IV. The total sum of the four columns is 300. In case it is less or more than 300, check the scores so that respondents do not repeat any number for any question in columns I, II, III and IV.
- Place the total sum of the four columns scores according to the appropriate box: I, II, III and IV as in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Individual Scoring Matrix (Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992)

Analytic II	Conceptual III
Directive I	Behavioural IV

The Nature of Decision Making in Educational Management.

Lunenberg and Ornstein (2002) defined ‘decision making’ as the process of choosing from among alternatives. This is significant to an understanding of educational administration because “choice processes play an important role in motivation, leadership, communication and organizational change” (Lunenberg and Ornstein, 2002, p.182). In addition, decision making permeates all parts of administrative functions such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating and controlling in the education setting. According to both scholars, all decisions result in some influence on the performance of both the faculty and students. Therefore, educational managers must develop their decision making aspect such as decision styles and skills for they make many decisions which eventually affect the whole working organization. In addition to that, educational managers in general are also evaluated on the results of their administrative decisions. In this case, the quality of the decisions is crucial in evaluating their effectiveness. The quality of numerous decisions made will not only reflect an impact to the clients but above all will transcend the values held by educational managers who represent the educational organization.

The decline in the world ranking of Malaysian universities in the past few years has gained major attention of all stakeholders including students, administrators of higher education, the government, academicians and even the public. With the deteriorating state of Malaysian public universities, the issue of quality decision making particularly by the heads (deans) has been identified as one of the potential areas that need to be investigated. A study conducted by Nik Maheran indicated that indirectly, the issue has to do with the management of IHE. She encourages top managers in universities to be more democratic and less autocratic to ensure the “reform undertaken deliver the right prescriptions for the well known weaknesses or shortcomings” (2009, p.4). This is mainly due to the reason that the autocratic leadership style in IHEs may create poor management and indirectly lead to poor decisions. Eventually, all these may lead to the falling standard of IHEs in Malaysia (Magoha, 2004).

Nonetheless, scholars in the area of leadership always believe that rigorous empirical researches on leadership need to be carried out in order to investigate academic excellence in academic organisations. Zairi (2009), the author of the book entitled *Total Transformational Thinking in Academic Leadership - A New DNA*, asserted that a new DNA is required in becoming a leader in the academic environment. He claims

that it is crucial to understand the key attributes of an effective leader in an academic setting. He further mentions that IHEs need to conduct investigations and determine individuals' capacity as in "Who are they?" since this information can help to build academic leadership .

To date, there is a dearth of research on leadership focusing on the top ranked managers in IHEs particularly public universities in Malaysia. Hence, this case study was conducted with the aim to explore and identify the managerial decision making styles of deans in one of the Malaysian public universities. Specifically, managerial DMS were measured among the deans from a public universitin Malaysia which was categorized as a comprehensive university. This case study is important from theoretical and practical perspectives. Findings from this study might extend the corpus of knowledge in the area of educational management and leadership particularly in Malaysian higher education .

Methodology

The aim of this study therefore is to explore and identify the decision making styles of leaders in a Malaysian public university. The target population for this study was all the deans in one comprehensive public university located in the Klang Valley in the state of Selangor in Malaysia. This particular university has 24 faculties.

Quantitative methodology was employed in data analysis and findings were reported via descriptive techniques. A survey using the questionnaire, Managerial Decision Styles Inventory or also known as DMSI (developed by Rowe and Mason, 1987) was used to measure and identify deans' managerial decision styles.

Over the years, testing, that is the validity and reliability of the DMSI instrument has been carried out with numerous groups. Based on Rowe and Boulgarides (1992), DMSI instrument has a very high face validity and reliability. Following the administration to more than 10,000 individuals in different fields and professions, including presidents of companies, board chairs, corporate key persons, architects, chiefs of police, army generals, nurses, teachers and many other professionals in numerous settings, the DMSI instrument was reported to have more than 90% face validity and 70% test-retest reliability (Rowe and Mason, 1987). Thus, published research continues to employ this instrument (Bowman, 1992; Leonard et al.,1999; Fox and Spence, 2005).

In this study, the 'drop off and collect' survey was applied in the administration of the questionnaire. Further, taking into consideration the characteristics of the target respondents, the type of questionnaire, the time required to complete the survey, the geographical coverage (Rosidah, 2004), and also personal delivery resulted in the researcher communicating with the deans personally and motivating them to participate in the study. All these helped to yield a higher response rate with few objections (Webster, 1997). Thus, the 'drop off and collect' survey approach became a major contribution to the outcome of the current study. Out of 24 questionnaires distributed to all the 24 deans from 24 faculties in the university selected, 22 (91.6%) sets were returned by 22 deans from the respective faculties.

A descriptive analysis was conducted to analyse and describe the findings of the overall individual deans' decision making styles and their decision style patterns. The demographic profile and results are presented below.

Demographic Data

Table 2 shows the respondents' demographic profile. The sample of the case study consisted of 54.5% (n=12) male and 45.5% (n=10) female deans and 13.6% (n=3) were in the age group of 40-45, 36.4% (n=8) were 46-49 and 50-55, and 9.1 % were 56-60. In addition, 86.4% (n=19) were PhD holders and 13.6% (n=3) were Masters holders.

Table 2 Demographic Profile of Deans

Demographic Variables		Research sample (n =22)	
		Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	12	54.5 %
	Female	10	45.5 %
Age	40 – 45	3	13.6 %
	46 – 49	8	36.4 %
	50 – 55	8	36.4 %
	56 – 60	2	9.1 %
	Missing value	1	4.5 %
Highest academic Qualification	PhD	19	86.4 %
	Master	3	13.6 %

Findings and Discussion

Table 3 reveals the overall individuals' scores on the managerial decision making style. The majority of the deans practised at least one *very dominant* or *dominant* style and often one or two *back-up* decision styles. In particular, a majority of them also scored at the *very dominant* or *dominant* levels of behavioural DMS. Details are discussed as follows.

Table 3 Decision Making Style Intensity Scores for all the 22 deans

	DEANS	Directive	Directive	Analytical	Analytical	Conceptual	Conceptual	Behavioural	Behavioural	Total
1	Dean 1	LP	49	LP	82	D	90	VD	79	300
2	Dean 2	LP	60	BU	93	BU	86	BU	61	300
3	Dean 3	LP	63	BU	94	BU	86	BU	57	300
4	Dean 4	LP	67	BU	87	BU	73	VD	73	300

5	Dean 5	LP	50	BU	85	D	91	VD	74	300
6	Dean 6	BU	74	LP	81	BU	82	D	63	300
7	Dean 7	LP	59	BU	87	LP	64	VD	90	300
8	Dean 8	D	86	LP	82	LP	65	D	67	300
9	Dean 9	LP	59	LP	63	BU	87	VD	91	300
10	Dean 10	VD	96	LP	51	BU	83	D	70	300
11	Dean 11	BU	79	LP	82	BU	75	D	64	300
12	Dean 12	BU	77	D	103	LP	65	BU	55	300
13	Dean 13	BU	77	BU	96	LP	66	BU	61	300
14	Dean 14	BU	74	VD	105	BU	85	LP	36	300
15	Dean 15	LP	62	BU	89	BU	82	D	67	300
16	Dean 16	LP	64	VD	115	LP	62	BU	59	300
17	Dean 17	VD	95	D	99	LP	64	LP	42	300
18	Dean 18	BU	78	BU	89	BU	84	BU	49	300
19	Dean 19	LP	64	BU	91	D	90	BU	55	300
20	Dean 20	LP	51	BU	84	VD	105	BU	60	300
21	Dean 21	BU	72	BU	92	D	91	LP	45	300
22	Dean 22	BU	71	BU	96	BU	86	LP	47	300

LP=Least Preferred, BU= Back-Up, D=Dominant, VD= Very Dominant

Level of Intensity (Rowe and Mason, 1992)

Style	Least preferred	Back-up	Dominant	Very Dominant
Directive	Below 68	68 to 82	83 to 90	Over 90
Analytic	Below 83	83 to 97	98 to 104	Over 104
Conceptual	Below 73	73 to 87	88 to 94	Over 94
Behavioural	Below 48	48 to 62	63 to 70	Over 70

Table 4 below displays a summary of the deans' DMS. Specifically, among the four decision styles, the highest number of deans 22.7% (n=5) scored at the *very dominant* and 22.7% (n=5) scored at the *dominant* level of behavioural DMSI. Many deans 36.4% (n=8) also scored at the *back-up* level and only 18.2% (n=4) scored at the *least preferred* of behavioural DMSI. It can be inferred that the majority of the deans in this university preferred behavioural decision style as compared to the other three decision styles, analytical, conceptual and directive.

Besides behavioural, the highest number of deans 54.5% (n=12) scored within the *back-up* level of analytical DMSI. This was followed by 50.0% (n=11) who scored within the *least preferred* level of directive DMSI.

The results also revealed that a small number of deans scored at the *very dominant* (9.1%, n=2) and *dominant* (9.1%, n=2) analytical DMSI, *very dominant* (9.1%, n=2) and *dominant* (4.5%, n=1) directive DMSI and *very dominant* (4.5%, n=1) and *dominant* (18.2%, n=4) conceptual DMSI.

Further, many of them also scored within the *back-up* level for all the styles: (54.5%) n=12 for analytical DMSI, (50.0%) n=11 for conceptual DMSI and (36.4%) n=8 for

both directive and behavioural DMSI. This is indicative that the deans tend to have more than one style of category they preferred and scored *very dominant* or *dominant* as well as *back-up* styles. Overall, this implies that they are flexible decision-makers who do not confine themselves to one style (which reflects rigid decision-makers). This is in line with the theory put forward by Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) which indicates that as managers, they are rather flexible in their decision styles and are able to change and adapt their decision styles from one particular situation to another with little difficulty.

Table 4 Managerial decision Style Profile for all deans (frequency and percentage)

Managerial Decision Style	Least Preferred	Back-Up	Dominant	Very Dominant	Total
Directive	n 11 (50.0%)	n 8 (36.4%)	n 1 (4.5%)	n 2 (9.1%)	N 22 (100.0%)
Analytical	n 6 (27.3%)	n 12 (54.5%)	n 2 (9.1%)	n 2 (9.1%)	N 22 (100.0%)
Conceptual	n 6 (27.3%)	n 11 (50.0%)	n 4 (18.2%)	n 1 (4.5%)	N 22 (100.0%)
Behavioural	n 4 (18.2%)	n 8 (36.4%)	n 5 (22.7%)	n 5 (22.7%)	N 22 (100.0%)

Issues: Decision styles and Flexibility

Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) highlighted two essential issues that need to be treated when measuring managerial decision styles. The issues concern one's decision styles and flexibility. Thus, researchers need to ask the following:

- Is there any one best style?, and
- How flexible can one's style be?

Looking at the first issue, both theorists highlighted that there is no one style that is more effective than any other. This is because each style is very contingent on the appropriateness of one's situation. In 1973, Boulgarides compared decision styles and leadership flexibility. Results indicated that "the extremes of being too flexible (indecisive) or too rigid are least effective" (as cited in Rowe and Boulgarides, 1992, p.35). Indeed, what transpired was a flexible style which can match a given situation and which proved to be more appropriate than a single best style.

In line with the findings of this current study and bearing in mind Rowe and Boulgarides' model, it can be inferred that on the whole, the majority of the deans are rather flexible; able to change and adapt decision styles contingent to situation. With such findings, this group of deans can be categorized as effective when 81% (n=18) of them had the trend of having one or two back-up styles and 77% (n=17) had at least one *very dominant* or *dominant* styles. However, when analysed carefully, even though there was a trend of flexible decision styles being rated by the deans, an issue can be raised when findings indicated the highest number of deans 22.7% (n=5) scored *very dominant* and 22.7% (n=5) scored *dominant* behavioural DMSI levels as compared to the other three decision styles. These findings indicated that the majority of the deans in this university tended to adopt the *very dominant* and *dominant* behavioural DMS instead of a mixture of all four decision styles.

Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) characterized behavioural decision-makers as those who formulate decisions based on their cognitive processes which are usually deeply rooted in people-orientation and have social concerns for organization. This implies that the decision style of the majority of the deans is mainly based on people-relations which require more personal attention than intellectual aspects. Nevertheless, Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) emphasized that those who adopted the directive and behavioural styles are action-oriented and that they operate as first-line managers. However, both theorists suggest that the upper levels of managers who adopt the behavioural decision style are often “seen as being inconsistent, and leave their subordinates in a weak position because they cannot be sure of what to expect” (p.34). It can therefore be inferred that the dominance of behavioural decision style among deans in this current study should be highlighted since deans are regarded as top academic managers who lead academic organisations and this requires consistency in their academic performance.

Nonetheless, when compared to studies pertaining to decision styles at a global level, this case study portrays rather similar results with those involving the educational setting using the same instrument. For instance, Abdulrahman AlQarni (2003) indicated that the majority of Florida university library managers (n=40 or 47% out of 85 respondents) scored within the *very dominant and dominant* behavioural DMSI levels and this was followed by the conceptual decision style (n=28 or 32.9% out of 85 respondents).

A similar result was also reported in a recent doctoral thesis by Ismail Hussein Amzat (2010). His study involving 1,117 university teaching staff investigated decision making styles and their relationship with job satisfaction in five Malaysian public universities. The studies showed that three out of the five public universities in Malaysia had actually adopted the behavioural decision style, while the remaining two had adopted the analytical and conceptual decision styles.

Looking at the second issue, Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) explored how flexible managers are and if they can they be trained to be flexible. Flexibility is the term equated with high or low cognitive complexity in a person. Managers with rigid or fixed style are found to be less able to adapt than those with a flexible style (able to adapt to most situations). However, Fielder (1967, cited in Boulgarides and Cohen, 2001) mentioned that it is easy to change almost anything but not a manager’s personality or style. Boulgarides and Cohen (2001) added that a flexible style does not mean changing personality but above all, it involves exposure and becoming proficient in applying different tactics, depending on situations rather than maintaining any given style of leadership or decision making.

With regard to this current study, it is rather difficult to address this issue since data collected are based on the managerial DMSI survey and it did not explore this aspect. Hence, this research can be further enhanced by involving a qualitative aspect such as interviews to provide in depth information pertaining to the issue. Perhaps what can be recommended is to come up with leadership tactics training among the deans. This is further discussed in the following section that looks into the strengths and weaknesses of the current findings.

Implications and Recommendations for further research

The majority of the deans can be said to be rather flexible in their decision making styles as they are able to change and adapt their decision styles from one particular situation to another with little difficulty as results indicated that the majority of them rated one or two *very dominant* or *dominant* DMSI levels along with one or two *back-up* DMSI levels.

Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) highlighted that an effective manager is the one who has a combination of directive and strong *back-up* behavioural DMS. The combination of both styles will lead to an action-oriented manager. Nevertheless, findings from this study indicated that a majority of the deans possessed *very dominant* and *dominant* behavioural styles instead of a mixture of a few decision styles. Hence, the findings from this study cannot be used as a benchmark for training novice deans in this particular university. Perhaps what can be recommended is that training be provided to deans in decision making styles to further enhance their organisational effectiveness.

It is also recommended that more studies in the area of managerial decision making styles and other related decision making aspects be conducted in order to better understand the trend and pattern of leadership DMS in Malaysian institutions of higher education.

Next, a study of deans from various types of public universities should also be considered. For instance, deans from the research, comprehensive and focused universities can be included in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the trend of managerial DMS among deans from public universities. Hence, findings can be generalized to a bigger population which represents deans in Malaysian public universities.

Furthermore, the methodology of data collection and analysis could be enhanced using a mixed-method employing both quantitative and qualitative research instruments. Such a measure would not only help to triangulate findings but more importantly provide in depth understanding of the deans' decision making styles. Hence, the richness of the data would further justify any consistency or inconsistency of the findings.

Due to time constraints, this case study was confined only to deans. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies should include some form of data validation from subordinates such as deputy deans, heads of programme, coordinators and even lecturers.

Lastly given enough resources particularly in terms of research grants, this study can be expanded to private universities in Malaysia. Perhaps, the current variable, related decision making areas and some other potential variables can be explored concurrently .

Finally, it can be concluded that the exploration and identification of managerial decision styles are essential and valuable since these help to form and strengthen the relationship of a manager to a group. Rowe and Boulgarides (1992) disclose that for

researchers, this is the platform to further chart a strategic training for managers towards organisational effectiveness.

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