

Investigating the Predominance of Academic Superior on Officer's Commitment Towards Service Quality in Malaysian Private Universities

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The primary objective of this inquiry is to examine the connection between transformative leadership approach and the affective commitment towards service quality among the administrative staff at private Malaysian universities. Prior evidence has indicated that one of the critical components in building a robust competitive advantage that will ensure the sustainability of an organization, is excellent service quality. Preceding studies also found that the transformative leadership approach accommodates the employee's motivation towards a higher commitment to the more bureaucratic organization. This investigation employed a quantitative survey method using a structured questionnaire to collect data. The study used disproportionate stratified random sampling, and 310 respondent administrative officers from local private universities in the Klang Valley participated. A total of 1,825 questionnaires were disseminated, yielding 17 percent response rate. The findings indicate that the transformative approach of leadership has a significant association with the affective commitment towards service quality amid the administrative personnel of private Malaysia universities. The study results are used to propose theoretical and managerial implications as well as suggestions for future research.

Key words: *Malaysian private higher education institutions, affective commitment towards service quality, transformative leadership approach.*

Introduction

The rapid growth of the global economy will tighten competition among education providers and the blooming increase of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Malaysia will make a tremendous impact on all HEIs providers simultaneously changing the landscape of the industry. Thus, HEIs should continue exploring ways and sustainable methods to stay relevant and survive in this aggressive environment to achieve a competitive advantage against competitors. In conjunction with the 21st century, which will be known as 'the quality' era (Juran, 1992), HEIs have to ensure that their staff is fully committed to improving the service quality for the sake of their institutions. As stated by Hudson, Hudson, and Miller (2004), the only way to stay competitive in this environment is to provide excellent quality of service. To distinguish oneself from its competitors, they recommended that an organization should give their utmost priority to service quality so that it can build a niche market and establish a competitive dominance.

There are 656 HEIs in Malaysia, which comprise 513 private universities and 143 public institutions (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2014). These institutions not only deal with domestic competition to entice local and international students to enrol at their varsity, but they also have to compete with foreign varsities from Singapore, Australia, Thailand, Indonesia, and India. Accordingly, the Malaysian HEIs should acknowledge that the competition is toughening domestically and internationally. This leaves no other choice than to improve their service quality to the stakeholders. This proposition is backed by Green and Ramropp (2014), who state that the stiff competition among universities to attract qualified students has urged them to pay more attention to the issues of providing high service quality.

Regrettably, previous research seems to neglect the issue of affective commitment towards service quality among university staff. There are those who think that a large number of students' assessment of service quality in universities in Malaysia is influenced by how they are treated by front house staff (Hassan, Rahman & Rahman, 2008; Ismail & Abiddin, 2009). Meanwhile, previous studies also showed that several cases of universities in Malaysia failed to secure new students because their standard of quality did not meet with the students' expectation (Ahmed & Masud, 2014; Shekarchizadeh, Amran & Huam, 2011; Slethaug & Manjula, 2012; Koni, Zainal & Ibrahim, 2013).

Meantime, there is a strand of evidence from previous work such as Ismail and Abiddin, (2009), Jalali, Islam and Ariffin (2011), Martin and Dastane (2014), and Choon, Teck and Hoi (2010), which alleges that the level of service quality of Malaysian HEIs is moderate as seen from the perception of the local students. Such conditions, to some extent, lead to other problems that can harm the chances of attracting students, either domestic or international students (Isahak,

2007; Sedhu, Ali & Harun, 2017). This issue will inflict a detrimental impact on the Malaysian government's endeavor to attract 200,000 international students by the year 2020.

The underlying mechanism behind the drivers of affective commitment towards service quality among the administrative staff in private universities remains inconclusive. Still, several studies have proposed that the leadership factor might be the driving determinant that plays a vital function in igniting the awareness towards the firm's goals by providing a conducive environment and relevant resources that will encourage organizational members to strive for affective commitment to the service quality (Hashim & Mahmood, 2012; Long & Thean, 2011).

Based on the above scenario, it is beyond doubt that the evolution of global economic and marketplace demands a genuine leader who can do more than just managerial task such as fostering innovation, encouraging credence and promoting continuous learning to the entire organization (Gladson & Augustine, 2010; Bolden, Petrov & Gosling, 2008; Brown, 2001; King, 2008; ACRULET, 2007). Nevertheless, there is an inadequacy regarding the topic of type of leadership approach and administrative staff's commitment towards service quality. In other service sectors, the transformative leadership approach is reported to trigger the changes in staff behavior and perception towards dedication to service quality (Clark, Hartline & Jones, 2008; Afthanorhan et al., 2018). Therefore, the question of how the transformative leadership approach will contribute to the degree of staff's commitment to service quality among administrative personnel is the main interest of the study.

Literature Review

Transformative Approach of Leadership and Affective Commitment towards Service Quality

Transformational leaders are recognized as the driving force behind the positive organizational culture and high commitment among the workers. The leadership factor could affect the firm's productivity and performance by deteriorating it or vice versa (Eunyoung, 2007). The inspiration of a visionary, transformative leader would impact their subordinates' perceptions towards their competency and commitments towards the organization's goal (Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood & Jantzi, 2003; Sehic, 2017).

Erkutlu (2008) asserted that there is a significant relationship between transformative leadership approach and employee commitment based on an investigation of a boutique hotel in Turkey. Bass (1990); Christie (2002); Jabnoun and Rasasi (2005); Rowold and Heinitz (2007) and Jansen, Vera and Crossan (2009) are scholars who study leadership in various organizations. They also confirmed that there were positive effects of transformative leadership approach in which they obtained a profound positive impact on business and job satisfaction, which in turn produce a committed staff to the organization. This finding was also supported

by Thamrin (2012), who found that there was a significant relationship found between transformative leadership approach, job satisfaction, and commitment among staff, which improved the quality of service in their organization.

Additionally, Raemah's (2010) study is parallel with Thamrin's (2012) findings that transformative leadership has a significant effect on staff commitment towards quality services in Malaysian universities. Whereas, in other sectors, an inquiry administered by Syarifah and Normala (2012) regarding the relationship between leadership style and effectiveness of leadership in SBK under the federal government, unveiled that the transformative leadership style is considered as an effective leadership practice that enhances the efficiency of an organization.

Nonetheless, the investigation by Aslamiah (2014) pointed out that there is no significant correlation between teacher transformational leadership with teacher commitment to the schools in Kalimantan, Banjarmasin. This evidence also indicated that there is no consistency with leadership theory, which suggested that transformative leaders are capable of influencing their subordinates' commitment to advancing individual performance (Bass, 1985).

Previous research also presented evidence that transformative leadership has a significant and positive relationship with the organization outcome, such as quality of service (Jabnoun & Rasasi, 2005), building long-term relationships with clients (Liao & Chuang, 2007), the impact of the involvement of students such as participation and identification with the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), and the commitment and the efforts of teachers in reform school (Geijsel et al., 2003). The study by Raemah (2010) in Malaysia HEIs certifies that transformational leaders have successfully increased academic staff commitment in providing the best quality service to their students. This finding concurred by Sadiq and Mahmood (2014) and Bakar and Mahmood (2014) which coined that transformative leadership has a significant relationship with the success of the HEIs in Nigeria and the performance of HEIs in Malaysia.

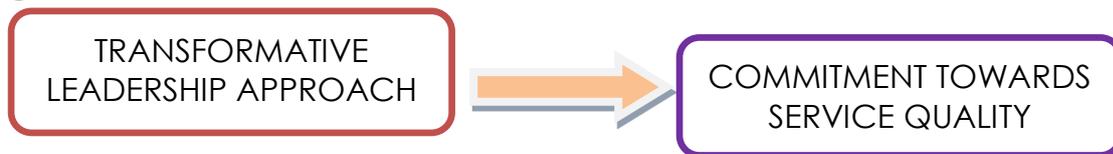
Nevertheless, in another strand of literature Yu and Jantzi, (2002) discovered that a commitment to change amongst teachers is different and contradictory with the fact that transformative leadership is perceived to be a feature of a leader who is very concerned about the career development of teachers. Even so, the level of commitment among teachers from the study of Yu and Jantzi (2002) found that the feedback from students and parents is more important compared to the input from the leaders. The findings of the review cases like this ascertained that teachers in the school environment could continue to stay committed even though they view their leaders as ineffective. This difference may be due to their sincerity and enthusiasm. Therefore, it is something interesting to apprehend what would happen in an environment of higher education in developing countries such as Malaysia.

And based on the justification discussed earlier, this study proposed the following hypothesis:
H1: Transformative leadership approach has a significant relationship with the affective commitment towards service quality.

Research Framework

The proposed research framework is presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Research Framework



The research framework is guided by the psychological theory and social science theory of Cognitive Dissonance Theory introduced by Festinger (1957). A conflict happens when administrative staff deal with leaders who fail to acknowledge their efforts and discriminate based on specific traits or individual characteristics. Therefore, in the event of any conflict, the leaders should give the perfect justification to convince that some contingency rewards, guidance, communication, or instruction are given to staff. This practice could avoid conflict and diminish the rebellious attitude of the administrative officer, where they will be more likely to adopt a positive attitude to the affective commitment to service quality.

Narimawati (2007) ascertained that one of the characteristics of genuine transformative leaders is they are susceptible to sacrifice their individual goals by assimilating organization goals into theirs, in doing so, they could express the highest level of empathy to the emotional attachment of the organization. This condition would directly increase the degree of employees' commitment to an organization (Emery & Barker, 2007; Nguni, Slegers & Denessen, 2006; McGuire & Kennerly, 2006). Eventually, the transformative approach of leadership could foster a positive culture that will encourage the employee's commitment to service quality and enable the organization to develop a competitive advantage against other industrial players.

Methodology

Population and Sampling

The population studies in this research is described as a specific or targeted group of people or event that worthwhile to investigate and to propose a relevant conclusion based on the preferable analysis method (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). Based on the statistics published by the Ministry of higher education Malaysia (MOHE), Malaysia has a total of 41 private tertiary education institutions (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2015). Nevertheless, this study

intended to examine the institution located in Klang Valley only which comprise of 7,299 administrative staff from 32 private universities.

This limitation is due to the geographical factor, respondent's accessibility, and cost-effective as demonstrated by previous research such as Raemah (2010), Noordin and Jusoff (2009), Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad and Othman (2007) and Santhapparaj and Alam (2005) which also conducted in the context of educational field. Furthermore, Ariffin (2006) and Sekaran (2005) posit that this sampling strategy is sufficient in terms of general external validity on research findings. On that account, this study proposed that by selecting the 32 targeted private universities as its research sample would satisfy the generalization requirement of representing the overall population of private universities in Malaysia.

Sampling

Based on the definition by Sekaran and Bougie (2014,) sampling is a process where a small number of elements from the total population is selected and reviewed to enable us to generalize the population. In short, sampling involves an investigation of the samples to represent the whole population in the study. Previous researchers have adopted this method either from pure science or social science (Sent, 2010; Sehic, 2017).

This study adopted the disproportionate stratified random sampling due to the several layers or strata is small-sized compared to other populations of the target strata, which have a more significant number of administrative staff. Disproportionate stratified random sampling has the advantage of convenience and cost-effective in conducting data collection process (Sekaran, 2005; Babbie, 2005).

The total numbers of administrative staff in private universities in Malaysia is 7,299. According to the sample size selection guideline developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the appropriate sample size is 365. Thus, a total of 365 respondents were investigated. This rule of thumb for sample selection is also agreed by Roscoe (1975), which posit that a sample size of more than 30 and less than 500 is sufficient for most studies.

Ramayah, Yan, and Sulaiman (2005) asserted that the response rate was around 10 to 20 percent, while Ainin, Kamarulzaman, Farinda, and Azmi (2010) in their study found only 15 percent. Based on these statements, the researcher assumed that only 20 percent of the overall distribution of survey questions. Hence, the researchers distributed a total of 1,825 survey questions to the respondents. A total of 310 survey questions have been accepted with a response rate of 17 percent.

Measurement of the Constructs

This research attempts to explain the relationship between transformative leadership approach and affective commitment towards service quality. The items for transformative leadership approach consist of 20 items using 5 Likert-scale adapted from Bass and Avolio (2004) while items for affective commitment towards service quality has 9 items using 5 Likert-scale and adapted from Clark et al. (2008). Table 1 below portrays the two research measurements and its reliability used in this study.

Table 1: Research measurement

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha Value	Source
Transformative leadership approach	20	0.966	Bass and Avolio (2004)
Affective Commitment towards Service Quality	9	0.912	Clark et al. (2008)

Results

The study employed multiple regression analysis to analyze the relationship between the study variables and to test the proposed hypotheses. To verify the adequacy of the model, the author examined the regression assumptions by conducting the test of linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and error independence. Besides, the data revealed that there is no issue with the multicollinearity, and there were no outlier observations. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the mean, standard deviation, and the correlations among the variables of understudy.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, correlations

	Mean	Standard Deviation	TLS	ACSQ
Transformative Leadership Approach (TLA)	3.74	0.616	1	
Affective Commitment towards Service Quality (ACSQ)	3.87	0.559	.565**	1

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level*

Next, the author tested the hypotheses to address the research objectives. For hypotheses 1, researchers used multiple regression analysis. Before the hypotheses were tested, the overall test results shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Model Summary^b

R	R Square	Adjusted R Squared	Standard Error of Estimate
0.565 ^a	0.319	0.317	0.462

a. Predictors: Transformative Leadership Approach

b. Dependent Variable: Affective commitment towards Service Quality

From the model summary, as described in table 3 above, the independent variable of transformative leadership approach shows that collectively, the model affects 32 percent of the variation (R square/(R2). This result indicates that the affective commitment towards service quality variable and transformative leadership approach predicted 32 percent affective commitment to service quality model as a set of predictor and the balance of 68 percent might be contributed by other factors that not incorporated in this study. The overall model, affective commitment to service quality verifies that the transformative leadership approach variable affects 32 percent of affective commitment towards service quality.

The result of multiple regression for hypotheses 1 is as follows:

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis between Transformative Leadership Approach and Affective Commitment towards Service Quality

Variable	Beta Coefficient	T	Sig
Transformative Leadership Approach	0.565	12.021	0.000

Independent Variable: Affective Commitment towards Service Quality

The multiple regression analysis results as presented in Table 4, illustrate that the transformative leadership approach has a significant relationship with an affective commitment to service quality, with the P value is equal to 0.000. The beta coefficient (β) for this relationship is 0.565, and t value is 12.021. Therefore, H1 is accepted. Hence, the transformative leadership approach could be regarded as a variable that influences the affective commitment to service quality.

Discussion

As discussed in the previous section, this study aimed to determine the relationship between the independent variable of transformative leadership approach and the dependent variable of affective commitment to service quality among administrative officers in Malaysian private universities. The statistical results indicate that that transformative approach of leadership has a significant association with the affective commitment towards service quality among the administrative officers of private Malaysia universities. In other words, the finding suggests that transformative leaders play a crucial role in the degree of affective commitment towards service quality by administrative staff in private universities in Malaysia. We firmly believe that the practice of this type of leadership could contribute to the performance of the organization, such as meeting customer's needs and secure customer's satisfaction.

Moreover, these current findings are homogenous with previous studies (Bass, 1990; Christie, 2002; Jabnoun & Rasasi, 2005; Rowold & Heinitz, 2007; Al-Mhasnah et al., 2018; Jansen et al, 2009; Raemah, 2010; Thamrin, 2012; Sadiq & Mahmood; 2014; Bakar & Mahmood, 2014). On the other hand, they contradict the findings from several studies such as Yu and Jantzi (2002) and Aslamiah (2014). The findings also justified the underlying theory of Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which proposed that affective commitment towards service quality through transformative leadership approach is successfully applied in private universities in Malaysia. From the perspective of management practice, the findings could provide valuable input to the leaders and academic management as well as policymakers in universities in formulating strategies to develop their practical approach of competing with other players in their industry by focusing on the commitment towards service quality (Hudson et al., 2004).

Even so, the author takes a modest and cautious approach in proposing a conclusion in light of the limitations faced by this study. First of all, considering the sampling frame only covered the Klang Valley area, it is therefore unfit to generalize the findings for the entire educational industry in Malaysia or any other fields or sectors. Secondly, despite receiving a 17 percent response rate, the resulting data does not exclude the non-response bias unless all respondents answered the questionnaires. Thirdly, this study did not examine other kinds of leadership approach that might have influenced the outcome of the study. Although the transformative leadership approach proved to overcome different leadership styles to elaborate MLQ constructs, other forms of leadership are also necessary, especially in certain circumstances, such as the ever-changing environment that require flexible leaders in addressing a crisis.

Thus, this study recommends that future research should address the differences of the response variables under investigation between different groups, different positions, and different hierarchy and also from different clusters and cultures. Additionally, future research should explore the potential association between other leadership styles and other influencing variables. In terms of the analysis method, future research should attempt to use a different analytical approach such as Partial Least Squares-SEM (PLS-SEM) or Structure Equation Modelling-Amos (SEM-Amos). The outcome of this study might as well be more robust using those analytical approaches. Finally, future studies may consider alternative methods such as experiments, data from the archives, observation, or interviews to better understand cause and effect at different phases of time (Sekaran, 2003).

Conclusion

Arguably, the customer's satisfaction might depend heavily on the administrative staff's affective commitment towards service quality as they are the front liner who deals directly with the university stakeholders such as students and parents. More importantly, this commitment towards service quality could foster good practice in corporate governance of the university's

administration whereby, the commitment towards service quality must be adopted by the entire organizational members. Thus, in appointing future personnel for the managerial position, the top management must prioritize candidates with excellent characteristics of transformational leadership so that he or she may cultivate the culture of service quality.

Consequently, the author pinpoints a call for a strategic restructuring of private university administration in the light of commitment towards service quality, especially among academic management. Perhaps, this strategic change will also encourage innovation, promote trust, and continuous learning among organizational members (Brown, 2001; ACRULeT, 2007; Bolden et al., 2008; King, 2008). Ultimately, the transformative leadership mechanism could provide the climate towards a continued commitment to service quality (Hashim & Mahmood, 2012; Hartline et al., 2000; Clark et al., 2008).

This research extends and expands the body of knowledge in the area of affective commitment towards service quality and transformative leadership approach, particularly in configuring the factors that describe affective commitment towards service quality among administrative personnel in Malaysian private universities and how transformational leadership style affects affective commitment to service quality. Finally, it is reiterated that there might be other potential variables that could influence, moderate, or mediate the relationship between affective commitment to service quality and leadership styles.

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