

Leadership Practice, Organization Culture and Emotional Intelligence Among Female Leaders: Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT

Leadership extends beyond seniority or hierarchical position within an organization. It is not acquired at a particular pay grade. However, leaders play vital roles in shaping an organization's success. Their behaviours profoundly impact employees' ability to meet and exceed expectations in achieving organizational goals. Effective leaders adhere to guidelines and empower their followers. True leadership is not solely defined by personality traits, attributes, or titles, but rather by the power derived from competence, effectiveness, relationships, excellence, innovation, and ethics. While historically male-dominated, women are increasingly being promoted to leadership positions due to societal, economic, and demographic changes. One area of leadership studies that has gained significant attention is emotional intelligence (EI). EI, whether as a personality trait or human ability, is considered a decisive factor for mental health, personal growth, and professional success. Previous research suggests that female leaders often exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence in decision-making and their interactions with employees. However, there are inconsistent findings and empirical evidence in this regard. This working research aims to be conducted in Sarawak, focusing on female leaders working in federal agencies and state offices. The study intends to investigate the mediating role of organization culture and test relevant theories pertaining to emotional intelligence. By contributing new knowledge to the field of emotional intelligence research, this study seeks to enhance understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence, leadership, and organizational culture.

Keywords: leadership practice, emotional intelligence, organization culture, public service, female leaders

INTRODUCTION

Women are more likely to lead from a creative mindset and play for all to win. This suggests that women leaderships are not only better at building relationship but also that the relationship they build are characterized by authenticity and an awareness of how they contribute towards leaders' immediate sphere of influence. On the other hand, female leaders more often lead from a 'playing to win' orientation – focusing on their natural curiosities about what matters most to the future as they created and partnered with others to move towards their visions (Novotney, 2023; Kruse, 2023; Adams, 2014).

Crossing the business sectors, employees' talent and experience, coupled to an enabling organisation culture; are the significant drivers of innovations. This impacted an organisation to which an organisation culture is identified as one of the major challenges that contributed to females' career progression (Trent, 2020; Aragan et al. 2017; Subramaniam, Khadri, Mariam & Ali, 2016). It was found that the various culture obstacles to female becoming leaders are gender stereotypes, workplace policies and management practices. From the perspective of Malaysia, a single woman working away from home in a male-dominated sector is often frowned upon. This becomes a hard task for women to break out the roles as wife and mother which are traditionally assigned to

them (Mohd. Rais, 2022). Latu, Mast and Stewart (2016) also found that although explicit forms of gender stereotyping of females in the workplace have become significantly positive, negative stereotyping persist and such stereotyping manifestations concealed females to be incompetent in becoming leaders compared to male counterparts.

While women are well educated, qualified and possess applicable working experiences to serve as organisation leaders, still, women are both being implicitly and explicitly overlooked for advancement to top leadership positions, in the organizational hierarchy in male-dominated organization culture (Trent, 2020; Noback, Broesma and Dijk, 2016). Gender discrimination is often camouflaged by the rules and regulations directing society, which rooted in the traditional male-dominant society that underlies social structures (Walby, 2009).

In a work environment, leaders play significant roles and are accountable for determining an organization's success. The behaviours portrayed by leaders have been found to influence employees' abilities to meet and exceed employers' expectations in accomplishing organisational goals (Udod, Hammond-Collins and Jenkins, 2020; Heckemann et. al, 2015). Although male leaderships were witnessed throughout history, females have recently been promoted to leadership positions as well (Duan et al. 2022; Jasmin et al. 2017; Boyd and Wolf, 2016). With the rapid development of the world's population, society, and economy, more women have entered the labour market, making the proportion of women's labour force change. One of the fields in leadership studies that received considerable attention is related to determining emotional intelligence.

Organisations having female leaders will have a positive impact on the organisation's progress (Hora, 2014). Women are described to have more patient, conscientious, and wise in making decisions that increase interaction in the members (Jamli and Salim, 2020; Singh and Kumar, 2016). However, women are not provided with relevant opportunities towards holding leadership positions in organizations. This can be referred as only 50.2% of women are employed in Sarawak either in the private and public sectors (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Another problem is on the issues of organisation culture on female leaders caused by barriers due to personal reasons such as family responsibilities, family support or demographic factors such as age, education and marital status. Besides, these barriers could also be due to work challenges such as organisational culture and career advancement opportunities such as promotion opportunities, training, selection and recruitment methods. This phenomenon has been termed as the "Glass Ceiling" (GC) which refers to barriers women face as they try to climb the corporate ladder. Finally, there are lacking studies on emotional intelligence in Sarawak particularly towards the public sector. Most conducted research were too focused to educational institutions either in Universities or Schools and most research were merely students' projects which were unpublished in journals or research-based publications. Some examples of unpublished students project (Bachelor and Masters Levels) are Asu (2017) which investigated the linkage between students leadership to emotional intelligence from among UITM students, Abang Sharif (2018) a final year degree project which looked at the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among employees at Jabatan Perangkaan Cawangan Sarawak, Edward Ulok (2018) on the emotional intelligence and job performance among the employees at Yayasan Sarawak, Mohd Zulkifli (2017) on the relationship between emotional intelligence and extrinsic career success among employees in a case of Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak and Ahmad Fadli (2017) on the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee motivation among support staff at UNIMAS. All these were identifying the emotional intelligence relationships with selected variables from the university setting and focused on selected Sarawak State Agencies rather than looking at female leaders as the main scope of study.

Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Practice and Organisation Culture Defined

Emotional intelligence was introduced by Daniel Goleman in 1990s when he published his book entitled "*Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*". Researchers have identified different terms which are interrelated to emotional intelligence namely intelligence alone, temperament, personality, information processing as well as emotional self-regulation. Emotional intelligence is defined as "the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade, 2008).

Emotional intelligence has become the subject of considerable interest to scholars and practitioners alike as an important antecedent to a variety of leadership and organisational outcomes. Considerable interest in the study of individual differences in general and (EI) specifically exists in the field of leadership. Leading researchers describe this concept as emotional intelligence. Caruso, Mayer, and Salovey (2002) demonstrated theoretically how emotional intelligence abilities encompass the skills needed by today's leaders. Caruso et al. (2002) further argued that leaders with higher levels of emotional self-awareness achieve higher levels of organizational performance.

Leadership according to various definitions offered by Kouzes and Posner (2012); proposed the idea that leaders are everywhere and leadership is about "relationship, credibility, and what you do every day" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). From the definition, the authors identified five practices of effective leaders including modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

Schein (2004) perceived leadership as so central to organisation culture that he refers to them as '*two sides of the same coin*'. He commented that in an age in which leadership is touted repeatedly as a critical variable in defining the success or failure of organisations, it becomes more important to look at how leaders create culture and how culture defines and creates leaders. He further contributes to the leader/manager debate by suggesting that leaders have the capacity to create and change culture if required, whereas managers act within a given culture. Schein acknowledged that culture is of course influenced by other factors, however, if for any reason an organisation's culture requires change, it is the job of leaders throughout an organisation to address this and it is from this perspective that 'leadership and culture are conceptually intertwined'.

Robbins and Judge (2013) defined an organisation culture as a shared perception of members of the organisation; a system of shared meaning; whereas to Schein (2010), organisation culture is a feature of the basic assumptions that are found or developed by a group to learn to deal with group problems from external adaptation and internal integration which have worked well.

Organisation culture has become essential in all activities and levels within an organisation and provides a practical framework for organising and directing an organisation's behaviour (Sunarsi, 2020; Paais and Pattiruty, 2020). Hence, organisation culture becomes an influential force within an organisation as it stimulates and supports specific types of individual and collective behaviour in any organisation. Thus, the importance of organisation culture constitutes a frame of reference and a model of behaviour that workers should emulate. It denotes and represents the social energy that pushed them to work or incapacitates them to represent the link between all workers in an organisation. Here, the organisation culture becomes a critical component of organizational behaviour, which influences leadership practice. Besides, leaders with high emotional intelligence can use organisation culture to enhance organisational excellence by providing employees with a sense of identity unity (Khan et. al, 2021; Muhdar and Rahma, 2015).

Organisational Barriers to Career Advancement for Women

Organisational factors are another set of barriers that can negatively affect a woman's career advancement. Advancement challenges women face in their career are due to poor organisational factors, prejudice policies and practices, and insufficient training opportunities to develop their capabilities (Ganiyu et al., 2018). Organisations may unintentionally create policies and programs that create barriers for potential women leaders. Organisational factors can either be a source of success or failure for women in the workplace as well which included work politics, mentoring, networking, sponsorship, women not supporting women, and leadership styles. For women to be successful, they must understand how to navigate the culture and values to offset the gender-based attitudes of male colleagues (Carbajal, 2018; Elias, 2018).

Although there are other factors that limit the women's career advancement, the most critical factor is on leadership itself. Examining the lack of women in leadership positions requires a detailed investigation of leadership styles, validation of leadership style choice, and accomplishments of successful women in leadership positions. Unfortunately, there is an absence of research exploring the leadership styles and behaviours to help women over gender biases as they work to achieve executive positions. and this becomes the underlying reason on identifying effective leadership styles for women reaching successive leadership roles. Competent women

should seek leadership positions; unfortunately, women's leadership potential has been misconceived, and their worth is often based on their gender and not their abilities to lead. Women are often stereotyped as sensitive, dependent, and lacking leadership abilities. This creates the idea that leadership styles associated with masculinity behaviours are better than those styles associated with femininity. Women are perceived as not having the right skills to lead; these skills are typically identified as masculine behaviours. Consequently, women who adopt male leadership styles are not always accepted. This creates the assumption that women can obtain top management positions by adopting male characteristics (Sanchez & Lehnert, 2018; Carbajal, 2018; Jones and Jones, 2017).

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

In the phase of this study, a quantitative methodology is applied. According to Creswell (1994), quantitative study is an "inquiry into a social or human issue based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalization of the theory holds true." Additionally for this study, the researcher would also like to understand the variables that influenced an outcome. It is applied to test or advance a theory through extensive reviews of literatures related to the subject being researched. The relationships between variables are measured and analyzed using suitable statistical procedure (DeCarlo, 2018). For the researcher to obtain and collect the quantitative data from the population of female leaders in Sarawak public services, self-administered approach and cross-sectional survey was utilized. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2009), this method of cross-sectional is useful for a huge sample size to which the targeted respondents of this study were the female leaders in Sarawak public services Grade 41 onwards.

The instrument for this study was developed using a combination of current verified measures based on a meticulous assessment of the past literatures. The formatting of the questionnaire divisions was designed based on the investigated variables. The questionnaire was divided into four (4) sections. Section A was on the demographic profile; Section B was on the Leadership Practice; Section C on the mediating relationship which was Organization Culture and finally Section D was on the Emotional Intelligence. All the variables were adopted from the renowned instruments based on their values of high Cronbach Alpha and references from literatures.

This research was utilizing the purposive sampling since the respondents were focusing on the female leaders from the public services in Sarawak. The sample size of 118 respondents was determined from G*Power (3.1.9.4). However, during the actual data distribution for the preliminary study, the total female leaders who answered the questionnaire were reported to be 250 respondents. The analysis presented in this concept paper was based on utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

From the overall Cronbach Alpha from a total of 250 respondents, the overall variables were .965 which constituted high reliability and validity and considered to be suitable in this study. This supported the excellent internal consistency as according to George and Mallory (2003). The table of the values is presented below.

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Values for All Variables

No	Variables	Cronbach Alpha values	No of items
1	Leadership Practice (Kouzes and Posner, 1997)	.964	30
2	Organization Culture (Cameron and Quinn, 2011)	.885	24
3	Emotional Intelligence (Wong and Law, 2002)	.913	16

	Overall:	.965	70
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Summary on the Analysis on Respondents' Profile

The results as shown below were based on the analysis from 250 respondents from the respondents' profile.

Table 2: Summary of Respondents' Profile

Variables	Descriptions
Age	Most of the respondents are between 31- 40 years old (f=93) with 37.2% which constitutes the majority
Marital Status	Most of the respondents are married with f=166 (66.4%)
Highest Education Level	The highest education level from among the respondents are Masters level with f=144 which constitutes 57.6% whereby Others is the least with only 1 respondent leading to only 4%.
Race / Ethnicity	Malays constituted the majority race with 139 respondents (55.6%) with Bumiputera Sabah has the least with f=3 (1.2%).
Income Level	Majority of the respondents with 56.4% are having the income level of more than RM5501.
Employment Agency	Respondents working with the Federal Agency responded with 39.6% with State Statutory Body as the least with 16%)
Length of Service	Respondents who are working between 1-5 years contributed most with 21.2% and those with more than 21 years of service is 20% from the overall total.
Current Position Level	Majority of the respondents are still in Grade 41 with f=73 which constituted 29.2%
Current Position Level	Most current position are others with 103 respondents of 41.2%.

Analysis Based on Tested Hypotheses

This research has conducted five tested hypotheses to investigate the relationships between the independent variable (leadership practice) and dependent variable (emotional intelligence). The summary for all the tested relationships was proven to be significance and therefore all hypotheses were supported.

Table 3: Hypotheses Relationships between Variables

Variables	Significance Levels
Model the way -- Emotional Intelligence	P<0.001
Inspire a Shared Vision --- Emotional Intelligence	P<0.001
Challenge the Process --- Emotional Intelligence	P<0.001
Enable Others to Act --- Emotional Intelligence	P<0.001

Encourage The Heart --- Emotional Intelligence	P<0.001
(Mediating Relationship)	P<0.001
Leadership Practice --- Organization Culture --- Emotional Intelligence	(3 steps mediation analysis)

From the relationships, it can be concluded that all tested hypotheses are significant and supported. However, to further investigate the mediator, the Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Sobel, 1992, Wu & Zumbo, 2008; Hayes, 2013) was utilized to examine if organization culture significantly mediated the relationship between leadership practice and emotional intelligence.

Hence, the results confirmed that organization culture significantly mediates the relationship between leadership practice and emotional intelligence ($Z = 6.27, p < .001$).

Implications of the Study and Future Research

The first implication of the study is on the theoretical by integrating the nexus of theoretical literatures between leadership practice and emotional intelligence; and the organization culture as the mediator. Salovey and Mayer (1990) were credited for introducing the term emotional intelligence which was made popular by Goleman (1995) to which he opined that it is required by all leaders to ensure efficient leadership practices. Added to this, Goleman (2004; 1998) analysed various studies on this topic around the globe. He found that what differ in outstanding leaders were in terms of emotional intelligence. Without the emotional intelligence, leaders can possess outstanding training, analytical skills or perhaps vast experience in completing their tasks, but they may not constitute as effective leaders.

This study contributed to the literatures in several ways on leadership practices and emotional intelligence. This study appeared to be one of the first (based on the researcher's knowledge) to examine the differences between practice practices and emotional intelligence of female leaders in Sarawak's public sector. Emotional intelligence behaviours in the workplace predicted one or more of the five leadership practices perceived by the female leaders in their respective work environment and organization culture. Further, this notion sheds more light on the unique attributes associated with women and the flexibility that they exhibited with their various leadership positions within their organization's hierarchy.

The findings of this preliminary study stated that the leadership practice, mediating organization culture and emotional intelligence are significant predictors. Further research should investigate other leadership characteristics using different measurement that must be conducted for developing leaders with high level of emotional intelligence. Additionally future studies may be carried out to add more variables that reflect positive leadership practices among leaders. The scope of study may be expanded to other specific groups of companies or organisations or women political representatives beside the public sectors as used in this partaking study.

Expanding the study into qualitative research may allow for a much-detailed exploration towards the complexity dynamics of emotional intelligence in leadership practices. This may surpass the confined of systematic methods and self-reported data. Hence, as a suggestion, direct engagement with corporate leaders or women political representatives can be made to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of emotional intelligence applications and challenges in the Malaysian perspectives. This will ultimately lead to a more grounded comprehension of the topic under study.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is thought to occur at different levels throughout an organization (Riches, 1997), and can be practiced by any individual, regardless of one's hierarchical position in the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Oshagbemi and Gill (2004) report that extensive research on leadership styles has focused on leaders in upper organizational levels alone, such as those of managers or directors. However, research on emotional intelligence among female leaders in the organization is not well explored in Malaysia. Leaders can influence others to work

together to achieve common goals. Examining the lack of women in leadership positions requires a detailed investigation of leadership styles, validation of leadership style choice, and accomplishments of successful women in leadership positions (Jones and Jones, 2017). Unfortunately, there is an absence of research exploring the leadership styles and behaviours to help women over gender biases as they work to achieve executive positions (Jones and Jones, 2017). Therefore, compelling and successful leadership needs emotional intelligence as it is essential to develop the organization culture in an accepted way between leaders and subordinates. Hence, with good leadership practice and high emotional intelligence, positive organization culture can be developed.

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