

Emotional Intelligence and Leader Effectiveness: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract: Malaysian public services have pledged to obey and practise the cores of their services while performing duties and ensuring a sound delivery system. A high-performance workforce in the public service emphasises leadership quality, high accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. A crucial aspect of leadership in an organisation determines how leaders can perform effectively. The way leaders evaluate complex situations and control their own and other people's emotions to solve conflicts in an organisation can determine how effectively they act. This paper discusses leaders' emotional intelligence and effectiveness in Malaysian public services and provides a conceptual framework. This paper provides a conceptual framework and suggestions on future studies between emotional intelligence and effective leadership in Malaysian public services.

Keywords Emotional intelligence, leader effectiveness, public services, Malaysia

Paper type: Research paper

1. Introduction

Malaysian public services have seen changes and reforms from their initial establishment in 1771, from assisting the British government on essential services to moulding their own public service after Malaysia's independence. Further reforms since then have allowed the implementation of new structures and improvements in line with the changes in the economics and political environment. The roles of civil services are dynamic and vary from policy-making and implementation to monitoring and enforcing the law. The public services function has changed from regulator to facilitator to the government due to increasing stakeholders need and globalisation impact (Ismail, 2011).

Issues on performance and leadership in Malaysian public service have gained more attention (Ramadass et al., 2017). Due to the changes in the ruling party and the global pandemic outbreak of COVID 19, the changes in Malaysia's political, economic, and health landscape require strong leadership in the public services to weather the challenges and meet people's expectations on the delivery system. The public service managers will be under heavy pressure to cope with frequent changes in policy and management (Fernandez et al., 2010). Hence, the governance within the public service organisations must have strong leadership with values and good emotional intelligence to manage employees and the stakeholders.

According to Public Complaints Bureau 2019, the increasing number of complaints from the public has been increasing, in which Malaysian public service received 8,992 complaints in 2019 compared to 6,387 complaints in 2018. These complaints pointed out the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the public delivery system. Malaysia is still struggling to have a commendable delivery system due to possible causes

of unethical behaviours such as corruption (Abdullah et al., 2018). Government employees need to be more transparent and effective in managing their delivery system.

Leadership in the public sector is necessary and crucial (Mau, 2019) because of the changes and reforms in the country, where government employees need to be alert on any latest issues. Leaders have struggled to manage the current crisis and global pandemic of COVID 19 because, besides having to manage other people, they need to manage their own emotions simultaneously (Dasborough et al., 2021). Public and private organisations need leaders with emotional intelligence to manage crises and manage self and others' emotions.

Effective leadership plays a key role in gauging leaders' capabilities in responding to their subordinates and handling the complications in the working environment. Leaders who understand other people's personalities and emotions will use it to improve their subordinates' motivation and achieve the intended outcome in the organisation (Ghani et al., 2016). Meanwhile, emotional intelligence is a necessary consideration for the management and is essential to improve the employees' interpersonal skills and teamwork in dealing with dynamic and complicated situations (Druskat et al., 2006).

2. Literature Review

A. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence relates to the understanding and controlling of emotions. The concept of emotional intelligence evolved from Thorndike (1920) research on social intelligence and expanded further when Gardner (1983) introduced multiple intelligence, which includes interpersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence is a subset of emotional intelligence in the form of self-awareness and empathy (Sharma, 2008). However, emotional intelligence is a more detailed task community to social intelligence (Mayer et al., 1999).

The ability-based model of emotional intelligence by Mayer & Salovey (1997) is the ability to accurately perceive, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access feelings when facilitating thoughts; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. The four branches can be combined to become experiential emotional intelligence, which is the ability to perceive, manipulate, and manage emotions based on emotional understanding (Brackett & Mayer, 2003).

Another theory by Goleman (1998) defines emotional intelligence as a learned capability within five sets of skills (self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy and relationship management). The general understanding of Goleman's theory is more to emotion rather than cognitive intelligence; however, the claims provided no empirical proofs (Newsome et al., 2000). The theory by Bar-On (2006) defines emotional intelligence as a mixed model with a set of non-cognitive skills, competence and abilities that affects one's ability to meet environmental pressures and demands. The Bar-on model covers five broad competencies: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability, and general mood. Both Goleman and Bar-on models are known as the mixed model because they combine mental ability, personality and character skills (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017).

The emotional intelligence ability model is the accumulation of behaviours and cognitive abilities that contribute to the success of recognising and managing emotions. Meanwhile, the mixed-model conceptualisation of emotional intelligence includes a constellation of non-cognitive competencies that enables one to cope with certain difficult situations, which is criticised because of a lack of scientific validation (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019; Newsome et al., 2000).

B. Leader Effectiveness

One of the challenges facing leaders today is to be able to position themselves emotionally and mentally to enable people in the organisation to adapt to the increasingly challenging and demanding environments. The organisation's outcome and performance will determine whether the leadership has been effective or otherwise. Effectiveness in leadership is the degree of success in meeting the objectives and the ability to

solve problems (Kwanya & Stilwell, 2018). Effectiveness is the standard for assessing leaders (Hogan et al., 1994). In simple terms, a leader is the one in charge and the one who convinces other people to follow. The effectiveness of leadership development is one of the important commitments of successful organisations (Ready & Conger, 2007). A leader, in simple terms, is the one in charge and the one who convinces other people to follow. Leaders must work horizontally together instead of in silos (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

The definition of leader effectiveness ranges from leaders traits and skills to behaviour, process, and environment (Barrow, 1977). Northouse (2016) defines leader effectiveness as how leaders are measured by achieving goals and objectives within a leadership context. Leader effectiveness is a longer-term concept that refers to the success rate of a leader's influence on subordinates toward achieving shared objectives (Vardiman et al., 2005), and it is based on the leader's attributes and the characteristics of the situation (Csoka, 1974). However, Derue et al. (2011) state that critiques prompted scholars to predict effectiveness beyond traits and consider the leader's behaviour.

Leader effectiveness depends on the type of leaders (task-oriented, person-oriented, path-goal, or contingency) and behaviours, where different behaviours produce different effects (Stogdill, 1975). According to Chemers et al. (2000), leader effectiveness requires complex judgement where leaders need to understand subordinates' needs and capabilities in order to provide appropriate guidance and encouragement. Mumford et al. (2000) state that leaders must be capable of recognising the social environment react to the complexities of that environment and possess other social performance skills (such as communication and persuasion, negotiation and coaching) in addition to social perceptivity and behaviour versatility as the main basis for effective leadership.

Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg (2005) argue that the leader's character as a group member is vital in leadership effectiveness. Ehrhart & Klein (2001) claim that subordinates prefer leaders with charismatic, relationship-oriented, and task-oriented characteristics. The charismatic leader communicates high-performance expectations to subordinates, confidence, takes calculated risks, and clear vision. Relationship-oriented leaders treat subordinates with respect, emphasise communication, trust and confidence in subordinates, and recognise and appreciate subordinates' contributions. Task-oriented leaders direct subordinates in the setting of performance goals, organising and scheduling tasks, providing technical and motivational support, and managing subordinates' activities.

C. Leader Effectiveness in Public Sector

The public sector's competitive edge is closely dependent on its delivery system's effectiveness and efficiency (Ahmad & Saad, 2019). Organisations such as government ministries and agencies are dynamic, and it holds their own unique working culture and has gone through several reforms and changes. Rapid changes require more effective leaders and a more productive and performing set of workers. Leaders cannot rely only on functional skills to become effective leaders but need socially and emotionally competent leaders who can regulate their own and others' behaviour according to situational changes (Kotzé & Venter, 2011).

Amid all the criticisms, public servants need to maintain their professionalism and integrity in serving the government and the people. Improving good governance and enhancing relationships with the public will increase the effectiveness within the public service and prevent corruption (Abdullah et al., 2018).

D. Emotional Intelligence and Leader Effectiveness

Mayer & Salovey (1997) assert that emotional intelligence leads to rational decision making. The ability-based model of emotional intelligence entails perceiving, appraising, and expressing one's own and others' emotions and using it to guide one's thinking and actions. This social interaction process is crucial in leadership, where an organisation's performance is determined by the ability of the leader to influence subordinates' behaviour (Yukl, 2012). Edelman & van Knippenberg (2018) argue that subordinates' emotion is one of the aspects of leadership challenges, and leader affective displays are crucial in

influencing subordinates. Leader affective displays are found to influence leadership effectiveness (van Knippenberg & van Kleef, 2016).

Research on the linkages between emotional intelligence and effective leadership has been growing steadily. Emotional intelligence has been linked with positive outcomes in the leadership literature, such as transformational leadership (Abdullah et al., 2015; Baba et al., 2019; Clarke, 2010; Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021) and servant leadership (Lee, 2019). Researchers also found that emotional intelligence significantly impacts leadership effectiveness (Bar-On, 2006; Dabke, 2016; Edelman & van Knippenberg, 2018; Kotzé & Venter, 2011). However, others claimed otherwise; Weinberger (2009) found that data from private manufacturing companies shows no relationship between a manager’s emotional intelligence and leadership style or the leader’s perceived effectiveness. Chatterjee & Kulakli (2015) found that sample data from public sector banks shows that the ability emotional intelligence does not have any relationship with perceptions of leadership style (transformational and transactional).

In describing transformational leadership, Bass (1990) suggests that leaders achieve exceptional motivation and commitment from followers by meeting their emotional needs. A study by Wong & Law (2002) suggests that leader emotional intelligence is related to follower satisfaction and extra-role behaviour. Hence, this paper suggests that a leader’s emotional intelligence can be associated with leader effectiveness.

3. Conceptual Framework

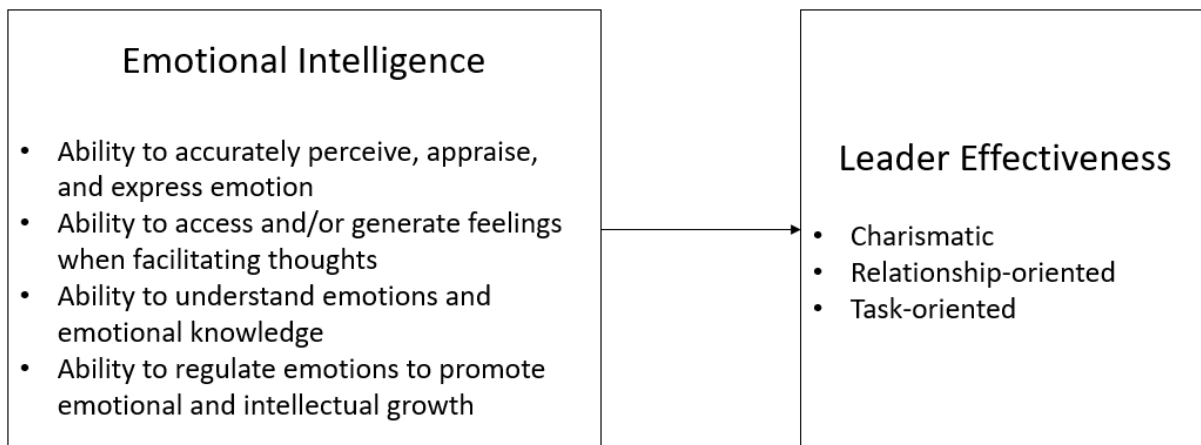


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Mayer & Salovey (1997) stated that the ability-model emotional intelligence consists of four branches. The first branch, the ability to accurately perceive, appraise, and express emotion, is to be aware of one’s own emotions and express those emotions and emotional needs accurately to others. The second branch, the ability to access and/or generate feelings when facilitating thoughts, is the ability to differentiate one’s various emotions and harness emotions to generate a practical and rational decision-making process. The third branch, the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, is to understand complex emotions and recognise the differences between them. The fourth branch, the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth, is to manage and engage particular emotions depending on their usefulness in a given situation.

The characteristics of leader effectiveness are divided into three preferences of charismatic, relationship-oriented, and task-oriented (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001). The charismatic leader can communicate high-performance expectations to subordinates, exhibit confidence, take calculated risks, and articulate vision. The relationship-oriented leader is able to treat subordinates with kindness and respect, emphasise communication, show trust, and provide recognition and appreciation to subordinates. The task-oriented

leader is able to guide subordinates in setting performance goals, plan and schedule work, provide necessary tools and assistance, and coordinate subordinates activities.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The research paradigm in this paper is leaning towards positivism and the deductive approach. This paper aims to examine leaders' self-report on emotional intelligence, subordinates' peer-rating on leaders' emotional intelligence, and an impact on leader effectiveness. The proposed unit of analysis is Malaysian public services junior and middle officers between the scheme of grades 41 to 54 working in the Ministries in Malaysia. The category of government officers in the sample data excludes armed forces, police, health, and education group. The leader and subordinate roles are based on the different grades of officers within the same unit or division. The sampling size is determined using the partial least squares structural equation method (PLS-SEM), where there is no fixed standard to identify the number of samples. The rule of thumb is equal or larger than ten times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure one construct. Still, prior research suggests a sample size of more than 100 is a good starting point.

This paper has an independent variable of emotional intelligence and a dependent variable of leader effectiveness. The emotional intelligence construct uses the ability model, and the proposed measurement uses a sixteen item scale adapted from Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) adapted from Wong & Law (2002). The leader effectiveness proposed measurement uses four items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 1995).

This conceptual paper focuses on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leader effectiveness in the public service context. A leader with high emotional intelligence should accurately perceive emotions, access feelings, understand emotions, and regulate the emotions of his/her subordinates to achieve organisation outcomes. In the public service, a leader manages his/her subordinate, top management, and stakeholders while at the same time rushing to meet multiple deadlines. More focus should be given to preparing and implementing government policies rather than entertaining office politics and micro-manage each subordinate. A leader who uses leadership skills to adapt to emotions and changes is identified to have balanced emotional intelligence skills (Jiménez, 2018). A part of leadership is the interaction between leaders and other parties (subordinate or stakeholders). The social interactions made emotional awareness an essential factor in the interaction quality (Wong & Law, 2002). An emotional intelligent leader can manage changes in an organisation while being attentive towards the behaviour and reaction of subordinates.

Emotional intelligence measurement in this study involves both leader and subordinate. Leader to self-report their emotional intelligence scale; while subordinate to provide peer-rating of the leader's emotional intelligence scale. The intention is not to compare merits between leader and subordinate but to foster more credible evaluations. One disadvantage of self-report measures is that people are not always honest with their own emotions and tendencies (O'Connor et al., 2019). However, this only happens when there is a mark for the correct answers. Fortunately, in the ability model measurement, there is no high score to achieve, which will limit the tendency to hide any emotions.

Accordingly, future studies may be carried out by having more variables that reflect the outcome of leader effectiveness. The scope of the study can be expanded to other specific groups of companies or organisations.

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