

LEADERSHIP IN MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION



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Performance of an organisation is the action or process of carrying out or accomplishing the improvement acts of an organisation via knowledge sharing, organisational agility and leadership style. In general, there are various leadership styles in managing an organisation, such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, autocratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, democratic leadership, bureaucratic leadership, charismatic leadership and situational leadership (see Table 1).

Table 1: Types of leadership style

Leadership style	Description
1. Transactional	Leader focuses on the management of the organisation
	Leader focuses on procedures and efficiency
	Leader focuses on working to rules and contracts
	Leader manages current issues and problems
2. Laissez-faire	Leader allows one or more people in the decision-making
	Leader maintains the final decision-making
3. Transformational	Leader acts rationally depending on the situation and environment
4. Servant	Leader encourages, supports and enables people to fulfil their full potential and abilities
	Leader helps people achieve their goals
	Leader works for the people
5. Democratic	Leader allows people to make their own decisions
	Leader is still responsible for the decisions that are made
	Leader allows high freedom and responsibility for people
	Organisation consists of competent people

6. Paternalistic	Leader acts as a "father figure"
	Leader believes in the need to support people
	Leader makes decision but may consult
7. Bureaucratic	Leader focuses on rules to define the organisation
	Leader focuses on hierarchy
8. Charismatics	Leader creates energy and eagerness in people
	Leader is well liked and inspires people
	Leader appeals to people's emotional side
9. Autocratic	Leader has the power to make decisions alone, having total authority
	Leader closely supervises and controls people

There is no such principle of "one size fits all" in selecting the best leadership style since each has different impacts on different segments of an organisation's goal, including performance improvement. Unfortunately, there are some leadership styles which are not suitable for improving the performance of an organisation, hence the need to combine according to the context suitability within the organisation.

Government organisation performance is critical to be at the forefront as it needs to be ready and prepared with sufficient knowledge and emerging skills as well as being committed and flexible to serve the people, where an appropriate leadership style is seen as among the main drivers towards a better and more positive working attitude in government servants. Generally, government organisations are defined as public service organisations operating in a complex external and internal environment, where vital assumptions tend to change due to dynamic developments in society.

However, in Malaysia, public complaints received in January and September 2016 on unsatisfactory quality of

service from government organisations are significant at 15.9% and 13.0% respectively and trends show a decrease in last five years. This apparently leads to increased quality demand pressures by taxpayers and the government itself, so it is important for Malaysian government organisations to look for ways to create higher quality organisations and to achieve sustainable high performance. High Performance Organisation (HPO) principles may provide the answer here as the HPO framework has been empirically validated in three Asian countries – Nepal, Vietnam and the Philippines. Research into the application of the HPO framework has also shown that organisations can expect considerably better financial and non-financial results.

HPO is defined as an organisation that achieves financial and non-financial results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of time of five years or more. This can be done by focusing in a disciplined way on that which really matters to the organisation, based on the five HPO characteristics (Figure 1), namely management quality, openness and action orientation, long-term orientation, continuous improvement and renewal as well as employee quality.



Figure 1: High Performing Organisation (HPO) framework

This article is aimed at appraising leadership styles towards improving performance by identifying the government servants' perception on current leadership styles in the Malaysian government organisation and examining the current performance of the Malaysian government organisation based on the HPO framework. It is expected that this article will provide valuable insights into the current performance of the Malaysian government organisation and suggest ways to improve performance based on the available principles of leaderships in the literature.

METHODOLOGY

One hundred government servants from two government organisations were involved in the questionnaire survey. The organisations were leading asset management, project management and engineering excellence for the nation and would deliver the country's public infrastructure. They were chosen as they had been given an important mandate by the government to become the agents of change in national development instead of being merely technical government organisations.

The questionnaire had gone through a pilot study on 15 government servants. It was divided into four sections. Section A was to obtain demographic data of respondents. Section B was to achieve objective 1, i.e. identifying the government servants' perception on current leadership styles in the government by randomly listing down the characteristics of each leadership styles as shown in Table 1. Section C was to achieve objective 2, i.e. examining the current performance of the Malaysian government organisation based on HPO characteristics randomly listed in Table 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 100 questionnaires sent, 92 were returned with 87 valid responses. The majority of respondents were male, 51 years old and above, Bachelor degree holders, had over 20 years' working experience and were from top management levels such as head of division/deputy head of division and director/deputy director (see Figure 2).

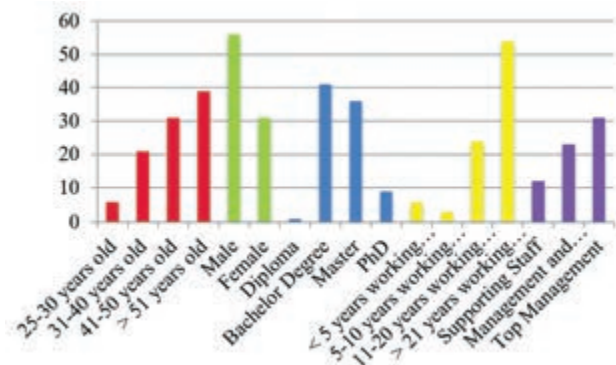


Figure 2: Demographic data of respondents

The leadership style was ranked based on the importance index (see Table 2), which showed that government servants perceived transactional leadership as the most practised by leaders in the Malaysian government organisation, followed by laissez-faire, transformational, servant and democratic.

On the other hand, the least practised was autocratic leadership, which showed a good sign of improvement in terms of positively impacting the overall performance of the government organisation.

Table 2: Perception on current leadership styles practised in Malaysian government organisation

Leadership Style	RII	Rank
Transactional	79.54	1
Laissez-Faire	78.62	2
Transformational	76.78	3
Servant	76.55	4
Democratic	76.03	5
Paternalistic	74.79	6
Bureaucratic	74.02	7
Charismatics	73.26	8
Autocratic	70.34	9

Table 3 showed that based on the HPO characteristics, the respondents claimed that the most obvious characteristic demonstrated by the leaders was employee quality, followed by long-term orientation, continuous improvement and renewal, management quality and finally openness and action orientation. The means recorded above 3.00 were considered high, which showed that the performance of the Malaysian government organisation resembling the HPO was acceptable. Yet more improvements were needed especially for the characteristics that recorded means lower than 3.20, namely leaders allow making mistakes, leaders are very effective, leaders welcome change and leaders always hold employees responsible for their results.

Table 3: Current performance of Malaysian government organisation based on High Performance Organisation (HPO) characteristics

No.	Management Quality	Mean
1	Leaders trusted by organisational members	3.90
2	Leaders have integrity	3.90
3	Leaders are a role model for organisational members	3.94
4	Leaders apply fast decision making	3.67
5	Leaders apply fast action taking	3.57
6	Leaders coach organisational members to achieve better results	3.71
7	Leaders focus on achieving results	4.05
8	Leaders are very effective	3.07
9	Leaders apply strong leadership	3.90
10	Leaders are confident	3.32
11	Leaders always hold organisational members responsible for their results	3.17
12	Leaders are decisive with regard to non-performers	3.31
Average Mean		3.54
No.	Openness and Action Orientation	Mean
13	Leaders frequently engage in dialogue with organisational members	3.57
14	Organisational members spend much time on dialogue, knowledge exchange and learning	3.46
15	Organisational members are always involved in important processes	3.55
16	Leaders allow making mistakes	2.63
17	Leaders welcome change	3.13
18	The government organisation is performance driven	3.55
Average Mean		3.31
No.	Long-Term Orientation	Mean
19	The government organisation maintains good and long-term relationships with all stakeholders	3.77

20	The government organisation is aimed at servicing customers as best as possible	3.77
21	Leaders have been with the government organisation for a long time	3.49
22	New leaders are promoted from within the government organisation	3.36
23	The government organisation is a secure workplace for organisational members	3.45
Average Mean		3.57
No.	Continuous Improvement and Renewal	Mean
24	The organisation has adopted a strategy that sets it clearly apart from other organisations	3.31
25	Processes are continuously improved	3.40
26	Processes are continuously simplified	3.49
27	Processes are continuously aligned	3.59
28	Everything that matters to performance is explicitly reported	3.49
29	Relevant financial and non-financial information is reported to all organisational members	3.68
30	The government organisation continuously innovates its core competencies	3.37
31	The government organisation continuously innovates its products, processes and services	3.40
Average Mean		3.54
No.	Employee Quality	Mean
32	Leaders inspire organisational members to accomplish extraordinary results	3.68
33	The resilience and flexibility of organisational members is continuously strengthened	3.77
34	The government organisation has a diverse and complementary workforce	3.68
35	The government organisation grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers	3.72
Average Mean		3.71
Overall Average Mean		3.52

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Malaysian government currently practises transactional leadership style by focusing on management, procedures and efficiency, rules and contracts as well as current issues and problems. However, based on the HPO characteristics, its performance is acceptable but more improvements are needed, specifically the promoting of creative thinking via acceptance and by being failure-tolerant, leaders can help government servants overcome their fear of failure and so create a culture of intelligent risk taking that leads to sustained performance. ■