

**TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
IN CONTEXT OF  
MALAYSIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

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## ABSTRACT

The pace of changing global environment is hectic and we forced to face the future with lot of uncertainties. Given this situation, competence technical and broad managerial abilities are remaining important but not more than leadership. The objectives of this study were to study and compare the leadership behaviour underlying the leader and subordinates' preference leadership behaviour in context of Malaysian construction industry with respect to transactional leadership and transformational leadership. This research also studied interrelationship between subordinates' preference leadership behaviour corresponding with subordinates' working experience, comparison between the leadership behaviour underlying the leaders between Consulting Firms and Contracting Firms as well as comparison between subordinates' preference leadership behaviour between Consulting Firms and Contracting Firms. A total of 80 questionnaires drawn from construction-related Technical Professional were collected and used. Frequency counts of the responses were computed, from which the mean score for each item was calculated. The relative importances were then ranked from the highest to the lowest for each topic concerned. The result shows that the leaders tended to demonstrate transformational leadership along with the subordinates also preferred transformational leadership. However the exercising degree of transformational leadership by the leaders was much lower than subordinates' expectation. The finding is aimed at providing a basic guidance and useful information for Malaysian construction industry leaders to have a better understanding as to followers' satisfaction.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

The issue has risen when we talk about why need leadership in engineering? The world clearly has changed and it continues to do so. The pace of changing global environment is hectic and we forced to face the future with lot of uncertainties. Given this situation, competence technical and broad managerial abilities are remaining important but not more than leadership. If there is one ingredient essential to the success of any organization, it is leadership (Goble, 1972). Success in today's international environment demands that engineers develop their competency skills in leadership. Leadership in engineering became immediate essential reading for engineers seeking practical information to hone those skill sets.

Owens (1982) had concluded the following regarding project leadership and related behavioral topics:

**Leadership behaviour** – Project manager cannot rely on one particular leadership style to influence other people's behavior. Different situations call for different approaches, and leader must be sensitive to the unique features of circumstances and personalities.

**Motivational techniques** – An awareness of unfulfilled needs residing in the team is required to successfully appraise motivational requirements and adjust a job's design to meet those needs.

**Interpersonal and organizational communications** – Conflicts situations occur regularly. A problem solving or confrontation approach (confronting the problem and not the persons), using informal group sessions, can be useful resolution strategy.

**Decision-making and team-building skills** – Participative decision making meets the needs of individual team members and contributes toward effective decisions and team unity.

Results of a national survey performed in America (NSPE, 1992) revealed that even graduates not only need to have sound technical base knowledge in different disciplines but also need to have specific skills that are highly valued by employer who hire them. The survey found that leadership is recognized as one of the skills that would merit more attention.

Moreover, a study conducted in Colorado (Ali, 1998) also emphasizes the significance of leadership on behalf of contractors. This study found that subcontractors prefer general contractors who exercising leadership in management and direction. Subcontractors have heavily considered the leadership issue in their bidding decisions. The good leadership exercising by contractors seems to reduce the subcontractors' investment risk and to facilitate subcontractors' work planning and coordination.

Odusami (2002) also identify the most important skill of an effective project leader as perceived by the significant actors in the construction industry. Odusami revealed that leadership and motivation had been put in an important place by three groups of respondents, namely clients, consultants and contractors. These three major groups that constitute the construction industry coincidentally considered leadership and motivation as importance skills for a successful project leader.

Goodwin (1993) remarked that, while there is no compelling necessity for a project manager to be a technical specialist, he should have some degree of technical skill encompassing the technological discipline on which the project is based. And yet, once the threshold is attained, human and conceptual skills appear to have more influence on the project manager's effectiveness than technical skill. Sahlin (1998), on the other hand, mentioned that a project manager does not need intense technical training but he/her needs leadership and management skills to perform effectively. Moreover, Wateridge (1997) in his literature review observed leadership skill appears as the most important skill that a project manager needs to possess.

A study performed in Malaysia (Lee & Tan, 2003) also revealed that the current employers tend to recruit engineering graduates who have a solid foundation on both technical and non-technical skills, wherein the leadership as one of the important soft skill that highly valued by leading engineering organization and yet not be sufficiently developed in engineering program. Consequently, there is a need to increase awareness and consciousness among Malaysian engineering as well as construction industry. Some type of formal leadership development program must be incorporated into education program as well as along with the on-the-job training in order to promote the leadership quality of related parties.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

We should aware of the importance of leadership in construction field after a reading of aforementioned descriptions concerning this topic. The key point to be made is that the project manager is expected to be the leader of the project. Successful project managers have used many different styles and methods of leadership, depending on their own personalities, experience, interpersonal skills and technical competence on the hand, and the characteristics of the project and its environment.

To effectively learn from successful leaders, we need to identify their beliefs (leadership), behaviours (action patterns), and batting order (sequences). Almost all management literature errs, misleads, or inadequately cover the needed information for several reasons. For one, focus is often on philosophies, instead of beliefs and behaviours (Mel Hensey, 1999). While each successful leader succeeds with his/her unique style and skill set, sure there are some common beliefs, behaviours, and sequences that we can identify.

Although the majority in community are not fully aware of the importance of leadership, or have not even thought about it, but apparently undeniable that leadership behaviour plays an important role in determines the success of a project manager as well as a leader. Also, Blanchard (1984) emphasizes on the followers with respect to leadership effectiveness. We must realize that it is the followers' onus to access the leader either accept or reject him/her. Ultimately, the response of subordinates to the leader determines how effective the leader will be. This is another focus that has been undervalued in most of theories.

Hersey, P. and Blanchard, J. (1982) suggests that effective style of leadership must take into consideration the maturity level of employees. For instance, in many contingencies such as in emergencies or when leading inexperienced followers, more direction, task oriented, and initiation were seen to be the more effective way to lead (Bass, 1985). So it is important for us to identify the interrelationship between followers' preference leadership behaviour corresponding with their maturity level. There are always many followers with different maturity level involved in a project. So it does always be a problem for a project leader, as well as a project coordinator to lead such a complex project team in an effective way.

Generally, the Consulting Firms and Contracting Firms are the principal actors of the construction industry. The key point to be made is that, consulting employees and contracting employees or so-called contractors are operating under distinct working environment. The difference with reference to working environment naturally will build the followers with different demand in concerned. Working environment seemed as a factor that effects appropriate leadership style adopted (Gharehbaghi and Mcmanus, 2003).

Goodwin (1993) suggests that the project manager must ensure the appropriate leadership style compatible with the contingency situation is adopted. A project leader should adapt to circumstance which their efficacy of leadership behaviour is attribute to the extent of understanding of their followers.

The perception of the leadership behaviour by Technical Professionals in Malaysia has become increasingly important owing to the rapid growing of Malaysian construction industry. A great understanding on what constitutes acceptable, effective and efficient leadership styles or practices in the construction industry could leads the man towards successful path. This report possibly can provide foundation information on this concerned subject.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

1. To study the leadership behaviour underlying the leader in Malaysian construction industry, whether transactional leadership or transformational leadership.
2. To study the subordinates' preference leadership behaviour, whether transactional leadership or transformational leadership.
3. To compare the leaders' leadership behaviour and subordinates' preference leadership behaviour with respect to transactional leadership and transformational leadership.
4. To study the interrelationship between subordinates' preference leadership behaviour corresponding with subordinates' working experience.
5. To identify and compare the leadership behaviour underlying the leaders between Consulting Firms and Contracting Firms.
6. To identify and compare subordinates' preference leadership behaviour between Consulting Firms and Contracting Firms.

## 1.4 Research Methodology

The research methodology conducted all the way of this study was compliance with the study aims and objectives. Basically there were four essential steps in conducting this study as briefly listed:

- The literature review
- Data collection
  - i. Questionnaire design
  - ii. Questionnaire distribution
  - iii. Questionnaire collection
- Data analysis and discussion
- Conclusion and recommendation

Figure 1.1 shown below illustrates the four essential steps in a proper and simple chronological order.

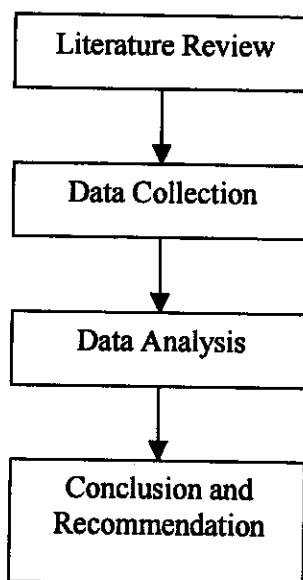


Figure 1.1: Research Steps



#### **1.4.1 Research Sample and Scope**

The samples in this study basically included both graduate and experienced Technical Professionals; those were operating in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor state. The samples were divided into two major groups, namely Consulting Firms and Contracting Firms. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 10.0, which is a statistical analysis and data management software package, was adopted in this paper for facilitating analysis process.

#### **1.4.2 Data Analysis and Discussion**

The data collected from designed questionnaire will be analysed by means of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 10.0 in terms of ranking, mean, frequency and percentage to generate the outcome of this study and consequently followed by discussion. The result had been discussed in various perspectives in order to have a comprehensive conclusion and be presented in Chapter VI and Chapter V.

#### **1.5 Conclusion and Recommendation**

Comprehensive conclusion, reasonable recommendation and limitation about this study based on the finding information that generated from the feedback of respondents were presented in Chapter VI. The future direction of this study also been discussed in Chapter VI.

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