

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

LEADERSHIP STYLES OF MILITARY HOSPITAL MANAGERS IN MALAYSIA AND ITS INFLUENCING FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

A good quality leader is vital in ensuring effective and efficient services rendered to patients. However, as to date, little is known on the leadership styles of managers in Military Hospitals in Malaysia and the region. The aim of this cross-sectional study was to determine the leadership styles and identify the influencing factors, among Military and Non-Military managers in five Military Hospitals in Malaysia. A pre-tested 20-item questionnaire was distributed to eligible managers in the hospitals. Based on the total score, the leadership style of managers was classified into Transformational (TS) and Non-Transformational style (N-TS). Among the 501 respondents, 375 (74.9%) of them were Non-military managers and 126 (25.1%) of them were Military managers. 46.8% (n=59) of the managers with military background practiced TS while only 27.7% (n=104) of Non-military managers have TS ($X^2 = 15.662$; $p < 0.001$). Managers aged 40 years and above, male, with higher educational level, served longer in the service, attended in-service training and participated in other capacity building activities were more likely to practice TS. Analysis using stepwise multiple logistic regressions proved that predictors of TS style are educational level (AOR=2.319; 95% CI=1.300,4.134), working experience (AOR=1.075; 95% CI=1.049,1.102), Military managers (AOR=1.759; 95% CI=1.104,2.802) and attended in-service training (AOR=2.070; 95% CI=1.369,3.129). In conclusion, the Military Hospitals have the benefit of being managed by Military managers that practice TS. Educational level and in-service training are two most important elements that influence the practice TS among the managers in these Military Hospitals.

Keywords: Leadership styles; Military Hospitals; Transformational; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Organisations need managers that could enhance the relationship between the managerial personnels and their subordinates in order to ensure that the objectives of the organisations are achieved. The leadership style of a manager is an important factor that determine the good relationships with workers^{1,2}. This is more crucial in an environment where managers and staffs are from different background of services like Military and Non-Military. A manager with an open-minded attitude to receive opinions from his subordinates is the style that is needed in the 21st century^{3,4}. However the differences between Military and Non-Military managers in view of giving commands and instructions to staffs could create disharmony and burnt out amongst the Non-military staffs in which they might not able to give full attention in fulfilling their duties and daily works⁵. Transformational leadership style (TS) was first introduced by Burns in 1974. It emphasises on certain elements such as charismatic, inspirations, intellectual and have sense of sympathetic to their subordinate^{6,7}. Burns in his study showed that the mutual understanding between managers and the staff is the key factor that contributes to the excellence performance of an organisation. This is because the right stewardship of a manager encourages staffs to

make changes to achieve the targets of the organisation^{8,9}. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), leadership style of a manager influences the achievement of health institutions to achieve excellent performance¹⁰. Managers should be opened to new ideas given by subordinates in continuing the best services rendered to clients¹¹. This may be achieved if the managers have qualities shown in the TS such as sympathetic, open minded and readiness to listen to ideas of their subordinates¹².

A study in Iran has shown that in 69.8% of the managers in seven Military Hospitals practised Non- transformational leadership style (N-TS). In the study, it was recommended that managers should enhance their skills on TS in order to ensure excellence performance of the Military Hospitals⁴. Meanwhile a study conducted in 20 Hospitals in Iraq among 576 medical practitioners showed that 95% of them migrated due to the way they were treated on their welfare affairs and the management does not practice open discussions in listening to their problems and issues¹³. In most private hospitals in Malaysia the application of TS is essential and proven to be one of the factors to achieve excellence performance and profits in optimising the rate of bed occupancies. This is due to the readiness of management to discuss and

receive new ideas from all level of managers¹⁴ .

The main objective of this study is to determine the leadership styles of the managers in five Military Hospitals (MH) in Malaysia. The secondary objective of this study is to determine the socio-demographic and services factors that influence the leadership styles of the managers. Age, gender, marital status and educational level are the socio-demographic factors in this study while the service factors include length of service experience, service grade, service scheme, service type, in-service trainings and participation in other capacity building activities such conferences, workshops and seminar to enhance their management skills. We hypothesise that socio-demographic characteristics and service factors are important predictors of leadership styles among managers in these Military Hospitals.

METHODS

This is a cross sectional quantitative study using validated and pre-tested self-administered questionnaire. The respondents are the general administrative managers with Military and Non-military background in the five MH. The first inclusion criteria are managers involved in the general administration from all grades of services. The second inclusion criterion is managers who are on-duty during the period when the questionnaires were distributed. The exclusion criteria are managers who refused to participate in the study and those who were on- leave during the study period.

The primary study variable that formed the dependent variable (DV) in this study is the leadership style. The independent variables are the socio-demographic factors (gender, age, marital status and education level) and service factors (length of service experience, grade, scheme, type, training and other capacity building activities).

The Leadership Questionnaire (LQ) was developed from studies on leadership style and theories conducted elsewhere^{6,7,15}. There were 20 items, which assess the leadership styles. All items in the questionnaires were using Likert Scale with five points for each item (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

The questionnaires were pre-tested in a pilot study conducted in two locations: Military clinic and another hospital under the Ministry of Defence. The questionnaire was validated and modified based on the outcome of the pilot study. The validated questionnaires were distributed to the five MH selected for this study. The estimated minimum sample size for this study is 327, which

is based on the number of managers that are eligible to take part in the study¹⁶. However, the actual number of respondents participated in this study was 501. This study has been approved by the Health Service Division, Ministry of Defence, and Malaysia. Before the questionnaires were distributed to all the hospitals, the researchers conducted briefing and discussion sessions with the Head of the Military Research Board in the Ministry of Defence. Instructions were then given to all Head of the Military Hospitals to identify and select eligible managers to participate in this study.

DATA ANALYSIS

All data received from respondents were keyed in and coded using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was carried out first by calculating the mean, median, standard deviation and the range the relevant quantitative variables. This is followed by bivariate analysis using chi-square tests to test the association between the DV (leadership style: TS and NTS) and the Independent variables (IV) (socio-demographic and service factors). Multivariate analysis was conducted using stepwise multiple logistic regressions to determine the strength of the relationship of all the IV and to control potential confounding effects of each of the IV. A p value of less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

RESULTS

A total of 501 respondents participated in this study, which exceeded the minimum number required samples size. On the demographic background of the managers, most of them are females (68.7%), age below 40 years (61.9%), married (88.2%) with Diploma level qualifications or below (86.4%) (Table 1). In term of service background, most of the respondents had served the Ministry for less than 20 years (77%) and were in junior service grade of 41 and below (89.2%) (Table 2). The senior ranked managers in grade 52 and above comprised only 6.2% of the total respondents. Out of the four types of service schemes, most of the respondents are in Medical-Non-Military scheme (49.9%), followed by Non-Military (25.0%), Military (20.6%) and Medical-Military (4.6%). When the schemes were combined into and re-classified into service types, most of the respondents were in Non-Military type of services (74.9%) and only 25.1% were in Military services. With regard to the in-service training, only 41.9% of respondents had undergone such training during their services. It was also found that 72.3% of the managers do not participate in any other capacity building activities such as conferences, workshops or seminars during their services.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Number	%
Gender		
Males	157	31.3
Females	344	68.7
Age		
Below 40	310	61.9
40 and above	191	38.1
Marital Status		
Singles	59	11.8
Married	442	88.2
Educational Status		
Diploma and below	433	86.4
First Degree and above	68	13.6

Table 2: Service Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Numbers	%
Years of Experience		
01 - 09	227	45.3
10 - 19	159	31.7
20 - 29	95	19.0
30 - 39	20	4.0
Service Grades		
Grade 54 and above	31	6.2
Grade 44 - 52	23	4.6
Grade 41 and below	447	89.2
Service Schemes		
Military	103	20.6
Non-Military	125	25.0
Military (Medical)	23	4.6
Non-Military (Medical)	250	49.9
Service Types		
Military	126	25.1
Non-Military	375	74.9
In-service Training		
Yes	210	41.9
No	291	58.1
Other Capacity Building Activities		
Yes	139	27.7
No	362	72.3

In this study, based on the 20 items in questionnaire on leadership style, the overall mean score is 73.8 (SD=11.031). The maximum score is 36 and maximum is 100. Participants with score more of 80 and above are considered as practising TS and those below 80 are N-TS practitioners. It was found the only 32.5% of the managers practiced TS while the vast majority were practicing N-TS.

Table 3 presents the relationship between demographic characteristics of the respondents and the leadership styles. Male managers, those age 40 and above and those with degree level education and above are more likely to practice TS. The relationship between Service factors and leadership style is given in Table 4. Managers in grade 44 and above, who had served longer, in the Military type of service, undergone in-service training and actively involved in other capacity building activities are more likely to practice TS.

Table 3: Socio-demographic Factors Influencing Leadership Style

Variables		Transformational Style		Non-Transformational Style		p value* (X ²)
		Nos	%	Nos	%	
Gender	Male	64	40.8	93	59.2	0.008 (X ² =7.055)
	Female	99	28.8	245	71.2	
Age	Below 40 years	88	28.4	222	71.6	0.012 (X ² =6.374)
	40 and Above	75	39.3	116	60.7	
Marital Status	Single	18	30.5	41	69.5	0.724 (X ² =0.125)
	Married	145	32.8	297	67.2	
Educational Status	Diploma and Below	122	28.2	311	71.8	< 0.001 (X ² = 27.621)
	Degree and Above	41	60.3	27	39.7	
Overall		163	32.5	338	67.5	

(* Chi-square test)

Table 4: Service Factors Influencing Leadership Styles

Variables		Transformational Style		Non-Transformational Style		p value* (X ²)
		Nos	%	Nos	%	
Years of Experience	1- 9 years	43	18.9	184	81.1	< 0.001 (X ² =46.134)
	10-19 years	57	35.8	102	64.2	
	20-29 years	51	53.7	44	46.3	
	30- 39 years	12	60.0	8	40.0	
Service Grade	54 and above	15	48.4	16	51.6	0.014 (X ² =8.497)
	44- 54	12	52.2	11	47.8	
	41 and below	136	30.4	311	69.6	
Service Scheme	Military	48	46.6	55	53.4	<0.001 (X ² =22.697)
	Military Medical	11	47.8	12	52.2	
	Non-Military	46	36.8	79	63.2	
	Non-Military Medical	58	23.2	192	76.8	
Service Type	Military	59	46.8	67	53.2	< 0.001 (X ² =15.662)
	Non-Military	104	27.7	271	72.3	
In-Service Training	Yes	93	44.3	117	55.7	<0.001 (X ² =22.744)
	No	70	24.1	221	75.9	
Other Capacity Building Activities	Yes	55	39.6	84	60.4	0.037 (X ² =4.336)
	No	108	29.8	254	70.2	
Overall	Overall	163	32.5	338	67.5	

Stepwise Multiple Logistic Regression was carried out to control the confounding variables on the relationship between socio-demographic and service characteristics with leadership styles (Table 5). The leadership style, which is the DV in the model is categorised into TS and N-TS type. Four factors were significant predictors of

leadership styles. These factors are educational levels, working experience, service types, and attendance of in-service training. Managers with degree qualifications are 2.3 times more likely to practice TS. Years of experience were entered into the model as continuous variables. Hence, for every one year of experience, the likelihood the

managers to practice TS is increase by 7.5%. Managers in Military service and those attended in-service training are 1.7 times and 2.07 times

more likely to practice TS, respectively than Non-military and those who do not attend in-service training.

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Logistic Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Leadership Styles

Independent Variables		Beta	SE Beta	AOR (95%Confidence Interval)	p value
Educational Level	Degree and Above (Ref: Diploma and Below)	0.841	0.295	2.319 (1.300 - 4.137)	0.004
Working Experience	Years of Working Experience	0.72	0.13	1.075 (1.049-1.102)	<0.001
Service Type	Military (Ref: Non-Military)	0.565	0.238	1.759 (1.104-2.802)	0.018
In-Service Training	Yes (Ref: No)	0.727	0.211	2.070 (1.369-3.129)	0.001

(R² =0.214)

DISCUSSION

Leadership style of managers is one of the important factors that may influence performance of an organisation. Apart from TS, managers may practice other leadership styles such as Transactional, Autocratic, Bureaucratic, Democratic, and Laissez-faire¹⁷. However, TS style seems to have a number of advantages compared to other leadership styles that was proven to provide the stewardship towards successful organisation. Managers with TS inspire members of the organisation through intellectual stimulation to work with full commitment that may result in improved productivity and performance¹⁸.

In this study, we determined the socio-demographic and service factors that may predict the leadership styles of managers in the Military Hospitals. Age, gender and educational levels were the three socio-demographic factors that have significant relationship with leadership style. Males and older managers were found to be more likely to practice TS in the bivariate analysis. However, the relationship between age and gender with leadership style were not found to be significant in the Stepwise Multiple Logistic Regression. This means that other factors might have confounded the relationship. Educational level of the managers is an important factor that linked to leadership style. Managers with degree level education were 2.3 times more likely to practice TS than those with lower educational level. Higher educational level received by managers may provide the skills and exposure to encourage them to practice TS. Managers with higher level of education may have better opportunities of being trained to be more innovative, apply more intellectual stimulation and use motivational tools in their management approach. This can be achieved with higher-level education that they received when they join the service.

Three service factors were found to be important predictors of leadership style. These are service type, working experience and in-service training. Managers with Military background were found to be more likely to practice TS. These findings are similar to studies done in USA¹⁹ and Indonesia¹². One of the possible reasons for the Military managers with medical training were inclined to practice TS is the need to conform to medical ethics that require them to be more flexible and innovative in managing their patients. Furthermore, patients receiving treatment in these MH are not only Military personnel but also their family members, military veterans and general population in the surrounding areas of the hospitals. Hence the Military managers in the hospitals have to adapt their leadership style towards serving the complex target groups.

Length of service is another important factor that predict leadership style among the managers. Managers who have served longer are more likely to practice TS. Senior managers are normally faced with different kind organisational issues that are more likely to be non-technical but humanistic and conceptual in nature. Hence, they have to be more innovative in their approach. TS fits well in the decision- making process in solving complex organisational issues.

The study also highlights the importance of in-service training. Managers who attended in-service training were two times more likely to practice TS. It seems that the content of the training programmes designed for these managers were effective in moulding them to apply flexible and innovative approach in their management practice. In-service training is an important element in building a workforce that can move the organisation towards service excellence through the practice of TS. One of the key success of the excellent organisations lies on the opportunity for the staff to undergo capacity building programme and continuous learning²⁰. Hence the top management in MH should provide more

opportunities for the Military and Non-military managers to attend in-service training. Organizations should emphasize on education and appropriate in-service training modules to enhance the capacity and skills of their workers²¹. It is also noted that in closed-service organization like MH, manager's level should be given exposures through courses, seminars and trainings to assist them in building up a better leadership and management styles. The influence of trainings to enhance manager's competencies is also shown from Malaysian Government Policies that allocates seven days per year for attending courses as stipulated in Public Service Policy on Training²².

Another important factor that should be considered is to give more opportunities to Non-Military managers to attend in-service training. This is because in MH, Military managers in more senior positions may have higher opportunity to attend in-service training as compared to junior non-military managers. There are a few limitations of this study. The study used self-administered questionnaire in assessing the leadership styles of the managers. The respondents were asked to respond to questionnaire with honesty. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of response bias that some of the respondents might choose to respond to the questions based on the accepted norms rather than their actual practice. Another important factor is that the respondents might have recall bias when answering questions that require them to reflect on their past actions in dealing with organisational issues.

For future studies, it is recommended that mixture quantitative and qualitative method should be carried out in order to provide more in-depth analysis of the issues that influence leadership style of the managers. One important factor that should be explored is the organisational culture. It is one of the important factors linked to leadership style of managers and has impact of organisational performance²⁴.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that overall, TS is practised by 32.5% of managers in the MH. Gender, age and educational level of the managers were significantly associated with the leadership style. Years of working experience, service grade, service type, service scheme, attendance of in-service training and participation in other capacity building activities were the service factors that had significant relationship with leadership style. Four factors were predictors of leadership style: Managers with higher educational level (2.319 times), attendance of in-service training (2.070 times), Military managers (1.759) and years of working experience (1.075 times) were more likely to practice TS. Hence,

senior managers with higher educational level should provide guidance to the Non-military, younger and lower educational level managers in order to mould them to practice TS. In-service training is an important element to assist the managers to practice TS in their career. It is recommended that future studies should employ mixture of qualitative and quantitative method in order to provide in-depth analysis on factors that have influence on the leadership styles of the managers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing financial interest. This is a self-funded research.

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