

LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY OF TEAM LEADERS IN
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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To my beloved husband, parents, parents-in-law, late son, children
and family



PTTA UTHM
PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUN AMINAH

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to identify the important leadership capabilities for Malaysia construction industry team leaders. This research used exploratory sequential mix-method research design which is qualitative followed by quantitative research method. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured in-depth interview was selected and purposive sampling was employed in selecting 15 research participants involving team leaders and Human Resource Managers. Qualitative data was analysed using content and thematic analyses. Quantitative data was collected using survey questionnaire involving 171 randomly selected team leaders as respondents. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics consisting of t-test, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Pearson Correlation, Multiple Regression and Structured Equation Modeling (SEM). This study found that personal integrity, working within industry, customer focus and quality, communication and interpersonal skill, developing and empowering people and working as a team were needed leadership capabilities among construction industry team leaders. The research was also able to prove that leadership skill is a key element to develop leadership capability. A framework was developed based on the results of this study, which can be used as a guide by employers and relevant agencies in enhancing leadership capability of Malaysia construction industry team leader.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengenalpasti keupayaan kepimpinan yang penting untuk pemimpin kumpulan dalam industri pembinaan di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah gabungan penerokaan berurutan iaitu kualitatif diikuti dengan kaedah penyelidikan kuantitatif. Di dalam fasa kualitatif, temubual bersemi-struktur telah dipilih dan teknik persampelan bertujuan telah digunakan dalam memilih peserta kajian yang terdiri daripada 15 orang dalam kalangan pemimpin kumpulan dan Pengurus Sumber Manusia. Kualitatif data dianalisis dengan menggunakan kaedah analisis kandungan dan tematik. Data kuantitatif diperolehi menggunakan kaedah soal selidik melibatkan 171 orang responden yang dipilih secara rawak. Data tersebut dianalisis menggunakan analisis diskriptif dan inferensi merangkumi Ujian t, Analisis Varian Sehala (ANOVA), Korelasi Pearson, Regresi Pelbagai dan Model Persamaan Berstruktur (SEM). Kajian mendapati bahawa integriti peribadi, bekerja di dalam industri, fokus pelanggan dan kualiti, komunikasi dan kemahiran interpersonal, pembangunan dan memperkasakan pekerja serta bekerja di dalam kumpulan merupakan keupayaan kepimpinan yang diperlukan oleh pemimpin kumpulan dalam industri pembinaan. Kajian membuktikan bahawa, kemahiran kepimpinan merupakan elemen penting dalam membangunkan keupayaan kepimpinan ketua kumpulan. Kajian ini juga dapat membuktikan bahawa kemahiran kepimpinan adalah elemen utama untuk membangunkan keupayaan kepimpinan. Kerangka kajian telah dibangunkan berdasarkan keputusan yang diperolehi dalam kajian ini, yang mana boleh digunakan sebagai panduan kepada majikan dan agensi-agensi yang relevan dalam meningkatkan keupayaan kepimpinan pemimpin kumpulan dalam industri pembinaan di Malaysia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIDB	-	Construction Industry Development Board
HRM	-	Human Resource Manager
TVE	-	Technical and Vocational Education
ADA	-	Assistant Director of Administration
ILME	-	Institute Leadership and Management England
NCVER	-	National Centre for Vocational education Research
NIEP	-	National Improvement Efficiency Partnership
DIF	-	Individual Differences Framework
FEMA	-	Federal Emergency Management Agency
LMX	-	Leader-member Exchange



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The construction industry is in a new arena of a challenging socioeconomic, cultural, political, and business environment. In addition to this complex array of challenges, the construction industry remains a key development industry with significant economic, social and environmental responsibility, especially as the pace of urbanization and resource depletion increases (Arain, 2008).

In the construction industry, the building profession has played an indispensable role that determines the performance of the industry. One of the most important research areas receiving relatively little attention in the construction industry is leadership. Leadership is often considered as a social exchange process in leader–follower relation. Leadership, further complicated by issues of social and cultural differences, has been found to impose significant impact on the performance of construction projects and is pivotal in determining project success (Chan and Tse 2003).

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation to make it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership attributes, such as belief, norms, values, ethics, character, knowledge and skills. Nowadays, major industrial players are seeking a special breed of leaders to head their organisations. They are looking for individuals who possess critical ‘adaptive’ leadership qualities to help them prepare for a

challenging environment.

Davis (2002) contends that leadership capability will not undergo drastic changes rather, the organisations should expect a sharpened focus on current skills necessary to accommodate intensified conditions in business and society. The organisation therefore need to be more sensitive about leadership qualities and capabilities, besides fulfilling growing needs by creating diverse workforces and implementing technology improvements.

Capable managers are more confident and effective in dealing with their often complex and demanding jobs. They display higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment and engagement. Organisations with a strong commitment to leadership and management development find that the returns are positive and high, in terms of organisational productivity, organisational learning, continuous improvement and quality and customer service. In addition, leadership and management development has benefits that extend into the broader community (Callan, 2005). Good leadership also lies in giving attention to the rank and file. A leader should realise that the success of an organisation comes from workers who possess specific sets of skills and varieties of expertise.

The Bonn Declaration 2004, as cited by Bhuwanee (2005), claimed that by recognising that the vast majority of the worldwide labour force including knowledge workers, require technical and vocational knowledge and skills throughout life; it was agreed that skills development leading to age-appropriate Technique and Vocational Education (TVE) should be integral to education at all levels. It also affirms that preparation for work should equip people with the knowledge, competencies, skills, values and attitudes to become productive and responsible. Recent reports into TVE leadership are beginning to describe the range of staff in training organisations. Some reports focus on the primary findings of those reviews in terms of drafting a set of capabilities required of the executive, managers, teaching staff and support staff to be able to respond to changes, as well as competing priorities and tensions.

In Malaysia there has been a lot of research conducted on leadership, but less focus on leadership in the construction industry. Mahyudin and Norafidah (2010) emphasised the importance of leadership as a generic skills in construction industry. However, several studies outside Malaysia show that TVE workforces, especially at the managerial and supervisory level, require an extensive range of leadership and management capabilities, as well as professional and more generic skills to meet the continued challenges of change and innovation, and to build strong and sustainable organisations in the future.

Many studies have been carried out on human skills in project management. Some studies suggested critical skills such as problem solving and good communication for project managers (Cowie 2003; El-Sabaa 2001; Strohmeier 1992;); whereas others recommended effective leadership as a critical factor in project management (Keegan and Den Hartog 2004; Zimmerer and Yasin 1998; Cleland 1995). Rowlinson et al. (1993) study on the leadership style of construction managers in Hong Kong revealed that human skills are of paramount importance in project management.

In 2003, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) published a paper focusing on transferable skills as the essence of employability that are relevant at different levels of organisational hierarchy. It discussed sixteen generic skills including leadership. This study shows that the most direct evidence is to be found in research that looks at employers' increasing demand for generic skills. The increasing demand was brought about through changes such as the emergence of the flexible high performance workplace, as well as in the organisation and management of industries.

One of the mandates of Malaysia's Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) is to serve as a gateway for Construction Industry Players to get involved in the international construction marketplace, with the aim of enabling them to earn leadership positions in overseas ventures; as well as maintaining an open exchange of information with construction leaders worldwide. This however, calls

for a better understanding of leadership and leadership skills required in the national and international construction industry (CIDB, 2007).

The Minister of Works, Y.B. Dato' Seri Shaziman Abu Mansor stated that to implement the 10th Malaysia Plan, the Ministry will set the stage for a major national structural transformation, towards that of a high-income economy. To achieve this, the construction industry must invest in and give priority to its human capital enhancement. The industry needs to transform its resources in the area of knowledge, entrepreneurship, competency and innovation. With about 64,000 contractors and 800,000 workers, this includes professionals, supervisors, skilled and unskilled workers, the construction industry is seen as significant contributor to Malaysian economy.

It has been said that the construction industry must unleash its potential as a source of wealth creation and provide opportunity for the betterment of quality of life. In ensuring the quality of workmanship at construction sites, supervisory skills of site supervisors need to be enhanced (The 7th Malaysia Construction Sector Review and Outlook Seminar, 2010). Dato' Seri Shaziman also stated that to match business growth and excellence overseas, we must recognize and act on the importance of continuously developing niche expertise and capabilities. Undoubtedly, the role of research in determining the specific leadership skills and the needed core capabilities cannot be over-emphasized.

1.2 Background of Study

The pace of change today is fast and we are forced to face new challenges with a lot of uncertainties. The proposition that the economic and social wellbeing of society, and those in it, is substantially dependent on the effective and efficient performance of organisations of all kinds, which in turn depend on adequate or excellent leadership and management capability that can be learned and developed, would be accepted by many as likely to be true in common sense and everyday

observation (Burgoyne, *et al.*, 2004). Developments in the construction industry such as the growing volume of activity, rising number of active stakeholders, technology advancement, global competition, and demand for fast-track completion, have created many distinct challenges. Recent reports show that TVE workforces, especially at the leadership and supervisory levels, require an extensive range of leadership and management capabilities, as well as professional and more generic skills, to meet the continued challenges of change and innovation, to build strong and sustainable organisations for the future (Callan, 2005).

Quality is often related to the main competitive strategy (Petersen, 1991) and many high performance organisations have made quality one of the main components in their competitive strategies (Chen & Lu, 1996; Madu, 1998). The ability of an organisation to produce quality services and products is one of the key factors to compete in the international market. Many concepts and techniques have been adopted to improve the standard of services and quality of product. One of them is ensuring that organisations adopt quality management systems in all activities of the organisations (Ilias *et. al*, 2006). Team leaders of an organisation have the prime responsibility for the quality created by the organisation. Only team leaders have sufficient authority, influence, and access to information to begin quality improvements and maintain major organisational change.

Human skills are of paramount importance as project managers need to interact with people frequently. About 88% of project leaders spend more than half of their working time interacting with others (Strohmeier 1992). This high level interaction demands that project managers are able to lead effectively and manage conflicts continuously in order to build good relationships and ensure the success of their projects. Limsila and Ogunlana, (2008), citing the works of other researchers, stated that the success of a construction project depends on several factors, one of which is the competencies of project managers. Their personalities, characteristics, skills and leadership styles also have much impact on project outcomes. Normally, a project is expected to be completed on time, within budget and meet with technical specification or customer satisfaction (Tukel and Rom, 2001). However, the difficulty and uncertainty of most construction projects creates daily problems for the

professionals who manage them (Chan and Chan, 2004). There is therefore a need to equip the team leaders with hard (technical) as well as soft (leadership and management) skills in order for them to effectively respond to these challenges.

Construction team leaders work in teams and assume leadership roles. They deal with various project stakeholders and regularly get involved in sensitive decision making and dispute resolution processes. In order to effectively deal with these, the team leader will need support from all levels in the organisation. It is also important to bear in mind that many other workers not recorded as leaders by occupation, need leadership and management skills. Most professionals manage projects, programmes or work and often staff while using their professional skills. Only a minority of them however, would be recorded as supervisors or team leaders, but they still need leadership and management development (Burgoyne *et. al.*, 2004).

A recent report from City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development (2008) shows that most Malaysian employers believe that a 'skills crisis' exists. They are less satisfied with the quality of training their employees receive in generic skills. They also pointed out that training provided falls short of enhancing the soft and generic skills of the individuals.

The construction industry generates impetus to the Malaysian economy. For many years it has played an important role in improving the quality of life for Malaysians through multiplier effects to other industries. Success in today's international environment however, demands that construction industry team leaders develop their competency skills in leadership. The demand for such high level of leadership competency is further supported by the fact that employers tend to recruit engineering graduates who have a solid foundation in both technical and soft skills, where leadership is one of the important elements in soft skills that is highly valued by leading organisations (Lee and Tan, 2003).

Leadership affects corporate culture, project culture, project strategy, and project team commitment (Shore, 2005). Therefore, the success of a project can be

seen to mainly depend on human factors, leadership and effectiveness of project teamwork. A study carried out at Cambridge University's School of Business and Economics found that 80% of project failures are caused by poor leadership (Zhang & Faerman, 2007) citing primary leadership skills, lack of teamwork, weaknesses in communication and inefficiency in problem solving as major factors.

The importance of leadership qualities has yet to be looked at in depth in Malaysia (Lyn, 2007). Lyn made a comparison between Malaysian and Australian team leaders on leadership and stated that team leaders have an obligation to meet people and maintain interaction with them, as a leadership requirement. Lyn also stated that Malaysian team leaders are generally contented with current local practices and knowledge levels, whereas Australian team leaders are likely to strive for more knowledge.

In comparison to other fields of research, studies undertaken on the subject of leadership in relation to professional practice are very limited in the construction industry in Malaysia. In view of this, (Grant, 1984; and Djebarni-unpublished thesis, 1993) expressed their concerns on the little research being done on leadership in the industry. Bresnen et. al. (1986) remarked that leadership studies have rarely focused on the role of site managers as leaders of their teams, and the range of managerial styles adopted on site. This remains true up to this date, and is consistent with the result of preliminary interviews carried out in this research with Abu Bakar bin Hashim, an expert in leadership and a senior lecturer in the Faculty in Education at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. said he stressed that leadership problems emerge in all organizations, whether big or small. The essential problem in any industry is they do not realize how important leadership skills are for their organizations. In the construction industry, they concentrate more on technical skills and other soft skills, but less in leadership. This has happened because top level managers have limited knowledge and information about leadership. Meanwhile Zakaria bin Mohd Yusof, environment construction lecturer in Faculty of Built Environment at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia stated that project leaders and site supervisors rarely apply what they learned and repeat the same mistakes in leadership, resulting in project failure. Zakaria further stated that some top level leaders/managers blame the bottom level

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