

The Effect of Transformational Leadership Style in Crisis Management: Does Gender Matter?

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Abstract

Leadership qualities in crisis management have become an important aspect to ensure the effectiveness of organizations in dealing with crises. According to Shift 8 for education at the primary to secondary school level and Shift 6 for higher education, the government emphasizes the need to transform the capabilities and capacity of leaders in an educational organization in Malaysia. One of the capabilities needed by the leaders in educational organizations to perform their job nowadays is crisis management competencies. Despite the importance of leadership skills in crisis management, there has been few research focused on

this topic, particularly in educational institutions. Because of that, this research has been conducted to bridge this gap. The primary goal of this study is to investigate the implementation of a transformational leadership style by leaders during crisis management in their organisation as well as the impact of the implementation on subordinates and the influence of gender on the implementation of that style. Qualitative methods which are interviews through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were conducted involving six (6) informants from different educational institutions to identify themes. Studies have shown that, among the four characteristics of transformational leadership, only three of them, which are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation, were regularly practised by the leaders, with less implementation of the characteristics of individualized consideration during crisis management. The findings also show that transformational leadership positively impacts subordinates during times of crisis. In addition, the gender of the leader had a significant impact on the findings, with male leaders demonstrating more transformative leadership styles during crisis management than female leaders. Finally, this study's findings will contribute to a field of study in which many educational institutions can use them as a guide to evaluate and improve the quality of their future leaders.

Keywords: democratization education, student leadership, public university, Malaysia

1. Introduction

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, is a guideline for the Malaysian Education System in Malaysia. According to Shift 8 for education at the primary to secondary school level and Shift 6 for higher education, the government emphasizes the need to transform the capabilities and capacity of leaders in an educational organization in Malaysia (MOE, 2013). One of the need competencies needed by the leaders in educational organizations to perform in the jobs nowadays is crisis management competencies.

Living in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world teaches us to be prepared for uncertainty. The disruption or crisis is not limited to the health crisis, earthquakes, floods, natural crises, civil conflicts, cultural constraints and social restrictions but there are many more that we may face in the future (Rachmawati et al., 2021 and Bozkurt et al., 2020). It is a new normal that is real and maybe around for a long time (Schwantes, 2020). A crisis cannot be avoided by anyone including organizations (Pelín, 2016). There are two types of crises that may be faced by an organization which is an external and internal crisis. Ahmady (2020) defined an external crisis as an event that occurs caused by external factors such as terrorism or natural disasters and an internal crisis is an event occur caused by internal factors of that organization such as product defects or corruption.

Organizations need to make sure that they are well prepared to face any possible crisis in the future either internal or external crisis. Organizations must make sure that their subordinates, especially in leader positions, have a good knowledge of crisis management to avoid the organization's failure during a crisis. According to Mazen, J (2017), crisis management is the management activity that puts decision-makers in a high-stakes decision-making situation while requiring them to minimize the potential consequences for a wide range of high-stake elements. Some of the obvious organizational consequences of a failure in managing a crisis

are loss of reputation, financial loss or even death (Lee et al., 2021).

The leadership qualities in crisis management become an important aspect to ensure the effectiveness of organizations in dealing with crises (Manja, 2020). According to Dirani et al. (2020), news, as well as social media, have exposed the failure of some leaders to save their organizations during times of crisis and the main reason for this failure is the lacking of leadership preparation to deal with the complexities of a crisis. Thus, it is crucial for any organization to have competent leaders to maintain their good reputation and uphold performance standards. Gani et al. (2020) agreed that to enhance the quality of organization delivery and capabilities, an organization must make sure that their employees especially in leaders' positions at every level are competent in crisis management. This statement is also agreed by Bundy et al. (2017) who stated that crisis management is an important aspect of management in any organization.

Besides of leader's skills in managing a crisis, the gender of the leader is also seen to give influence on the effectiveness of crisis management. One of the most significant current discussions in crisis management and leadership are the findings which state that women tend to be more effective than men as leaders during uncertain times and when compared to men, women leaders expressed more empathy and confidence in their briefings in time of crisis management (Sergent & Stajkovic, 2020). These findings are also in line with other studies conducted by Hoobler and Burno (2019) and Ryan et al. (2016) which stated that in comparison to men, women's more desire to help others, can balance risk, resilience to bounce back from failure and also tend to be communal and sharing whereas men are agentic and independent.

Despite the importance of leadership capabilities in crisis management to reduce the impact of an unexpected event, there is little research that has focused on leadership capabilities as an important factor in crisis management, especially in an educational institution (Beauchamp et al., 2021). Previous studies in educational institutions regarding crisis management were largely focused on the sudden impact of crisis (Moerschell & Noval, 2020) such as on subordinates and student achievement.

2. Issues

Placing the wrong leader in an organisation is like putting the organisation on the end line (Bowers et al., 2017). Dealing with crises is one of the axes of interest in management as it requires the presence of a special type of leader who is characterised by many skills (AbdElaal et al., 2021). In Malaysia, there is no specific model or framework, particularly one that emphasises leadership style or leadership characteristics, to serve as a guideline for leaders in crisis management, particularly in educational institutions (Gani et al., 2020). This situation needs to be improved because sometimes a leader's failure to manage a crisis is not due to a lack of proper guidelines, but rather to a failure to implement those guidelines (Paraskevas, 2006) due to a lack of specific competencies to implement them.

Even though there has been much research on the development of leadership behaviours, skills, knowledge or competencies, there has been little research in that area which focuses on

crisis management (Dirani et al., 2020), particularly in the context of educational organizations (Angela et al., 2021). Using a general model or guideline of a leader's competencies as a reference in managing an organization's crisis is highly impractical since the competencies required by a leader are different according to the business nature of each organization. Each organization must ensure that the competencies model or guidelines in crisis management for their organizations truly fit with their organizations (Ashurova & Fayzullaev, 2021). In leadership, capability development references such as competency models are very important since they are more reliable predictors of performance compared to academic ability and knowledge tests (Sanghi, 2007).

With the context, significance, and gaps discussed above, this study provides an exciting chance to explore the effective leadership style in crisis management by focusing on the application and impact of the transformational leadership characteristics and also the influence of the leader's gender on these characteristics. Due to the limited study engaging educational institutions on this issue (Angela et al., 2021), this study has selected educational institutions as the focus of the study.

3. Research Question

The questions of this study are as follows:

1. Do leaders in Malaysia's education organizations use transformational leadership styles when dealing with crises?
2. What is the impact of a transformational leadership style on subordinates used by leaders in Malaysia's educational organizations during crisis management?
3. How the gender of the leader influences the use of a transformational leadership style during crisis management.

4. Methodology

This study uses the qualitative method to collect the data. The research design chosen by the authors is a literature review and a descriptive survey using the field research method through interviews. In addition, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews were conducted in Focus Group Discussion to obtain more in-depth input (Sargeant, 2012). Focus Group Discussion involves natural groups of participants which consist of six (6) participants from 6 different educational organizations in Malaysia. Conducting a Focus Group Discussion with a natural group may reveal discrepancies and similarities between what people say and how they act and how other participants react and comment in response (Eeuwijk, V et al., 2017). Participants were selected using non-probability sampling, which is purposive sampling with the below criterion:

- a. Have an experienced work in crises with both female and male superiors in an education organization
- b. Have more than 5 years of experience working in educational organizations

Participants worked in government and private educational organizations and experienced working during crises with both male and female leaders. The number of informants for

Focus Group Discussion is based on a suggestion from Eeuwijk et al. (2017), which is 6–12 informants. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. The Focus group Discussion is being conducted through the online platform.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Participant	Gender	Age	Post
P1	Female	38	Senior Officer in MOE
P2	Female	37	Lecturer in Private Higher Educational Institution
P3	Female	37	Secondary School Teacher
P4	Female	37	Lecturer in Public Higher Educational Institution
P5	Male	37	Primary School Teacher
P6	Male	37	Secondary School Teacher

Based on the informants' profiles obtained during data collection, it was found that their ages ranged from 37 to 38 years old. They are made up of four females, and the rest are male. They also have more than 15 years of working experience in the education sector.

Furthermore, ethical issues are an important consideration in any research plan. The research or data collection should not burden the informant. As a result, the informants' safety and confidentiality are protected in this study. To protect the informants' privacy, nicknames are used during the writing and encoding processes. They are also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.

5. Data Analysis

The researchers compiled, integrated, and synthesized field notes, and debriefing notes, as well as the verbatim transcriptions of the focus groups discussion conducted. The main preparation for analysing qualitative data is to look at the purposes and objectives of the study. The first step of the analysis begins with reading the data repeatedly. For this study, researchers repeatedly read the data and analysed the documents. In this step, researchers sorted the data more systematically and examined the data labelling in detail to avoid confusion when researchers want to revisit the data, and after that, the researchers begin to set the coding process using NVivo software. For the second step, the data unit of each code was identified. Researchers also look for similarities for comparisons to determine the systematic order in the data. An open-coding process was implemented and at the same time, each unit from the open-coding process was categorized. Once the category was specified, the researcher compiled the description, and the themes were formed. Verification of data accuracy also occurred at this stage, using data triangulation. Once all the data is completed and analysed, the third step is to write a study report.

6. Finding and Discussion

This study presents the findings of the data analysis, which have been organized into two

themes, 6.1 and 6.2, as follows:

6.1 Leaders' Use of Transformational Leadership During Crisis Management and the Impact on Their Subordinates

The findings of this study found that only three (3) of the four (4) behaviours listed in the transformational leadership style are regularly used by the leaders during crisis management in their organization. According to informants, all of them agreed that during crisis management, characteristics such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation are more prominent among their leaders than individualized consideration. The application of the transformational style by the leaders has a positive impact on the subordinates as well as the organization. For individualized consideration, even though it is not applied by leaders in crises, most participants agreed that it does not have a bad impact on them as well as their organization. Since all the participants involved came from organizations with the nature of top-down style administration, it seems like a lack of individualized consideration, especially in terms of decision making, is a normal situation for the subordinates. Details elaboration and findings on this are discussed as follows:

6.1.1 Idealized Influence

For idealized influence characters, leaders serve as role models for followers. Because followers trust and respect the leader, they emulate this individual and internalize his or her ideals. In their study, Dwiedienawati et al. (2021) mentioned that the effectiveness of crisis management was positively and mostly influenced by subordinates' confidence in their leader. In crises, Almohtaseb et al. (2021) and Bowers (2017) found that leaders who implemented the characteristic of idealized influence in crises helped subordinates work effectively and increased their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Findings from this study show that the majority of informants agreed that their leaders show very good idealized influence during crisis management, and they also agreed that those characteristics had a positive impact not only on them but also on their organizations. For example, similar to the findings from research conducted by Alkhawlani (2021), P1 agreed that a good example shown by the leader makes employees more motivated and focused on performing tasks. Details statement by P1 are as below:

"... Leaders here show a good example when managing a crisis. It makes subordinates eager to stay focused on carrying out our responsibilities even in a crisis because we are guided by a very positive leader. Though our leader needs to carry out high responsibilities during a crisis, with that positivity, they can manage the crisis well. "

(P1, Senior Officer in MOE)

Besides that, the idealised character of influence practised by leaders has also attracted workers' respect for them. Some participants asserted this matter as follows:

"...The leaders here implemented various new rules during the crisis, and we are satisfied because all the rules made are also followed by themselves. Crisis

management here is very systematic and orderly. "The leader is very high-calibre, and all subordinates follow and respect the leader's decisions. "

(P2, Lecturer in Private Higher Educational Institution)

"... We respect all leaders' decisions because they walk their talk. While managing the crisis, they show a good example... "

(P3, Secondary School Teacher)

"...Decisions made by leaders are respected because they walk the walk. They led by example in dealing with the crisis... "

(P5, Primary school Teacher)

6.1.2 Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders have a clear vision that they can articulate to their followers. These leaders are also able to help followers experience the same passion and motivation to fulfil these goals. In this study, 4 out of 6 informants agreed that their leaders always give inspirational motivation to their subordinates during the crisis, and by implementing this inspirational motivation, leaders help subordinates feel more comfortable in their job even though they need to adapt to new norms in implementing their job during crisis. According to Dwiedienawati et al. (2021), the transformational style, which includes inspirational motivation, has provided subordinates with the opportunity to work with positive behaviour and build a strong commitment to the organization. Below are the statements of participants who agreed that their leaders practised inspirational motivation during crisis management and that this inspirational motivation has had a positive impact on them while performing tasks in crises.

"...Leaders give us motivation throughout carrying out tasks during a crisis. I and a few of my friends here have felt demotivated to carry out tasks during a crisis, but lucky to have a very motivating leader makes us more enthusiastic in performing our job even though need to face the crisis"

(P1, Senior Officer in MOE)

"... Grateful for being able to carry out tasks well during a crisis with high motivational support from leaders because without the motivation given by leaders throughout performing tasks during a crisis can make subordinates burnout."

(P3, Secondary School Teacher)

"...Leaders provide motivational support during crises and it makes us maintain our momentum throughout the crisis."

(P5, Primary School Teacher)

According to P1, P3, and P5, the nature of inspirational motivation has a positive impact on most employees, making them feel more enthusiastic about completing tasks. They were initially unmotivated to complete their tasks during a crisis, but with the attitude of a motivating leader, they improved.

Furthermore, P2 claims that their leaders' use of inspiration and motivation reduces workplace stress.

"...Leaders always provide motivational support to subordinates throughout the crisis so that we do not feel stress over though need to carry out our task during a crisis because the demand and requirement of our job scope are different during the crisis compared to normal environment."

(P2, Lecturer in Private Higher Educational Institution)

6.1.3 Intellectual Stimulation

Leadership is considered one of the most important factors influencing the success of innovation (Abbas et al., 2020 & Bledow et al., 2015). Transformational leaders encourage creativity among their followers. The leader encourages followers to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn. In Dwidienawati et al. (2020), Baškarada et al. (2016) and Moriano et al. (2014), it is summarized that the transformational leadership style is considered the most suitable type of leadership that can influence innovation in turbulent and uncertain environments. All the informants in these studies agreed that leaders always encourage them to explore new ways of doing things and ask them to find new opportunities to learn and equip them with new knowledge, especially in managing crises. This situation helps the subordinates feel more comfortable since their leaders give them opportunities to do the task in their style as long as they can achieve the objective that was set by their organizations as agreed by P1, P2, P3 and P6 below:

"...Usually, you have to do it yourself. Leaders give trust in us to use our styles as long as they are not against the rules and it makes us comfortable in making decisions in our ways."

(P1, Senior Officer in MOE)

"...Leaders always give us support and encourage us to think for ourselves to find the best way to do and complete our task in a crisis. We, as subordinates, feel more trusted and comfortable with that. "

(P2, Lecturer in Private Higher Educational Institution)

"...Leaders always encourage us to think creatively and critically and to be independent in performing tasks during a crisis. They make us more independent and can explore many new things on our own. "

(P3, Secondary School Teacher)

"...Leaders constantly remind all subordinates to always use the opportunities

available and increase creativity while performing tasks during a crisis to produce high impact tasks, and it makes us independent and gets more experience."

(P6, Secondary School Teacher)

Meanwhile, for P4, a long-serving employee in his organisation believes that the intellectual stimulation used by leaders is very appropriate and comfortable, especially for those who are senior staff and have extensive experience in their tasks. P4 articulation is as follows.

"... Because almost all of the staff here are senior subordinates, the leader only monitors a little during the crisis and gives more opportunities to the subordinates themselves to perform tasks in their way as long as they achieve the required objectives. "We preferred that way since we already know what we have to do even though, in a crisis, our job demand is a little bit changed, but with little monitors and opinions by leaders, we managed to do our job well..."

(P4, Lecturer in Public Higher Educational Institution)

For P5, when leaders encourage them to be more innovative in their tasks, it is a big responsibility for them because any impact should be entirely on their shoulders, but he agrees that the positive effect is that they will be more independent in the future. The detailed statement from P5 is as follows:

"...Yes. Leaders will encourage us to explore new ways and always grab new opportunities during crises. It's such a big responsibility since the effects of our decisions if we make a mistake, are on us, but it's OK since it teaches us to be more independent in our work."

(P5, Primary School Teacher)

6.1.4 Individualized Consideration

Transformational leadership also involves offering support and encouragement to individual followers. To foster supportive relationships, transformational leaders keep lines of communication open so that followers feel free to share ideas and so that leaders can offer direct recognition of the unique contributions of each follower. However, during a crisis, Dwidienawati et al. (2020) concurred that leaders need to be able to make decisions fast, even the tough ones. This situation sometimes makes leaders fail to consider their subordinates' ideas before making any decision. This is consistent with the findings of this study, in which the majority of our informants agreed that their organisation still does not promote an open communication culture among their subordinates, particularly when it comes to important decisions. However, based on the interview, even though the majority leader does not practise individualised consideration, it seems not to be a big deal and does not have a bad impact on many subordinates. The system of the participant's organisation may influence these results since their organization's system is top-down, which makes the culture of open communication difficult to practise comprehensively. Below are the details and statements from the majority of the participants involved:

"...Usually, leaders just discussed among top management to make a decision

without involving us. I think it ok since our nature of organizations is top-down administration”

(P1, Senior Officer in MOE)

“...Leaders here still have not practiced such an open communication culture. Sometimes they must listen to their subordinates because subordinates have worked directly with our client”

(P3, Secondary School Teacher)

“...Can share ideas in meetings but usually the final decision is made by the top leader only. Sometimes it's ok but sometimes they also need to listen to us as their subordinates”

(P4, Lecturer in Public Higher Educational Institution)

“...All decisions are usually from top leaders. They have special meetings to discuss especially involving policy. Usually, those things are confidential and we will only be given instructions involving execution only. For me, its ok not to be involved especially with a big decision since sometimes more involvements make it more difficult to reach a consensus and some time, we need to give a leader's power to make their own decision as long as that decision does not give a bad impact on the organization...”

(P6, Secondary School Teacher)

The findings reveal that the majority of the leaders implemented only three of the four behaviours listed in the transformational leadership style regularly during crisis management in their organization, which answers the research question number one, which is, do the leaders implement the transformational leadership characteristics during crisis management? Furthermore, findings also reveal that the practice of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation has a positive impact on the employees during crisis management as they feel motivated, have more respect for their leaders, feel independent, and so on. This finding has answered research question number two, which is, what is the impact of the transformational leadership style implementation on subordinates during crisis management?

6.2 Male Leaders Are More Transformational Than Female Leaders

The study conducted by Munir and Aboidullah (2018) found that there are no significant gender differences in practising transformational leadership behaviours. However, this study found that most of our participants agreed that male leaders show more transformational behaviours during managing crises in their organization compared to female leaders. This finding confirmed the findings from past literature such as Sahin, F et al. (2017) and Alghamdi (2017), which state that male leaders have more transformational characteristics compared to female leaders. Below are the explanations from P1, P2, P4, P5 and P6, where all of them agreed that male leaders practised a more transformational style compared to female leaders, especially in managing crises.

“...Male leaders are more likely to show transformational leadership characteristics while managing organizations in crisis...”

(P1, Senior Officer in MOE)

“...Male leaders are more motivated, open-minded and encourage creativity as well as being the best example in managing crises compared to female leaders who are more emotional in management...”

(P2, Lecturer in Private Higher Educational Institution)

“...Transformational leader characteristics are more prevalent among male leaders in these organizations...”

(P4, Lecturer in Public Higher Educational Institution)

“...Male leaders are more motivated, open-minded and encourage creativity as well as being the best example in managing crises compared to female leaders...”

(P5, Primary School Teacher)

“...Yes. Male leaders more to transformational leadership style compared to women leaders...”

(P6, Secondary School Teacher)

As the findings show that most of the participants agreed that male leaders show more transformational behaviours during crisis management compared to female leaders, it has answered the third research question, which is, is the implementation of a transformational leadership style influenced by the gender of the leader?

7. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study is qualitative, so cannot be generalized to other populations. This research is limited to Malaysian educational institutions. This study only focuses on leaders in the education sector. It is suggested that researchers will continue research on this transformational leadership by involving group leaders in other sectors. In addition, future research is also suggested to look at other leadership styles such as distribution style, transactional style and so on.

8. Implication

With all of the information stated in this study, it enhances the current literature regarding transformational leadership styles in crisis management, including the context of gender, and it gives crucial information to educational organizations to identify and arrange suitable training to improve their leaders in crisis management. Besides that, our findings can also facilitate all leaders out there, especially in educational organizations, to recognize and evaluate their behaviour or competency in dealing with crises.

9. Conclusion

In today's world, leadership is considered one of the essential factors in managing crises

effectively in educational organizations. The main aim of this study is to look at the application of transformational leadership styles among leaders in educational organizations and their impact on crisis management and the influence of gender on those leadership styles. The findings reveal that from the list of behaviours listed in the transformational leadership style, the most popular behaviours used by leaders during crisis management are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation compared to individualized consideration. The leader's implementation of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation during crisis management has had numerous positive effects, such as making subordinates feel more motivated even though they must perform their duties outside of their normal norm. Meanwhile, the less practised individualized consideration during crisis management by the leaders does not have as much impact on the subordinates. Furthermore, this study also revealed that gender also has an influence on the implementation of transformational leadership styles during crises, where this study found that male leaders are more adept at the transformational style compared to female leaders.

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