Does Job Satisfaction Mediate the Relationship between Leaders and Academic Staffs’ Commitment to Service Quality at the Malaysian Universities?

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Abstract

This paper discussed the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between perceived transformational leadership style and commitment to service quality among academic staff in Malaysian Universities. Total useable questionnaires were 387 with a response rate of 36 percent from both private and public universities. The result revealed that job satisfaction only partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and academic staffs’ commitment to service quality. This study implies to the policy makers and academic leaders at the universities that there is a need to focus in developing their academic staff, by tapping their potentials, inspiring them, promoting collaboration, motivating and reinforcing positive attitudes towards commitment to service quality. Future study should consider inclusion of other the mediating variables, alternative modes of enquires and a nationwide survey covering samples from the whole population of the higher institutions of learning in Malaysia that would be more significant in making generalizations.

Keywords: Commitment to Service Quality, Academic Staff, Service Quality, University, Job Satisfaction, Transformational leadership
Introduction

Malaysia’s economy has undergone a transformation from that of a production based to that of a knowledge-based economy (k-economy). There has also been a call for some restructuring to tackle critical issues such as demand for more professional and skilled labour to manage the capital intensive, high technology and knowledge based industries (Mustapha & Abidin, 2008). By the end of 2010, Malaysia will need both policy makers’ with partnership with the universities’ community to materialize this transformational plan. Only through solid education and training systems can this transformation process into becoming a developed nation become a reality (Mohamad, 1991). However, there is an acute shortage of qualified academicians and high turnover especially with those with doctoral qualification. The turnover rate among doctorate holders at the Private Higher Education Institutes (PHEIs) in Malaysia was reported at 12 percent (National Higher Education Research Institutions, 2004). Huge investments in both the public and private universities have been carried out mainly to attract foreign students and retaining nationals but how do they prevent the academic staff from leaving. To encourage retention and eventually attained a high level of performance, especially for academic staff, it is important that academic leaders understand the aspects of professional job satisfaction that the academician would have derived from their duties and responsibilities at the university (Kuska, 2003). Nevertheless, past studies conducted on job satisfaction have been varied in terms of subject matter and also in the research frameworks (Tsai, 2008). For instance, there is a dearth in the past findings on the relationship between job satisfaction and commitment to service quality.

Past researchers were seen to adopt an attitude that displayed affective commitment to organisation as synonym to commitment to service quality. However, there have been some disagreements among scholars on how best to describe these relationships. Porter, Steers, and Boullian (1973) were convinced that organizational commitment is interrelated to job satisfaction but they have asserted that job satisfaction had to come first. Recent finding by Silva (2006) is in agreement with Porter, Steers, and Boullian’s (1974) proposition that job satisfaction is interrelated to organisational commitment. Huang and Hsiao (2007) on the other hand, accepted that the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment was reciprocally related. Studies on commitment to service quality are important and necessary but unfortunately there is still little research progress in this area despite past researches have also suggested that some universities in Malaysia were losing students because their standard of service quality was not up to the expectation of the students (Jain, Abu, Akhbar & Sapuan, 2004; Firdaus, 2006; Latif, SungSir & Bahroom, 2009). However, what really motivates commitment to service quality among academic staff at the universities remains unanswered. Past leadership literatures have associated transformational leader to organizational commitment, such as to service quality delivery (Jabnoun & Rasisi, 2005); building relationships with customers (Liao & Chuang, 2007); students' engagement with schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999) and towards school reforms (Geijsel, Sleegers, Leithwood & Jantzi, 2003). Some of the benefits of transformational leadership style based on job satisfaction have been realised, such as the reduction in work environment pressures and stress that is the cause of low turnover (Berson & Linton, 2005; Nielsen, Yarker, Randall, & Munir, 2009).

Only of recent, researchers have begun to be aware of the missing mediating links between leadership styles and organizational outcomes. For example, Politis (2006); Griffith (2003); Yousef (2002) have reported the existence of a possible mediator, such as job satisfaction that may account for the significant linked between leadership styles, organizational behaviour, commitment and performance. Although empirical findings have advanced the understanding of these links, little is known about the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between leadership styles of transformational leadership on the academic staff commitment to service quality. However, there still exists a vague support that indicates a direct relationship between the variables. The question of whether the transformational leadership style as perceived by the academic staff would directly or
indirectly affect their job satisfaction which eventually will lead to the commitment to service quality remains unanswered. Given the salience of this issue, more evidence is required. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to elucidate information on the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between perceived transformational leadership style and commitment to service quality of the academic staff in their respective universities.

**Literature Review**

**Commitment to Service Quality**

Studies on the commitment to service quality in education literatures follow the same footpath as the general definition of affective commitment. Affective commitment is defined by Meyer and Allen (1991) as “an employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization”. Commitment to service quality is defined and understood as “conformity to a specification” (Martin 1986; Witt & Steward, 1996; O’Neil & Palmer, 2004) and in achieving “excellence” (Peters & Waterman, 1982). It is also about commitment to meet the students’ needs and their expectations (Witt & Steward, 1996), and about building relationships between a customer and the organisation (Kandampully, 2002). Accordingly, the most important basis for the assessment of quality is the individual’s experience of a service that comes from the internal quality service of the internal customer (all the organization’s employees). Their commitment and willingness to serve is in the best interest of the customers, which incidentally is a prerequisite for achieving service quality (Kandampully, 2002). Clark, Hartline and Jones (2009) defined commitment to service quality as “dedication of employees to render service quality and the willingness to go beyond what is expected of them”.

Past findings have also established that employees who are committed to the organization will remain loyal and are inversely related to turnover (Hartline, Maxham & McKee, 2000; Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009; Elmadag, Ellinger, & Franke, 2008). In such conditions, employees were known to spend more time and energy in assisting the organization realize its goals and they also put their own self interest aside (Porter, Steers & Boulian, 1973; Tsai, 2008; Sohail & Shaikh, 2004; Yiing & Ahmad, 2008). They would subscribe to the idea of being a citizen of the organisation and be fully committed to the goals of the organisation (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003). O’Neil (2000) in his study in higher education concurred on the importance of internal customer commitment to service quality as a means of gaining competitive advantage. Satisfied external customers, for example the students, were reported to spread by “word of mouth recommendations”, which is a powerful tool in marketing (Cuthbert, 1996). Commitment of the highest level would mean emotional attachment to the organisational and this bondage is synonymous to “partnership” with superiors and colleague who would tender the academic staff’s intention to continue their tenures at the university (Narimawati, 2007; Rego & eCunha, 2008).

**Transformational Leadership**

Leaderships can be of many facets and visages and they differ in effectiveness in terms of consequences of their actions towards internal and external stakeholders. Since organizations today are faced with many challenges, especially with the constant changes in technology, economic, social, political and legal conditions and internal processes, flexibility is required in resource utilization and in the promotion of continuous learning (Horner, 1997; Christie, 2002; Hashim & Mohmood, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for leaders in organizations to contribute not only in terms of knowledge or ideas but also in making right the decisions and responding to the changes. According to Bass and Avolio (1990), transformational leaders will focus on developing their followers by tapping them of their potentials, inspiring them, promoting collaboration, motivating them and by reinforcing positive behaviours. Bass (1990) argued that transformational leaders were pertinent especially during

Transformational leaders in the education industry were also seen to be responsible for laying the foundation for changes in the organizational culture, strategies and even structures that are similar to any other corporate setting (Yu & Jantzi, 2002). Strategies may include development of employees to attain a higher professional level that will directly increase their capabilities, innovativeness and give more empowerment to their subordinates to shape initiatives that will bring about the much needed changes (Clark, Hartline & Jones, 2009). It is also interesting to note that in his study, Leithwood (1994) indicated the importance of transformational leadership that indirectly promoted students’ achievements through their leaders’ abilities to promote the school vision, and provide the much needed intellectual stimulation through the introduction of the best educational practices which fostered a high performance culture. Bess and Golman (2001) who studied leadership in American universities also supported the notion that transformational leaders are not likely to be found at universities where the heavy emphasis is on teaching and decentralization of authority. However, in this turbulent and ever changing environment, transformational leaders are much needed, especially the educational leaders who experience threats of mergers or a total collapse and in need of drastic changes in order to survive.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been defined as a single globe concept referring to the overall satisfaction levels (Ying & Ahmad, 2009) or a multiple dimensional concept that refers to the psychological or sociological factors. Multiple dimensional concepts have been applied to discover how employees are affected by for examples, intrinsic and extrinsic elements of their jobs (Ssesanga & Garret, 2005; Lacy & Sheehan, 1997). Generally, academic researchers would prefer to define job satisfaction based on the dual theory of Herzberg et al. (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997; Ssesanga & Garret, 2005; Rad & Yarmohammadin, 2006). As such, job satisfaction studies were based on the notion that the academicians’ source of satisfaction comes from intrinsic factors which are related to job content and extrinsic factors that are associated with the working environment

Previous studies have indicated that the link between job satisfaction and leadership styles has not been consistent (Tsai, 2008; Nemanich & Keller, 2007). One such finding by Evans (2001) has reported that there is no direct link between the academicians and their leaders’ motivational support in ensuring that their subordinates’ were satisfied with their jobs. To a certain degree, the study revealed that the academician’s nature of job, such as academic freedom, being independent and generally low in accountability has to a certain extent resulted in such outcomes. Later study by Griffith (2004) had resulted in similar observations and concurred that job satisfaction had an indirect relationship with transformational leadership style in speculating staff performance and turnover in schools. However, reviews of past studies have also demonstrated some support on the link between leadership styles and job satisfaction. Nielsen, Yarker, Randall and Munir (2009) for example, conceptualised the importance of health care providers in serving senior citizens in a pressured
environment and leaders especially transformational leaders were seen to have a direct link to the employees’ job satisfaction and their well being.

Therefore, due to the inconsistency in the result of the findings, it has lead to some researchers to suggest that a strong indirect link through job satisfaction exists between the leadership styles which in turn influences an array of other variables such as school performance, organizational commitment, team performance, organizational citizenship behaviour and work outcomes, (Yousef, 2002; Griffith, 2003; Cheung, Wu, Chan & Wong, 2008; Chui & Chen, 2005). Chui and Chen (2005) for example presented a strong case of the mediating effects of job satisfaction in twenty four electronic companies in Taiwan, and have found that intrinsic satisfaction mediates the relationship between job varieties, job significance and organizational citizenship behaviour. However, the study did not find any support for extrinsic satisfaction but it was known to have important managerial implication. Another review of literature which linked the role stresses variable and organizational commitment indirectly through job satisfaction was conducted by Yousef (2002). He was concerned about the mediating effect of job satisfaction on role stresses particularly the role conflict and role ambiguity among employees in various organizations in United Arab Emirates. However, the findings indicate that job satisfaction mediates the influence of role conflict and role ambiguity on both affective and normative commitment with the exception of continuance commitment. The result indicates that employees were less willing to remain in the organization if they perceived they are less satisfied with their jobs because of the high level of job stress that they have to face. The lack of opportunities to move due to the scarcity of jobs was the only the reason for them to remain in the organization.

Politis (2006) conducted a study in Australia among the manufacturing organizations with the objective of testing the mediating effects of job satisfaction in relationship to self leadership and team performance. By using a structural equations modelling, the study provides full support for job satisfaction through the effects of self leadership behavioural-focused strategies which is based on team performance. Another study by Lok and Crawford (2004) obtained a totally different result. They concluded that job satisfaction only partially mediated the effects of leadership styles, organizational cultures and subcultures on commitment among nurses in seven large hospitals in Australia. Similarly, research in the school setting has also produced the similar results which pointed out the importance of indirect effects of job satisfaction on organisational commitment and citizenship behaviour (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006). On the other hand, studies by Salam, Cox and Sims (1996) reported that leadership according to transformational and authoritarian styles are related to team anti-citizenship, which is fully mediated by job satisfaction in a large defence firm located in mid-Atlantic United States. This study does not seem to be consistent with past studies such as those by Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Bommer (1996) who found a significant relationship between transformational leadership behaviour and citizenship behaviour through mere trust and job satisfaction. Given that most of these studies were conducted in affluent societies and that there are inconsistencies in the findings which may be due to the context, conducting more empirical studies and tests will provide more insights into the mediating variables of job satisfaction on the relationship between perceived transformational leadership style and the academic staffs’ commitment to service quality in a developing country such as Malaysia.

Methodology and Research Design

This study was based on a descriptive correlation research design and cross sectional survey methodology. The target population for this study consisted of academic staff from two public universities and four private universities. Their perception of their immediate superiors such as the deans or heads of department or heads of schools were closely studied to identify their commitment to service quality. Using a 5-Point Likert-type scale, the respondent indicated their intensity of agreement anchored by 1, “strongly disagree” through to 5, “strongly agree” with items phrased. For this study,
the researcher adapted a later version of MLQ instrument commonly known as MLQ 5x-short-forms to rate transformational leadership. Although the factors that measure transformational leadership styles were distinctive, (5 factors measuring transformational leaders) in this study a single dimensional construct for transformational style was adopted. This is in line with past empirical studies by Walumbwa, Wang, Lawler and Shi (2004) and Walumbwa, Orwa,Wang and Lawler (2005) on transformational leadership construct. A recent modified version by Clark, Hartline and Jones (2009) was adapted in this study with slight modifications make in order to complement the study context for measures for commitment to service quality items. Finally, the instrument to measure the mediating variable of job satisfaction components was adapted from Ssesanga and Garrett (2005) and Mertler (2001). For this study a combination of on-line and self administered questionnaires were distributed to collect individual data on the respondents. Overall the response rate was 36 percent which was slightly better than what was reported generally in the Malaysian context (Othman, Ghani, & Arshad, 2001).

Discussion of Findings
A total of 387 academic staff participated in this study. The sample indicates that female respondents represented a slightly higher percentage of total samples (59%) when compared to the male respondents (41%). The majority of the respondents possessed Master degrees or others of similar level (71%) while 29 percent had completed their doctorate degree. Majority of the respondents were middle age of between 30 to 40 years of age (43%) followed by those between 40 to 50 years old (25%). About 18 percent of the academicians were from the younger group age of between 20-30 years. With reference to their experience in teaching, the sample showed a balance between those who had teaching experience of between 1 to 5 years (33%), 5 to 10 years (28%) followed by 10 to 15 years (17%) and above 20 years (14%). More than 47 percent of the respondents were from business faculty followed by faculty of information technology (12%).

Table 1 below presents the mean and standard deviation of all the variables understudy. All the variables were measured on a five (5) interval scale. All the variable means were higher than three (3). It ranged from 3.36 to 4.04. This suggests that the perceived leadership style of the transformational, job satisfaction and academic staff commitment to service quality were at moderate to high levels in importance. All the standard deviations were below one (1) which indicates the variability in the data (Sekaran, 2005). Results of the correlation analysis indicate no violation of the assumption as the absolute value is between the ranges of 0.43 to 0.55 which is lower than the acceptable cut-off value of 0.8 (Benny & Feldman, 1985). Commitment to service quality was found to have a moderate positive correlation with the variable of transformational leadership (r = 0.430, p<0.001) and a strong positive correlation related to job satisfaction variable (r = 0.551, p <0.001). For transformational leadership, strong positive correlations were also observed with job satisfaction (r = 0.533, p<0.001). The variables for this study were also reported to have an excellent reliability with a coefficient of more than 0.7 ( Nunnally & Berstein, 1994; Nunnally, 1978). For this study none of the item- to-total correlations values were removed since they have values of above 0.3 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations of Variables of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>CSQ</th>
<th>TLF</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Reliability coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Service Quality (CSQ)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.038</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td>0.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership (TLF)</td>
<td>0.430***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.356</td>
<td>0.714</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction (JS)</td>
<td>0.551***</td>
<td>0.533***</td>
<td>3.607</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To investigate the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between perceived transformational leadership styles on the academic staff’s commitment to service quality, Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) assumptions were conducted and were reported to have no serious violations. The tolerance statistics revealed that the entire variables understudy were in an acceptable range (cut off of .10 as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). The stepwise regression analysis was then employed and the three guidelines for the mediation analyses established by Baron and Kenny (1986) procedures were followed. The guidelines that must be upheld are: i) the independent (predictor) variable should make significant contribution to the dependent (criterion) variable; ii) the independent variable should make significant contribution to the mediating variable; iii) the mediator should make a significant contributions to dependent variable.Perfect mediation holds when the independent variable no longer relates to the dependent variable after mediator is included and regression coefficient is reduced to non significant (near zero) level. Partial mediation is when the beta coefficient of the independent variables value is reduced but still statistically significant after the inclusion of the mediator (Lok & Crawford, 2004).

Table 2 below reports the results of the analysis that was carried out. In Step 1, perceived transformational leadership style was used to predict the mediator variable of job satisfaction and was found to be significant at p<0.001, (r² = 0.284) contributing 28 percent of variance in job satisfaction. Therefore, condition one was supported where perceived transformational leadership was positively and significantly correlated to commitment to service quality (β=0.533; t= 12.35; p<0.001). In the second step, the mediating variable of job satisfaction was entered to predict the level of commitment to service quality. The result revealed it to be significant at (β=0.551; t= 12.94; p<0.001) which in turn supports the second condition. 30 percent of the variance in commitment to service quality is contributed by job satisfaction. The results also revealed that before the inclusion of the mediator, as indicated in Model one, the R –Squared was at 0.185 which was significant at 0.001 level. Previously, it was found to be significantly correlated at (β=0.430, t= 9.334, p<0.001). However, in the third step, after the inclusion of the mediator variable of job satisfaction, as shown in Model Two, the previous significant relationship does not reveal any insignificant relationship to account for the third support for the perfect mediator. The strength of relationship indicated a decrease (β=0.190, t= 3.853; p<0.001). The R –Squared was 0.329 significant at 0.001 level. When the mediator was included, the equation for R-Squared revealed a significant (F change = 0.001) increase from 0.185 to 0.329, indicating an improvement of 14 percent in the variance of the commitment to service quality (r² change =0.144). As indicated, the beta coefficient of the independent variable value was reduced but still was statistically significant after the inclusion of the mediator. Therefore, it can be concluded that job satisfaction only partially mediates the transformational leadership and commitment to service quality relationship.

Table 2: Transformational Leadership Style and Commitment to Service Quality Mediated By Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>r²</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>Sig F change</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transf L</td>
<td>0.284</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>12.35</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>152.533</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satis</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.551</td>
<td>12.94</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>167.441</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transf L</td>
<td>0.185</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>9.334</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>87.118</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satis</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>3.853</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>94.152</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transf L</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>3.853</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>94.152</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.716</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Job Satis     | 0.449 | 9.094  | 0.001***| 0.716

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05 DV: Commitment to Service Quality, Transf L: Transformational Leadership, Job Satis: Job Satisfaction
The finding indicates job satisfaction as being partially mediated the relationship between perceived transformational leadership on commitment to service is a step forward in uncovering the process through which both this leadership style influence one’s commitment to service quality. This finding seems to complement other relevant research as that been conducted in non educational settings (Lok & Crawford, 2004) and in school settings (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006) which demonstrates how leadership behaviour indirectly influences its followers’ organizational commitment through job satisfaction. Based on the present findings, there seems to be some confirmation that the academic leaders may have an indirect effect via job satisfaction on the attitudes of academic staff such as commitment to service quality. Thus, with the paucity and inconsistency in past findings which may be due to the context of the study, it is hoped that this study will provide sufficient support and insights into the mediating variables of job satisfaction on the relationship between perceived leadership styles of transformational leaders and the academic staff’s commitment to service quality in a developing country such as Malaysia.

Conclusion and Implications

This research has its theoretical implications on the key area related to addition of new knowledge in integrating two disciplines which are: organizational behaviour and service quality management in education in Malaysia. Although empirical findings have advanced on the mediating role of job satisfaction, little is known about employing this mediating role of job satisfaction into the relationship between transformational leadership style and commitment of the academic staff towards service quality. The results from the findings have revealed that the outcome of the study was further enhanced by the mediating factor of job satisfaction. Therefore, this study provides more support theoretically of its importance in the education industry. Ignoring its importance may have an impact on the degree of the academic staff’s commitment to service quality. From the managerial perspective, this study implies to the policy makers and academic leaders at the universities that they need to focus in developing their academic staff, by tapping their potentials, inspiring them, promoting collaboration, motivating and reinforcing positive attitudes towards commitment to service quality. They should also seriously consider benchmarking their compensation system and practices with the best practices of other educational institutions or with other service industries. This study also has its share of limitation in the sampling frame which only considers a particular group of institutions of higher education (selected universities only) and therefore the results cannot be generalized to the whole education industry. Future studies should also consider inclusion of other variables such as conducive climate that supports research and development, creative thinking and goal clarity emphasis or elements of trust as the mediating effect so as to gain better insights. Future studies should also consider alternative modes of enquires such as employing the longitudinal method of data collection design (e.g. experiments, archival data, observations or interviews) and a nationwide survey covering samples from the whole population of the higher institutions of learning in Malaysia.
References


