IDENTIFYING MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES WHICH LEAD TO INNOVATIVE PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Managerial competencies are the needed skills, knowledge and attributes to perform managerial tasks effectively and efficiently with readiness and dexterity. This paper identifies managerial competencies and the outcomes measured as innovative performance demonstrated by academic librarians. By using a literature review, purposive sampling, multiple case studies and interviews we discovered that the antecedents of managerial competencies include leadership, information technology (IT) and Islamic work ethics (IWE) competencies. These antecedents influence academic librarians’ innovative performance which was evaluated based on generativity or idea generation, championing and formative investigation. This study explores managerial competencies and innovative performance in Malaysian research universities.

Field of Research: managerial competencies, leadership, information technology, ethics, innovative performance

1. Introduction

Managerial competencies are the needed skills, knowledge and attributes to perform managerial tasks effectively and efficiently with readiness and dexterity for all professions. Similarly in librarianship, managerial competencies are crucial to ensure that librarians perform their duties and roles effectively and efficiently. The issue of academic librarians in relation to managerial competencies is being debated. A study of core competencies and professional development for information professionals in Brazil (Ferreira et al., 2007) found that teaching practices are inadequate for the development of information professionals. Management and leadership were listed as skills considered necessary to exercise their professions but were not acquired in college, and this lack was perceived as a major difficulty which professionals encounter in the workplace. In addition, the competencies of librarians are highlighted as among indicators to measure the quality of library services, especially in an environment of increasing economic pressure, structural change, and technological innovation (Praditteera, 2001). In the same light, Koufogiannakis and Crumley (2006) stated that the topic of competencies has been less published in librarianship even though they are essential to develop professional education and innovative performance (Ross, 2012). By reviewing the literature on managerial competencies and innovative performance and through interviews, this paper is intended to explore the managerial competencies of academic librarians and to measure the impact of these skills on innovative performance among academic librarians in Malaysian research universities. To achieve its objectives, the following research questions were used to guide the study: (a) how do academic librarians demonstrate managerial competencies? (b)
How do managerial competencies give impact to innovative performance and how are they measured by the top management of academic libraries? The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we examine the underlying three antecedents based on managerial competencies models and explain the outcomes of innovative performance which can be measured. In section 3, we discuss the methodology and research design used to measure the variables. We report our empirical results in section 4. In section 5, we provide a conclusion and outline directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Competency is defined as knowledge, a single skill or ability, a personal characteristic, or a cluster of two or more of these attributes. Competencies are the building blocks of work performance. In the literature of strategic management, managerial competencies refer to personal-oriented and task-oriented skills that are associated with effective management and leadership and the key element in investment readiness (Martin & Staines, 1994). Managerial competencies are positively associated with performance across a variety of organizational and industry settings (Tucker & McCarthy, 2001). The underlying antecedents of managerial competencies in this paper are based on previous studies of management competency models. Clarke (2005) proposed that the Management Competency Model was required in the performance of specific jobs. Viitala (2005) stated that the management competency model helps to communicate a company’s strategic objectives and needs, as well as measure staff performance. Viitala (2005) further suggested the integrated elements of competency models; among them are technical competencies, leadership competencies, social competencies, and intrapersonal competencies. Hondeghem and Vandermeulan (2000) affirmed that competencies are being dominated more by an individual approach compared to an organizational approach. Moreover, an individual approach is extensively considered applicable to the job performed and is accepted as the minimum level of achievement that is essential to perform job efficiently (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Draganadis and Mentzas (2006) emphasize the beneficial characteristics of managerial competencies for private and public organizations. Their findings showed that the areas of IT competencies such as semantic technologies (semantic web) and portals with self-service technologies play an important part in the growth of competence management systems. To sum up, managerial competencies are needed to do the specific job and are useful in evaluating staff performance. Thus in the paper, the managerial competencies refer to the skill, knowledge and attributes of academic librarians to carry out their responsibilities effectively and innovatively. Based on the literature, we are proposing the behaviours that are associated with managerial competencies. Following is a discussion of each key characteristic.

2.1 Leadership Competency

Leadership competencies are defined as knowledge, skills, and abilities to influence, motivate and inspire others through direct and indirect means to accomplish organizational objectives. Today’s leaders face an extremely dynamic environment where change is a constant issue. To effectively deal with change, followers must share the leader’s vision and be willing to commit themselves to accomplishing the leader’s direction (Northouse, 2007). One of the most well-known leadership styles that have been considered as suitable for the current dynamic environment and to enhance innovation is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is based on assumptions such as: people are trustworthy and purposeful, and everyone has a unique contribution to make. A brief description of each dimension is presented next:
2.1.1 Individualized consideration refers to the personal attention given to followers by treating them “differently but equitably” (Bass and Avolio, 1990). The role of the transformational leader is as a coach or mentor who is aware of followers’ needs and develops their potential.

2.1.2 Intellectual stimulation means to apply encouragement and foster innovation by reframing new problems and approaching old situations in new and novel ways. The leaders present new ideas to followers and challenge them to think critically. They do not publicly criticize errors, mistakes or failure, or ideas or approaches that differ from their own (Bass and Avolio, 1990).

2.1.3 Inspirational motivation refers to what shapes vision, gains optimistic commitment to that vision, and sparks enthusiasm for meeting the challenges of accomplishing the organizational vision. The leaders communicate a clearer vision of the possible future; align organizational goals and personal goals so that people can achieve their personal goals while achieving organizational goals; and treat threats and problems as opportunities to learn.

2.1.4 Idealized influence refers to leaders acting as altruistic role models who engender the respect, admiration, and emulation of followers. They express confidence in the organizational vision; show a sense of purpose, determination, persistence, and trust in other people; and emphasize accomplishments.

2.1.5 Empirical findings showed a positive association between transformational leadership and innovation. For instance, Reuvers et al. (2008) reported a positive impact of transformational leadership on employees’ innovative work behavior in Australian hospitals.

2.2. Information technology (IT) competency

IT competency can be defined as a cluster of related IT knowledge, know-how and attitudes that affect a major part of an individual’s job responsibility. It correlates with performance on the job, which can be measured against well-accepted standards and can be improved via training and development (Perry, 1990). In this study, IT competency has followed the proposed definition which is the organization’s capability to manipulate and exploit IT technologies in order to manage information effectively. There are three required components to be demonstrated in order to achieve IT competency: IT knowledge, IT operations, and IT infrastructure. These dimensions represent conceptualized resources that indicate the organization’s capacity to understand and use the tools necessary for managing information about market funnel and customers (Tippins & Sohi, 2003). The three required dimensions to demonstrate IT competency are as follows:

2.2.1 IT Knowledge
Knowledge has been regarded as one of the key sources to sustain competitive and is created from the information, experience, interpretation and reflection. Tacit knowledge is difficult to be transformed into explicit knowledge; it applies to creativity and innovation in a task whereas explicit knowledge is used as guidance for the task to be accomplished. Knowledge’s output depends on how people share their competencies with those who manipulate it (Abell & Oxbrow, 2001).

2.2.2 IT operations
The application of IT to improve business method processes and techniques which lead to added value on business operations (Maier et al. 1997).

2.2.3 IT infrastructure
IT infrastructure functions are to support the current applications while remaining responsive to change for sustainability. It refers to the artefacts, tools and resources that contribute to the acquisition, processing, storage, dissemination and use of information (Reardon et al.1996).
The current IT environment has inspired academic librarians to proactively innovate the library services such as e-database/e-resources, digital content, e-learning and e-reference as an added value in meeting users’ expectations. IT has innovatively brought changes into academic libraries (Liao et al. 2007) and it has been accepted positively by librarians as it becomes one of the major factors of improved performance (Al-Qallaf, 2006).

2.3 Islamic Work Ethics

Ethics deals with the distinction between what is right and wrong. It is concerned with the nature and grounds of morality, including moral judgments, standards, and rules of conduct. For this study, we used Islamic work ethics (IWE) as proposed by Ali (1992) who mentioned that IWE influenced economic development and organizational commitment. Ali (2005) further noted the Islamic work ethic had tremendous influence on Muslims, and the organizations for which Muslims worked. The IWE places substantial importance on hard work, commitment to work, dedication to work, and to work innovatively (Yousef, 2000). It has four primary concepts: (a) effort which is seen as the necessary ingredient for serving self and society; (b) competition which means individuals must compete fairly and honestly and trade with good intentions; (c) transparency where trade and transactions should be conducted in an environment of trust and openness; (d) morally responsible conduct which is an essential precondition for sustaining a prosperous economy and a vital business community. The dimension of IWE is as follows:

2.3.1 Deeds and work intentions

One of the fundamental assumptions in Islam is that intention rather than result is the criterion upon which work is evaluated in terms of benefit to community. Any activity that is perceived to do harm, even though it results in significant wealth to those who undertake it, is considered unlawful.

2.3.2 Justice and fairness (generosity)

In Islam, observing justice and fairness is done only through proximity to God, and it is so important in Islam that for most of Muslims Islam is the religion of justice and fairness. Justice and fairness as part of the Islamic economic ethic even limit the ways of gathering wealth for Muslims. Observing justice and fairness in economy automatically immunizes Islamic society from polarization and expansion created through the gaps in class differences.

2.3.3 Cooperation and collaboration

Islam calls Muslims to cooperation and collaboration in all activities especially in economic activities and recognizes it as the sign of piety. Furthermore, there are many instances in the Holy Prophet’s words where he calls upon Muslims for cooperation and collaboration.

2.3.4 Trusteeship

Trusteeship has a close relationship with another dimension of IWE, i.e. work is the only source of ownership and perception of trusteeship without paying attention to work as the only source of ownership is impossible. As work is the only source of ownership in Islam, observing trusteeship is honouring a religious brother’s ownership. Yousef (2000) found that employees’ IWE directly and positively influenced their attitudes towards organisational change and organisational commitment. In Malaysian context, Kumar and Rose (2010) agreed that IWE influences innovation capability in the Malaysian public sector.
2.4 Innovative performance

Innovative performance is rooted in innovative behaviour demonstrated by employees in organizations in order to create new processes, products or improve administration processes as a vital contributor to the effective functioning of organizations (Amo & Kolvereid, 2005). Innovative behaviour is a vital contributor to the effective functioning of organizations (Woodman et al., 1993). In this study, innovative performance is defined as the degree to which librarians working in academic libraries produce novel or useful ideas to enhance the provision of library services or creation of new library services. To measure the innovative performance, immediate supervisors should rate the employees’ innovative work behaviours in the workplace. This is the most common approach used in the measurement of individual innovative performance and can be based on: (i) generativity which entails behaviours including generating ideas and solutions to opportunities (Howell & Higgins, 1990); (ii) championing, including persuading and influencing (Kanter, 1988), pushing and negotiating (Van De Ven & Rogers, 1988); (iii) formative investigation, including formulation of ideas and solutions, experimenting with ideas and proposing solutions (Amabile, 1988).

3. Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative interview method which focused on gaining an understanding from the academic librarian’s point of view, experience and interpretation. The methodology may provide insights into competencies from a process perspective that traditional quantitative methods may not bring to light (Hindle & Yencken, 2004). Furthermore, Smith and Morse (2005) affirm that due to the broad concept of competencies, it is a challenge to measure something which is elusive and slippery and which manifests itself differently in different contexts, changes over time and is not directly observable. In using multiple case studies, academic libraries working in three public-funded research universities (RU) located in the Klang Valley of Peninsula Malaysia were evaluated in this study. We scrutinised managerial competencies and innovative performance among academic librarians. We note that many of these elements are among the competencies required to fulfil the client’s needs in a changing information environment (Partridge et al., 2010; Jantz, 2012). Hence, we sought through interviews the interpretation and viewpoints of the academic librarians which we consider to be vital data when exploring managerial competencies and innovative performance in the three academic libraries. We undertook four interview sessions (three sessions were conducted with representatives of the departments of Reference, Information Technology and Acquisition and another single session was conducted with chief librarians) in each RU. The sample was selected by using purposive sampling to select information-rich cases that can be studied in depth (Perry, 2001) and to identify a set of key informants who constituted a source of multiple perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in different library departments. In total, forty-five academic librarians and three chief librarians were invited to participate in the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the top management of the academic libraries involved. We sent a letter to each of the academic librarians selected to inform them about the research and the date that the interview would take place. Each letter clearly explained the objectives of the research including the confidentiality of the responses. The data collection was based on a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questions posed were focused on how academic librarians demonstrated managerial competencies and how they were measured and evaluated by superiors/top management. Secondary data such as job descriptions, performance measurement tools and written information on the libraries’ innovative projects were also included in our study in order to gather relevant contextual knowledge about library management practices in those RU. All the interviews were recorded for subsequent coding with the interviewees’ agreement. The recorded data were transcribed verbatim to form texts and were analysed by coding.
4. Research Findings

Through coding analysis, the study found three dimensions of managerial competencies demonstrated by academic librarians, namely leadership competencies, information technology (IT) competencies and Islamic work ethics (IWE) competencies. The antecedents related to the competency domain and frequency is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Managerial competencies of academic librarians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency domain</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Consider individualized</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stimulate Intellectual</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspire motivation</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influence idealized</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology</td>
<td>IT application</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT knowledge</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT infrastructure</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic work ethics</td>
<td>Deeds &amp; good intention</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trusteeship</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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By combining the interviews, we analysed the managerial competencies as followed.

4.1 Leadership competency

Leading competencies cover the ability of academic librarians to influence, motivate and inspire their subordinates to accomplish the parent organizational objectives. Academic librarians agreed that RU in Malaysia operate in an extremely dynamic environment where change is a constant issue. For instance the recognition towards universities increasingly covers technology transfer and commercialisation activities where scientific knowledge is of utmost importance in the innovation process. Whatever affects universities has an impact on academic libraries and their working environment. The role of academic libraries is changing to provide the competitive advantage for the parent university and to be competitive, librarians should share the organisation’s vision and be willing to commit themselves to accomplishing its direction. The leadership competencies enable them enthusiastically to transform subordinates or staff personal values and self-concepts in order to move them to higher levels of needs and aspirations and raise their performance expectations according to the parent organisation’s mission. Academic librarians agreed that they have to encourage their staff towards self-esteem and self-actualization and place priority on the organisation’s needs. They also need to coach their staff and develop their potential. As mentioned by one of the informants, “because they (staff) do not have education equivalent to officers, they would have different understanding for certain issues. Therefore, I need to convey information or instructions clearly. When they are having problems, I have to reassure that they have the potential to solve it. At the same time, appreciate their opinion and the tasks given if possible should be suitable with their interests and abilities, so by that the momentum to leverage innovative ideas will generate automatically.” This finding is consistent with Elkins and Keller (2003) who mentioned that leaders should inspire and stimulate their followers in order to energise innovation.
4.2 IT competency

We sum up IT competency as the ability of academic librarians to manipulate and exploit IT technologies in order to manage information effectively. The academic librarians agreed that they are capable of performing innovatively from the ideas generated by IT knowledge. For instance, the knowledge on library databases enables them to understand, manage and manipulate the information in the database such as the patron database which contains users' demographic information, level of program enrolment, their preferred reference and preferences based on their faculties. From this data, the academic librarian is able to analyse data through the data mining process where the data is sorted to determine users’ patterns. The decision can be made on the library resource subscription based on the analysed “hit” search history. The implementation in planning and conducting library programs such as information literacy can also be implemented. One of the informants mentioned, “The ability to use internet and websites enable my team to promote the library resources to enhance marketing strategy by creating new service such as subject guide in the library portal to be utilized by user. It is also capable to attract new users by the dissemination of “unique” information that library has such as the agricultural resources.” The findings are consistent with a recommendation that academic librarians need to leverage themselves with the required IT competency to perform innovatively in order to cope with the universities’ environment (Feret & Marcinek, 1999) as well as creating responsive and convenient services (Li, 2006).

4.3 IWE competency

We sum up IWE competency as the ability of academic librarians to demonstrate the nature and grounds of morality, including moral judgments, standards, and rules of conduct for organizational commitment. The academic librarians agreed that the IWE influenced their attitudes towards librarianship professionalism and guided them when faced with difficulties in handling their work. The IWE is also positively, indirectly and significantly related to their innovative performance because when they have those values, they are satisfied in their jobs and thus tend to put a higher commitment in work. One of the informants mentioned, “In doing the work, the intention is very important and helpful. When the work that we had done doesn’t get the recognition from the management, as expected, I do not feel disturbed or regretted easily. I also have to fulfil the trust as required by the management, for example, we can not violate the copyright act. Now we are doing our e-publication project for thesis. As instructed, we can’t publish more than 24 pages to be stored in our information repository (IR) system.” This finding is consistent with studies conducted by Rahman et al. (2006) that close relationship with God spur one’s attitudes and behaviour to be consistent with the rules and stipulations of the religion and IWE advocates the importance of performing one’s work to the best of ability for the pleasure of God.

In the next section, we provide the analysis of innovative performance measurement.

4.4 Innovative performance

In the analysis of the interview texts, we find that innovative performance is the ability to generate, introduce and apply new processes, products and services or improve administration processes to increase performance and enhance work efficiency. Management encourages librarians to share their ideas in solving problems or finding resolutions of any issues/conflicts. The idea would be potentially accepted and implemented into innovative endeavours after taking into consideration the novelty, practical, economic and relevancy elements. Further, the ideas generated will be measured based on the librarian’s ability to win support from others through presentations, meetings, paperwork and by vigorously convincing others of the importance of realizing these ideas. To promote the ideas, the librarian participates in innovative competition before ideas/products are patterned and commercialised. The rewards and recognition given by the top management to those
who initiated or generated ideas is regarded as extrinsic motivation which affects individual effort and the overall quality of the innovative endeavours and thus, increases the propensity for innovation (Danish & Usman, 2010).

5. Conclusion

The managerial competencies identified by academic librarians are encouraging and they are agreed that the competencies should be embraced for sustainability. Overall, the findings are also significant indicating that librarians should strengthen managerial competencies to be more effective and efficient in conducting tasks innovatively and maximising working competitiveness. This study represents the first research involving the focus on managerial competencies and innovative performance of academic librarians in the Malaysian public sector. It is important because it could provide evidence regarding the required managerial competencies of academic librarians from the viewpoint of the research universities status. The empirical data derived from the study can assist in some guidelines and suggestions, which can be beneficial to the parties concerned. However, the study is limited due to the lack of standards and appropriate measurements for innovative performance for Malaysian academic libraries in the public sector. According to Siggins (1992), reward and performance assessment is crucial to stimulate behaviour and encourage organizational commitment. To be successful, such a system must be perceived to be equitable, realistic in its expectations, and conforming to a set of clearly understood and accepted standards. The study is also limited to the public sector; future research in the non-profit and the private sectors is recommended. In addition, the next studies should compare public and private sector organisations with similar managerial competencies to determine if there are differences in innovative performance.

References


