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Identifying the Dimensions for Culture of Excellence in Higher Education

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Abstract

The Malaysian Government, with the assistance of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is aiming to turn Malaysia into an education hub within ASEAN. In achieving this target, the Malaysian Government is working very hard to attract as many foreign students as possible to further their studies in Malaysia. Furthermore, in line with this effort, the government has to ensure that all Public Higher Learning Institutions (PHLI) in Malaysia will be able to attract students, lecturers and sponsors by offering the best service quality in the field of higher education. The catalyst of this effort is the employees' role in providing the best work performance which will increase their productivity. This heightened performance can be observed in their daily routines which will then transform into a culture of excellence in the long run. Good relationships between the management of the universities and their employees will subsequently increase employees' satisfaction and loyalty. And if the management of these institutions fails to seriously consider this matter the resulting outcome could be the other way round. As such, the findings of this study will provide the solution needed by the Top Management of PHLI to utilise the Culture of Excellence (CoE) as a tool, especially in dealing with employees and meeting their demands, which will consequently result in employees' satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, it will have a great impact on the productivity of the employees in the respective organizations of Public Higher Learning Institutions (PHLI). While constructing the questionnaires, various dimensions and items were identified and most of these were derived from the literature review and focus group interviews. These included 10 dimensions and 103 items. New items from focus group interviews were also included as they were found to be relevant to the study. The purpose of this study is to identify, point out and determine some of the dimensions of the CoE. The results will be used to develop the best structural model for managing PHLI in relation to CoE and ISQ. This study attempts to qualitatively determine the critical factors of CoE from PHLI employees throughout Malaysia. The research process began by identifying the determinants for CoE, followed by the development of the research instrument and pilot testing. Lastly, relationship analysis was conducted by using multiple regression analysis, confirmation of CoE and applying the findings in order to build the structural model of CoE.

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1. Introduction

The Government introduced the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) in 2011 which outlined seven (7) National Key Result Areas (NKRAs). These NKRAs are in line with Vision 2020. Improving student outcomes is closely related to Public Higher Learning Institution (PHLI). On 27 August 2007, the Ministry of Higher Education published a book entitled *The National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020*. Seven (7) Strategic Cores (Teras) have been identified as crucial elements in implementing this strategic plan. Core number seven which is on strengthening the delivery system is closely related to this study. To achieve this core target, all public universities are required to increase their service quality and programs so that they create a conducive environment for students to study and acquire knowledge. So as to become competitive, most public universities have a set target or better known as Key Performance Indicator or KPI. The Ministry of Education (previously Ministry of Higher Learning (MoHE) will closely monitor the achievement of these KPI among public universities. Achieving the KPI means there will be higher chances for the university to achieve high quality and outcome for their university. In line with this effort, the government has to ensure that all Public Higher Learning Institutions (PHLI) in Malaysia will be able to attract students, lecturers and sponsors by offering the best service quality in the field of higher education. The catalysts of this effort are the employee's role in providing the best work performance thus increasing their productivity. This excellence in performance can be observed in their daily routine which will then transformed itself as a culture of excellence in the long run.

Good relationship between the management of a university and its employees in understanding each other will subsequently increase the employees' satisfaction and loyalty and if the management fails to seriously consider this matter the resulting outcome could be the other way round. In September 2014, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Education (HE) in an effort to transform Higher Education towards excellence. To achieve this, the Ministry has developed 10 Big Ideas which are Outcome-based. The main goal is to create a talented nation with first class mentality and values. This effort will consist of Holistic Entrepreneurial and Balanced Graduates, HE Excellence, Nation of Lifelong Learners, Quality TVET Graduates, Empowered Governance, Financial Sustainability, Innovation Ecosystem, Transformed HE Delivery, Global Prominence, and Globalized Online Learning. The underlining catalyst for this future achievement will be the PHLI employees. As such, the aim of this paper is very important to identify the elements and dimensions of culture for excellence.

2. Literature review

Many empirical research projects have been conducted on quality management practices. On the contrary, studies on the culture of excellence in an organization are very limited (Trivellas & Dargenidou, 2009). As a result, many issues pertaining to the culture of excellence are less pursued after when it is clear that it is a very important subject or issue to examine and study (Anthony & Bhattacharyya, 2010). Furthermore, several studies on Total Quality Service (TQS) have highlighted that there is a need to study the excellence component in quality (Md Zabid, Murali & Azmawani, 2003; Ali, Gulsen & Zbignew, 2010; Hoseong & Beomjoon, 2012). It is of a great need to operationalize the elements of excellence empirically (Sureshchandar, Rajendran & Anantharaman, 2002; Choy, 2002; Tjahjono et al., 2010). In achieving this target, this study will seek to answer issues pertaining to Total Quality Management (TQM) practices in Public Higher Learning Institutions (PHLI) which are currently not really helping to push up the level of excellence among the employees.

2.1. Culture

Culture is a set of routines that is practiced by a group of people on a regular or even daily basis (Herguner & Reeves, 2000). When good practices are being repeated everyday by people or community it automatically becomes a culture. Good practices create good culture and excellent practices create excellent culture (Hofstede et al., 1990). To become excellent one should strive to do something that is extraordinary from their normal routine. Goffee and Jones (1998) highlighted that in order for an organization to achieve a high level of excellence, the employees or staff working for the organization must also have an excellent work culture. A successful organization can only

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