

Does Developing Students' Leadership Attributes and Leadership Motivation Affect Their Career Choices? A Case Study of Malaysian Undergraduates

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Abstract: Youths in universities gain wide exposure through socialization with peers and lecturers and involvement in a variety of campus activities. The exposure to different role sets and role models foster leadership attributes and leadership motivation that may influence their future career aspirations. Efficacy and socio cognitive theories have shown how efficacy beliefs may persuade individuals to believe in their ability to perform in specific functional domains. If this is the case, there is some probability that leadership efficacy beliefs might orient students to be drawn to specific types of work that enable them to enact their leadership abilities. This study examines the premise of this hypothetical assumption amongst 711 Malaysian undergraduates in four public universities. Leadership attributes is measured by leadership skills and motivation while career choice used Schein's career anchor typology. Results indicated that leadership attributes and motivation do indeed predict choice of certain careers over others.

Key words: Leader Attributes (LA), Motivation to Lead (MTL), career anchor, undergraduates, socialization

INTRODUCTION

As a community based institution, universities are at an advantage to develop future leaders with a sense of civic responsibility to lead in complex times (Astin and Sax, 1998). Opportunities to enhance curricular and co-curricular experiences can be created with input and participation of the many community and college stakeholders (Terenzini *et al.*, 1996). In participating, students develop awareness and competence in responsible decision making, and they gradually view themselves as citizen-leaders and agents of influence and change (Astin and Astin, 2000; Bonsall *et al.*, 2002; Hamid and Krauss, 2013). Indeed, during the phase of their academic life in the university undergraduates are expected to be independent and show initiative, attain self-leadership and develop leadership with others during group projects (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Hence, university could be a setting for experiences that provide practice with building credibility as a basis for further development in other arenas (Astin and Astin, 2000; Krauss and Hamid, 2013).

In serving and working with others students develop leadership skills and attributes and the Motivation to Lead (MTL) (Hamid and Krauss, 2013). MTL is the desire to provide service to others to enrich group experience or to initiate some desired change (Astin and Astin, 2000).

Leadership resides in any individual who has the motivation and the willingness to initiate and to implement change and transformation within the group or community that he/she belongs and to help others achieve goals that the group aspires (Astin and Astin, 2000).

Leadership attributes constitute skills (De Vries, 2007; Lawler III, 2008), personality or traits (Bass and Stogdill, 1989, 1990; Bass, 1985) and identity and values (Day, 2000). Descriptions of leadership skills abound in the literature. For instance, Zaccaro *et al.* (2004) included in their description of leadership skills the following: cognitive abilities with critical reasoning and creative thinking; motivation and personality toward using power, information and affiliation with others; social intelligence with appropriate self-monitoring and employing-tacit knowledge in problem solving. The personality theory exhorts a list of "leader traits" although the lists tended to include aspects of behaviors and skills in addition to other traits that were related to temperament and intellectual ability. Typically, the traits included characteristics such as self-confidence, intelligence, ambition, perseverance, assertiveness, emotional stability, creativity and motivation. Leader identity in Komives Model is represented through six developmental stages: awareness, exploration, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity and finally synthesis. In other words, the process of leadership identity begins with the awareness

of the role of the leader and progress towards the willingness of the self to begin learning and practicing leadership in formal and non-formal ways and finally being able to transform one's leadership beyond the horizons of organizational or positional context to embrace a wider agenda and purpose in one's leadership.

In part, the development and transformation of leadership to the generativity level puts leadership identity not merely as a persona or presentation of self but more importantly identity is based on a bedrock of values (Porfeli, 2007) that consolidate over time and experience. Since it is through values that late adolescents form their self-identities (Flanagan, 2003), it would be plausible that university undergraduates form part of their self-identities from the leadership values that they have nurtured in themselves. Values provide adolescents with guideposts and a schema to make sense of their experiences and to make important life decisions such as career choices (Flanagan, 2003; Shanahan, 2000). Hence, at the point of career planning, career selection may be driven by what a person believes in by what he or she believes is important for him or her to achieve in life and by what he or she believes is compatible to the skills and experience attained so far (Bandura, 1989). It is plausible that the fostering of leadership attributes (that embody skills, traits, identity and values) may influence the types of career choices undergraduates make.

There has indeed been some research that proves the relationship of leadership attributes with the kinds of tasks that one prefers to do. For example, the Big 5 theory of leadership with its emphasis on conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness and extraversion, states that conscientious people has no trouble in task settings that require order and scheduling; agreeableness goes well in task settings that require high people interaction, neuroticism would work best in task settings that allow for individual autonomy and individual space, openness will thrive in research and creative productions while extraversion works well in work environments where individual initiative and achievements are given priority. It has been suggested that top leaders demonstrate all five theories if they were to be effective leaders (Heller *et al.*, 2002) in organizations that very often encapsulates multiple task and work environments.

Motivation to lead on the other hand is the readiness of the person to take on leadership to provide service to others or to lead in bringing about change within the group. While leadership attributes might be construed as the fundamental material resource to leadership, the motivation to lead on the other hand is the intrinsic internal drive that inspires the will to lead. Leadership and motivation to lead are values driven and their

manifestation spills into the kinds of careers that will most likely allow these underpinning values to be practiced (Hamid and D'Silva, 2014).

We took career choice from Schein's classification of career anchors. Schein (1971, 1996) defines career anchors as an individual's self-perceived needs, values and talents that give shape to individuals career decisions. Career anchor determines individual's future career aspirations and the selection of particular work setting and occupations (Schein, 1996). Schein's original "career anchors model" consists of five types of anchors with a set of concepts concerning the nature of one's career. (Schein, 1987). Schein (1996), further revised and added the original five anchors to now eight career anchors. Usually, each individual identifies mainly with one or two of these career anchors. Schein's career anchors are as follows.

Technical/functional: These individuals are motivated towards being very knowledgeable in some field of specialization. They develop their sense of identity from the application of these skills and they love to face numerous challenges pertaining to these skills. These individuals, generally keep away from general management as this will not allow them to demonstrate their technical and functional know-how.

General managerial: People who are possessing general managerial career anchor would emphasize on the output of an organization. They place much importance on results and associate themselves with the success of their respective organization.

Entrepreneurial creativity: These individuals are willing to take risks. They enjoy developing new products or services, creating new organizations. They prefer to be in the front line and making important decisions and willing to take risks these people are more likely to want to take the lead, rather than be a follower.

Autonomy/independence: People possessing autonomy/independence career anchor will seek flexible environments regarding when and how to work. They turn down opportunities for promotion or advancement in order to retain autonomy.

Security/stability: These individuals prefer employment security whereby work is stable and predictable. They would not give up employment security or tenure in an organization. They are more concerned about jobs that will make them economically secure and stable.

Service/dedication to a cause: These individuals will research towards achieving something that has a value to improve livelihood in this world such as making the world, a better place to live, solving environmental problems, improving harmony among people and helping others. They would pursue such opportunities even if it means changing organizations. As such, they would like to seek opportunities to move into positions that will help them achieve their noble needs.

Pure challenge: These individuals expect to be working in an environment that is challenging. They like to demonstrate their self-ability in solving problems. These people will constantly push themselves and others in their charge to achieve something new and to rise to new challenges. Thus, the career that is most applicable to these individuals would be something that has novelty, variety and difficult.

Lifestyle: Individuals with lifestyle career anchor would like to fulfill individual, family and career needs. They seek to balance and integrate their personal needs, family needs and the requirements of their job. Hence, organization flexibility plays an important role for people in this anchor since flexibility allows individuals to achieve integrated goals.

Empirical studies of undergraduates' choice of careers:

Choosing a future career is a common challenge for students. Scholars and vocational practitioners both emphasized the importance of choosing a career that is consonant with one's profile (Cools and Vanderheyden, 2009).

Marshall and Bonner (2003) conducted an international comparative study of career choice on a sample of graduate business students from five different countries. They found differences among different regions in the dominant career anchor expressed (e.g., lifestyle for Australia, USA and Malaysia, service/dedication for UK and pure challenge for South Africa). Also, both male and female scored higher for lifestyle. By analyzing the link between students' career anchors and their cognitive styles and personality profile, Cools and Vanderheyden (2009) conclude that cognitive styles and personality traits could predict people's career orientation towards security/stability, service/dedication to a cause and for pure challenge.

Related studies such as by Kuhn and Weinberger (2005) gives evidence that individuals who exhibited leadership propensities while they were in high school had greater likelihood to occupy managerial positions as adults. Hassan *et al.* (2012) argue that individuals with a

higher level of technical competence tend to avoid decisions that lead to managerial jobs and attempt to remain in their interested technical groups. Debnath *et al.* (2007) found out that those individuals having leadership skills and are motivated to look for more complex job characteristics.

Krauss and Hamid (2013) found that undergraduates with high leadership skills tended to enjoy being involved in many activities. In an earlier study, Hamid and Krauss (2010) found that student leaders in campus were more comfortable in communication and relationships with the higher authorities at the faculty and university. Their findings lead us to a possible hypothesis that undergraduates with leadership attributes would seek for jobs that allowed much room and flexibility for them to move across task types. They would also not be averse to seek for jobs that required high levels of communication. Based on the above arguments, the objectives of the study are:

- To examine the pattern of preference of career anchors amongst Malaysian undergraduates
- To examine the relationship between leadership attributes and motivation to lead with the preference of career anchor

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative correlational survey research strategy was employed for this research whereby a cross-sectional survey was carried out to gather data from Malaysian undergraduates in public universities. Data was randomly collected from undergraduates of four public universities in Malaysia representing the North, South, East and West zones of the Peninsular. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed and 764 questionnaires were returned. The response rate was 95.5%. Of these, 53 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete data leaving only 711 respondents' feedback fit for the final analysis. The questionnaire comprised three sections: A leadership attribute section, a Motivation to Lead (MTL) and career anchor section. The leadership attribute section contained nineteen items which were developed by the researchers using the existing literature as a guide. The leadership attributes comprised measuring visionary leadership (5 items); group leadership (7 items), leader identity (4 items) and leader emotional stability (3 items). The Motivation to Lead section (MTL) was adapted from Chan and Drasgow (2001)'s inventory of 9 items on affective motivation to lead but only six items were used in this study. The career anchor section contained measures that were adapted from Schein (1990). This

adapted career anchor section in this research still maintained Schein's original eight career anchors but the items have been reduced to 24 items. These items are comprised of technical competence (3 items), managerial competence (3 items) security and stability (3 items), entrepreneurial creativity (3 items) autonomy and independence (3 items) service and dedication to a cause (3 items) pure challenge (3 items) and lifestyle (3 items). All items on the leadership attribute, MTL and career anchor scales were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree', 'to 5 = 'Strongly Agree'. The dependent variable of this study was career anchors while the dimensions of leader attributes and Motivation to Lead (MTL) formed the independent variables.

A pilot test was carried out prior to the actual study and the overall Cronbach's alpha was above the threshold of 0.7, indicating the soundness of the instrument in terms of its reliability (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2012). SPSS software was used to analyse the data.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis of leader attributes, motivation to lead to lead and career anchor: The majority of students who responded to the survey were females (79.3% or N = 564) while males represented 20.7% (N = 147) of the respondents.

The mean, standard deviation and alpha scores for leader attributes, motivation to lead and career anchor are listed in Table 1. Amongst career anchors, the overall pattern shows that undergraduates in Malaysia had a high preference for careers that allowed a balance in life style (M = 4.46, SD = 0.58). The other dominant career anchors are security/stability (M = 4.27, SD = 0.61) service dedication (M = 4.27, SD = 0.63) and challenge (M = 4.14, SD = 0.62). Their least preferred career anchors were managerial career anchors (M = 3.55, SD = 0.85). Results showed that undergraduates career orientations fall in the categorization defined by Feldman and Bolino (1996) for need-based (lifestyle and security) and value-based (pure challenge and service dedication) orientations.

A correlation test was carried out to determine the correlation between leader attributes and motivation to lead with career anchors (dependent variable). Table 2 leader attributes shows positive correlations to all job anchors. The highest correlation was observed with challenging career anchor $r = 0.557$, $p < 0.000$; followed by service contribution $r = 0.431$, $p < 0.000$ and managerial career anchor $r = 0.373$, $p < 0.001$. Weak but significant positive relationship was observed between leader attributes with security $r = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$ and life style $r = 0.355$, $p < 0.000$; entrepreneurial ($r = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$) and technical $r = 0.305$, $p < 0.001$ career anchors. The weakest relationship was observed between leader attributes with independence career anchor ($r = 0.172$, $p < 0.001$).

Correlations between motivation to lead with each job anchor showed the highest correlation with managerial job anchor ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$). This correlation was moderate and positive. Motivation to lead showed weak but significant positive relationship with challenging career ($r = 0.293$, $p < 0.001$) entrepreneurial job anchor ($r = 0.280$, $p < 0.001$), technical career anchor ($r = 0.159$, $p < 0.001$), service contribution ($r = 0.145$, $p < 0.001$) and security ($r = 0.123$, $p < 0.001$). No significant relationship was observed between motivation to lead and independence career anchor and life style career anchor.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of leader attributes, motivation to lead and career anchor N = 711

Variables	Alpha score	M	SD
Career anchor			
Lifestyle	0.75	4.46	0.58
Security	0.76	4.27	0.61
Service contribution	0.75	4.27	0.63
Challenge	0.75	4.14	0.62
Independence	0.74	4.07	0.67
Technical	0.74	4.03	0.71
Entrepreneurial	0.90	3.77	1.00
Managerial	0.77	3.55	0.85
Leadership attribute			
Group leading	0.84	4.19	0.52
Leader identity	0.86	3.90	0.75
Emotional stability	0.71	3.92	0.66
Visionary	0.77	3.92	0.58
Overall leader attributes	0.90	4.01	0.48
Motivation to lead	0.89	3.40	0.82

M = Means; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2: Correlation between leader attributes, MTL and career anchor

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Leader attributes	-									
MTL	0.58**	-								
Independence	0.17**	.03	-							
Security	0.36**	0.12**	0.27**	-						
Technical	0.30**	0.16**	0.26**	0.29**	-					
Managerial	0.37**	0.49**	0.23**	0.18**	0.31**	-				
Entrepreneurial	0.31**	0.28**	0.22**	0.16**	0.32**	0.44**	-			
Service contribution	0.43**	0.14**	0.21**	0.32**	0.26**	0.21**	0.34**	-		
Challenging	0.56**	0.29**	0.15**	0.33**	0.32**	0.28**	0.30**	0.46**	-	
Life style	0.35**	0.05	0.33**	0.44**	0.25**	0.10**	0.18**	0.44**	0.36**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: Multiple regression of career anchors (dependent variable) with gender, program of study, LA, MTL as predictors

Variables	β	t-value	Sig.	Adjusted R ²	df	F
Independence						
(Constant)		14.588	0.000	0.032	4,706	6.898
LA	0.225	4.960	0.000			
MTL	-0.099	-2.181	0.029			
Security						
(Constant)		14.062	0.000	0.153	4,705	33.089
LA	0.414	9.723	0.000			
MTL	-0.127	-2.982	0.003			
Technical						
(Constant)		10.061	0.000	0.091	4,706	18.710
LA	0.323	7.345	0.000			
MTL	-0.027	-0.614	0.540			
Managerial						
(Constant)		4.770	0.000	0.251	4,706	60.608
LA	0.142	3.566	0.000			
MTL	0.412	10.332	0.000			
Entrepreneurial						
(Constant)		4.028	0.000	0.121	4,706	25.481
LA	0.232	5.371	0.000			
MTL	0.157	3.629	0.000			
Service contribution						
(Constant)		10.976	0.000	0.198	4,706	44.730
LA	0.521	12.613	0.000			
MTL	-0.158	-3.822	0.000			
Challenging						
(Constant)		7.603	0.000	0.307	4,706	79.758
LA	0.582	15.157	0.000			
MTL	-0.042	-1.108	0.268			
Life style						
(Constant)		16.285	0.000	0.164	4,706	35.833
LA	0.480	11.382	0.000			
MTL	-0.230	-5.454	0.000			

LA = Leader Attributes; MTL = Motivation to Lead

So far, it would appear that undergraduates with good leadership attributes appear to be more open and receptive to a broader range of career anchors. Next, Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was applied to gain a better understanding of how leader attributes and Motivation to lead amongst undergraduates (both termed as predictors) helped to explain variation of choice of career anchors (termed as dependent variable). The results are shown in Table 3.

The strongest of all the regression models was the choice for challenging career which was significantly predicted solely by leadership attributes (adjusted R² = 0.307; t = 15.16; p<0.01). The next strongest model was the managerial career where both leader attributes and Motivation to lead significantly explained 25% of the variance in the choice for managerial careers (adjusted R² = 0.251; t (LA) = 3.57; p<0.01; t (MTL) = 10.33; p<0.01). The third strongest regression model was service contribution where LA and MTL significantly predicted to almost 20% of the model (adjusted R² = 0.198; t (LA) = 12.61; p<0.01; t (MTL) = -3.82; p<0.01). The rest of the regression models for careers anchors of independence, technical, entrepreneur, security and lifestyle were very weak (adjusted R² ranging from 3-16%).

Looking at the effects of leader attributes and motivation to lead, it is quite clear that leader attributes and motivation to lead behaved in markedly different ways in predicting career anchors of undergraduates in Malaysian Public University. First, motivation to lead did not significantly predict technical and challenging career anchors while leader attribute consistently was a significant and positive predictor of all the eight career anchor types. Secondly, leadership attribute consistently contributed larger and positive predictive effect on all career anchor types, EXCEPT for managerial career anchor where motivation to lead was the larger contributory coefficient to the prediction of variance in the regression model.

The regression models confirm that students' leadership attributes was a significant factor in predicting students' preference for job anchor. Motivation to lead displayed mixed effects in predicting the variance of choice for all eight career anchors. Leader attributes was found to have highest prediction with challenging career anchor (t = 15.157; p<0.01; Adjusted R² = 0.30) and MTL was found to have highest prediction with managerial career anchor (t = 10.33; p<0.01; Adjusted R² = 0.25).

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between leader attributes and motivation to lead on preferred career anchors of Malaysian undergraduates. This findings showed that Leader Attributes (LA) did indeed significantly predict all career anchors but Motivation to Lead (MTL) were significant predictors to all but technical and challenging career anchors. MTL was found to have highest prediction effect for managerial career anchor, indicating that undergraduates with high motivation of leading believed that they would do well in management jobs. Hamid and Krauss (2013) study suggested that student entrusted with leadership responsibilities might develop familiarity with managerial tasks and hence this could have motivated them to choose managerial career anchors.

MTL was not found to be significant in predicting technical and challenging career anchors. One explanation for this phenomenon is that these career anchors required a considerable amount of personal interest, keen initiative, and effort. If Malaysian undergraduate leadership experience had comprised more of task completion experience, group solidarity, and team cohesion rather than on the experience of self-agency, creativity and individual initiative, then it comes as a small surprise that the motivation to lead tended to lean more towards the dimension of ensuring conformance and predictability. Hence, tasks that demanded (and supported) high creativity and self-initiative were perceived as non-attractive. On the other hand, jobs that were managerial in nature would appear more appealing as the results have shown.

Surprisingly, MTL contributed a small but significant predictive relationship with entrepreneurial career anchor. Entrepreneurial work has often been described as challenging and creative but it also emphasizes the "be your own boss" work ethos which probably exerts some appeals to individuals who exhibit MTL. MTL shows reverse but significant predictive relationships with other career anchors and more investigation is needed to clarify this pattern of tendency.

Leader attributes on the other hand was a significant predictor of all career anchors. In particular, leadership attributes were highly predictive of selection of challenging, managerial and service dedication career anchors. The findings suggests that leadership attributes assist university students to be more open to a wide variety of career anchors. This finding seems to support other research for example the Big 5 theory of leadership that imply leadership attributes is generic in its positive effect across a wide range of task and work environments. Hence, people with strong leadership attributes may find satisfaction in a wide variety of career anchors.

The findings of this study supports the development of leadership attributes amongst undergraduates, since these leadership attributes appear to help students to develop positive orientation towards a broad range of career choices. Their leadership skills, traits, knowledge, and identity appears to enhance their readiness to pursue careers that are challenging, fulfil their needs and enable them to practice their values. On the other hand, keenness as in motivation to lead appears to develop a more selective stance with regards to career choice amongst undergraduates. Although, it is still too premature to draw any conclusive commentary, yet the results of this study suggests that motivation to lead presents itself within a sharply focussed, purposeful and absorbing schema, replete with its set of values and goals that act as strong filters or post guides in how undergraduates viewed their prospective careers. Undergraduates with strong motivation to lead give the appearance of being more cautious in their choice of careers. To sum up, this study has proven that leadership attributes and motivation to lead act in distinct and separate ways to influence undergraduates' choices of career anchors.

CONCLUSION

Both leadership attributes and motivation to lead are important factors that affect undergraduates' choice of career anchors, except that their paths of influence may not be parallel. High leadership attributes seems to be associated with affinity for all career anchors and in particular, challenging, managerial and service dedication career anchors. However, motivation to lead tends to be negatively associated with most career anchors except for managerial and entrepreneurial career anchors. Universities need to be aware of the differences underpinning perceptions of leader attributes and motivation to lead and the implications of developing both on their undergraduates' choices in career decision making.

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