THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR MALAYSIAN NATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOL (NPS) HEADS INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (SIP)

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ABSTRACT

The School Improvement Programme (SIP) is the central core strategy that the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOEM) employs in fulfilling its educational mission. The purpose of this study is to examine the status of the strategic leadership styles of NPS heads that involved in the SIP. The study selected 150 (out of 350) schools involved in MOEM's SIP. Approximately 600 senior management team teachers were required to complete the 10-page survey questionnaire, which consists of 52 seven-point Likert scale items. The collection centre received 135 envelopes containing 420 completed survey questionnaires from the sampled schools towards the end of May 2007. The data screening process omitted 14 out of 420 cases prior to data analyses. The employment of a full fledge Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), AMOS 7.0 and SPSS statistical application would be used to confirm the dimensionality and the psychometric properties of the scales respectively. The study confirmed that NPS heads possess 7 out of 10 required strategic leadership style dimensions. Finally, the study also confirmed the presence of strong relationship between the strategic leadership styles of NPS heads in the SIP. The findings from the study provide useful and pertinent information to senior management team teachers, the NPS heads and especially to MOEM as stakeholders. First, it will enable the senior management team members to reflect on themselves and thus try to shift their paradigm. Secondly, the NPS heads may be able to apply and practice their effective strategic leadership styles especially in synergizing the human resources they possess for the success of the NPS concerned. The findings of the study are also relevant to the MOEM's third core strategy, which is central to the Educational Development Master Plan (2006-2010).

1. INTRODUCTION

School improvement means making schools better places for learning. This relies on changes at both school level and within classrooms, which in turn depend on schools being committed to fulfilling the expectations of children, parents and other stakeholders. In other words, school improvement refers to a systematic approach that improves the quality of schools.

In the international research field of school improvement, Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994), Stoll and Fink (1996) and Harris (1999), emphasized that the characteristics of school improvement efforts have been widely documented and disputed. Successive studies have clearly shown that purposeful leadership, teacher collaboration and central focus on learning outcomes are the factors that support positive school change (Fullan, 1993). There are however, relatively few detailed studies of successful school improvement programmes (SIP) in action and even fewer studies of the same nature.

2. OVERVIEW OF SIP FOR NATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA

As a centralized governance system and as one of the largest and most vibrant ministry, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOEM) needs to develop and enhance the quality of educational improvement programmes for the benefit of the schools and pupils. As at June 2005, there are 5,761 National Primary Schools (NPS) (accommodating approximately 2.4 million pupils) in Malaysia. As a NPS, each individual school is expected to be successful in attracting different races and ethnic groups into their schools; however, this target

has not been achieved. Hence, the government's goals to employ the NPS as a platform for national unity effort will obviously not be successful if some effective measures are not introduced. As the government still relies on the NPS unity platform strategy, the SIP becomes a major focus in the MOEM's Educational Development Master Plan (2006-2010). The said plan is one of the several plans (involving other ministries) that are aligned with the Ninth Malaysia Development Plan (2006-2010).

Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB) as one of the MOEM's key policy implementers, particularly in the area of Educational Management and Leadership (EML), contributes significantly in its capacity as a training and consultancy institution for NPS and similar educational setups. As early as 2005, MOEM had selected 350 NPS for the SIP. First, 350 school heads (principals) were given five days of SIP training at IAB in the middle of 2005. Within a period of two months they were required to prepare their school's strategic plan (2006-2010). At the beginning of 2006, all 350 schools were supposed to manage and fully implement their full fledge strategic plans as well as to practice their strategic leadership skills. This is the best time for MOEM to monitor the Strategic Leadership Style of NPS Heads particularly for those who are involved with SIP.
The main objective of SIP is to enable the Malaysian educational system to nurture and develop strong, excellent and high performing schools particularly among the NPS. MOEM's Educational Development Master Plan (2006-2010) consists of eleven characteristics for these high performing NPS and these are:

(i). possess highly trained and quality leaders and teachers,
(ii). able to provide and implement customer oriented curriculum,
(iii). able to provide and implement effective co-curricular activities,
(iv). achieve excellent student moral and personality achievement,
(v). practice internalization of national aspiration,
(vi). achieve zero illiteracy,
(vii). exhibit healthy school culture and climate,
(viii). possess adequate and strong support system,
(ix). attain excellent academic achievement,
(x). able to provide Chinese and Tamil subjects as part of the curriculum,
(xi). possess excellent and high quality infrastructures.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objective is to examine the status of the strategic leadership styles among the heads of the NPS involved in the SIP. Another objective is to examine which strategic leadership styles are dominant to the NPS heads. In general, the objectives of the above study can be determined through the conceptual model of the study as in Figure 1 below. The conceptual model is recursive as there is no feedback loops (Arbuckle & Wothke, 2006).

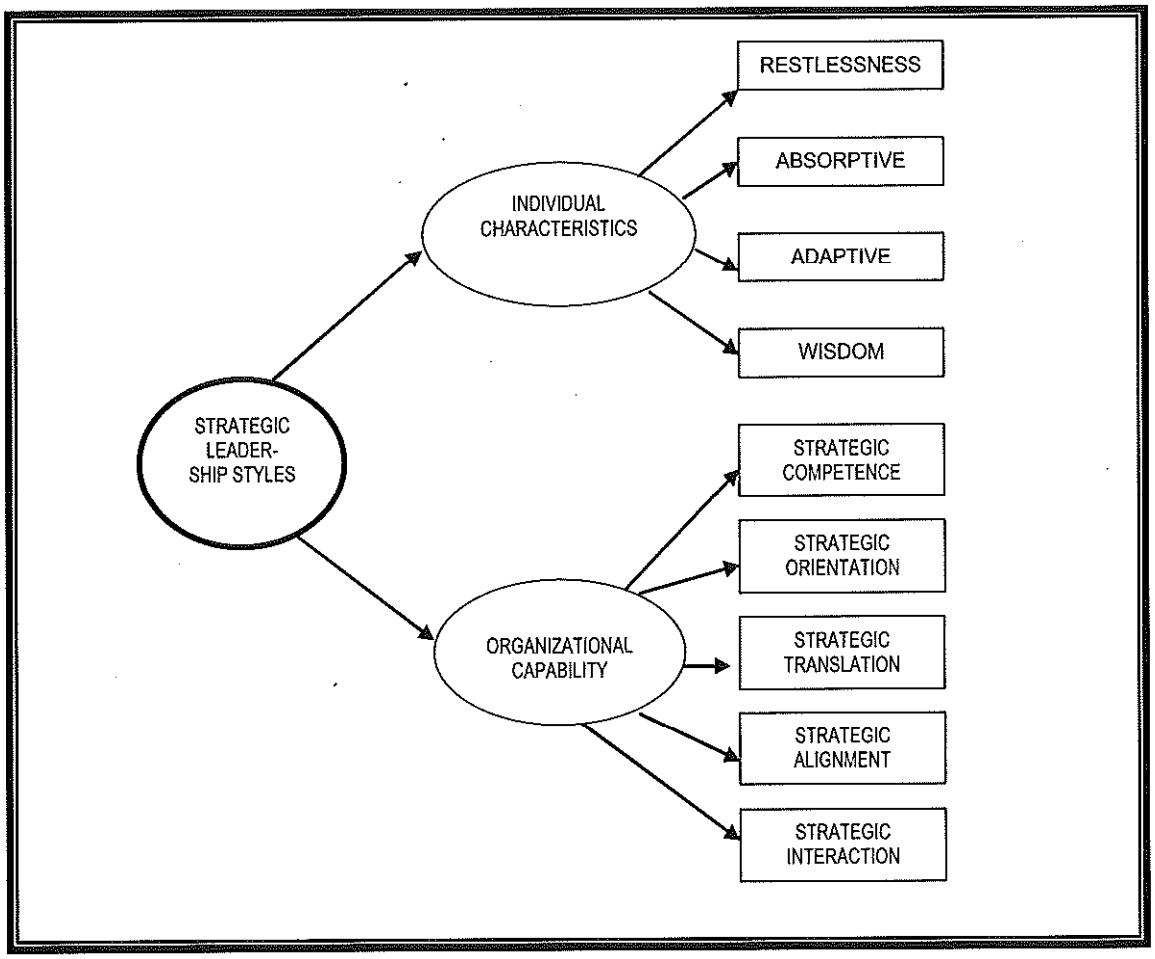

Figure 1: Strategic Leadership Styles: The Conceptual Model of the Study

4. UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Researchers in the fields of school effectiveness and school improvement have consistently reinforced the importance of leadership as a major lever for change, development and improvement, and in determining the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching (Harris, 2004). Harris again emphasized the needs to raise the standards and to improve the outcomes of schooling. This has increased the pressure on school heads to secure, sustain and demonstrate school improvement. This inevitably extended the changing roles of the school heads (Cranston, 2000) and those serving in other key leadership positions (Kouzes & Posner, 2003) within the school.

The quality of strategic leadership in the school is the central activity that facilitates and drives the strategic cycle of a strategically focused school (Davies, 2004; Davies & Davies, 2004). If we are to support and enhance the development of strategic leadership in schools, Davies suggested building a framework of understanding of what strategic leadership might comprise. Hence, Davies had identified nine factors associated with strategic leadership styles of school heads. In his term, Davies classified these nine factors into two parts or sub domain: firstly, the ability of a school head to undertake organizational activity, and secondly, his or her individual abilities. The two-sub domains are as follows:

(i) Strategic leaders have the organizational capability to:
- be strategically oriented (ORIENTAT)
- translate strategy into action (ACTION)
- align people and organizations (ALIGN)
- determine effective strategic intervention points (POINT)
- develop strategic competencies (CAPABILI)

(ii) Strategic leaders display individual characteristics:
- a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present (RESTLESS)
- absorptive capacity (ABSORB)
- adaptive capacity (ADAPT)
- wisdom (WISDOM)

As stated earlier, the objective of this study is to examine the status of strategic leadership styles among the school heads in the SIP. Thus, the hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1 (a) NPS heads in the SIP in Malaysia possess five organizational abilities such as:
- H1.1 (a) is strategically oriented
- H1.2 (a) translate strategy into action
- H1.3 (a) align people and organizations
- H1.4 (a) determine effective strategic intervention points
- H1.5 (a) develop strategic competencies

H1 (b) NPS heads in the SIP in Malaysia display four individual characteristics such as:
- H1.1 (b) a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present
- H1.2 (b) absorptive capacity
- H1.3 (b) adaptive capacity
- H1.4 (b) wisdom

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Sampling

The study used probability sampling because it provided a statistical basis that a sample should represent the target population and has the ability to generalize the findings of the entire population (Fink, 1995). The sampling units were the schools chosen for the study while the sampling elements were all senior management teams comprised senior assistants/deputy heads of administration, student affairs, extra co-curricular and afternoon session supervisor. The study used a sampling frame comprising a list of 350 schools involved in SIP. Out of 350 schools, the study randomly selected 150 schools as samples (sampling units). All senior management team members of the sampling units (schools) were instructed to complete the survey questionnaires. It was expected that at least 600 senior management team members (sampling elements) from these sampling units would respond to the survey questionnaires. Thus, the expected margin of error (accuracy) should ± 4% and confidence interval of 95% (Ferguson, 1981; Vockell & Asher, 1995). All survey instruments were mailed to and administered by the Senior Assistants/Deputy Head for Administration of the respective schools. All completed survey instruments were returned to IAB using the enclosed envelopes.

5.2 Instrumentation

Dillman (1983) emphasized the quality of questionnaire design as an important factor for self-administered instruments. For data collection process, the study used ten (10) pages Bahasa Malaysia (National Language) survey instrument comprising 55 items. Back-translation process of the survey questionnaires confirmed the original translation (Brislin, Loner & Thorndike, 1973). The survey questionnaires comprised filtered questions (states, region, school's category, enrolment etc.), a section comprised 35 items on strategic leadership styles based on Davies and Davies (2004) and additional space for respondents to provide comments and other information. The study used multiple-item measures for all constructs in the hypothesized model (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980). Compared to 5-point Likert scale, Churchill (2004) suggested the study to use 7-point Likert scale (where 1 = Rarely, 4 = Occasionally and 7 = Almost Always) because the samples were considered large (with 600 respondents).

As suggested by Bourque and Clark (1992) and Zikmund (1997), the survey instruments underwent two stages of pretests. In the first stage, two educational management experts form IAB screened the items searching for difficulties such as ambiguous items, wordings, leading questions and biases. As a result, some sections especially the directions and a few ambiguous items were corrected. For the second stage pretest, the study selected thirty (30) senior management teams from the sampling frame. As expected, generally there were no problems with the responses to the survey instruments (compared to the first stage pretest). In terms of internal consistency the Cronbach's Alphas of the indicators were ORIENTAT = 0.8895, ACTION = 0.8911, CAPABILI = 0.9074, RESTLESS = 0.8658, ABSORB = 0.9040, ADAPT = 0.8238 and WISDOM = 0.9346. The study considered all Cronbach's coefficient alphas as acceptable and good (Sekaran, 2003 & Nunnally, 1978) because the values were between 0.8238 (which was the lowest) and 0.9346 (which was the highest).

5.3 Statistical Analyses

The study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique for statistical analyses. SEM is a multivariate technique combining aspects of multiple regression and factor analysis to estimate a series of interrelated dependence relationships simultaneously (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1995). In conjunction with SEM, the study used SPSS Analysis of Moment Structures or SPSS AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 2006). For clarity, the study exhibits a hypothesized model of the study or SEM model (Figure 2) as causal modeling, confirmatory analysis and latent variable modeling (Loehlin, 1992).

5.4 Goodness-of-fit criteria evaluation

As mentioned in the research methodology, the study used SPSS AMOS 7.0 data-fitting program (Arbuckle & Wothke, 2006) to analyze and estimate the hypothesized model of the study. This software adopted maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) in generating estimates of the full-fledged SEM. Since the software also analyzed covariance matrices, the estimation procedure satisfied the underlying statistical distribution theory, and thereby yielding estimates of desirable properties (Arbuckle & Wothke, 2006).

Once the estimates of the model were established, the study applied a set of measures to evaluate its good-fit. The consistency of the model with the data was determined by nine measures, which reflected the overall model fit. Next, the study examined the magnitude and direction of individual parameter estimate to determine its reasonableness. The examination included the offending estimates such as negative error variances and theoretically inconsistent coefficients that could undermine the validity of the model. Organizational capability (ORGACAPAB), as an endogenous latent variable, is measured by five manifest variables such as strategic orientation (ORIENTAT), translate strategy (ACTION), strategic alignment (ALIGN), strategic interaction (POINT) and strategic competencies (CAPABILI). Individual characteristics (INDVCHAR) as an endogenous latent variable is measured by four manifest variables such as restlessness (RESTLESS), absorptive (ABSORB), adaptive (ADAPT) and wisdom (WISDOM).

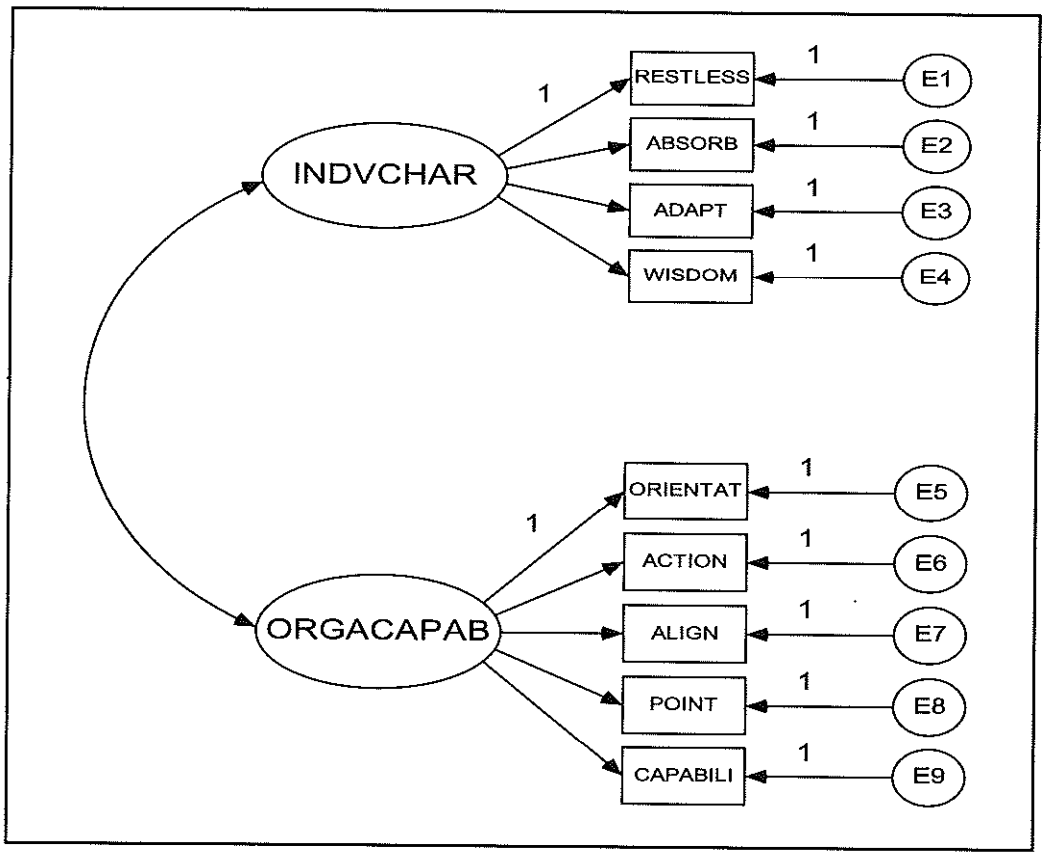

Figure 2: Hypothesized Model of the Study

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSES

6.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

As exhibited in Table 1, this study covered almost all states in Malaysia. However, only Labuan was not included because the study considered it as part of the state of Sabah when the study commenced. Out of 150 schools, 135 (90%) responded to the survey. From these 135 schools, 420 (70%) senior management team members successfully completed the survey questionnaires and mailed them to IAB. With 420 responses, the confidence interval was at 95% and the margin of error (accuracy) was ± 5% (Ferguson, 1981; Vockell & Asher, 1995).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents.

Nos.	Characteristics		
1	**States**	School Responses	Senior Management Responses (%)
	Johor	7	23 (3.833)
	Kedah	9	28 (4.666)
	Kelantan	5	17 (2.833)
	Melaka	7	23 (3.833)
	N. Sembilan	3	10 (1.666)
	P.Pinang	8	24 (4.000)
	Pahang	22	62 (10.33)
	Perak	19	60 (10.00)
	Perlis	3	10 (1.666)
	Sabah	8	25 (4.166)
	Sarawak	22	67 (11.16)
	Selangor	5	19 (3.166)
	Terengganu	12	35 (5.833)
	WPKL (FT)	5	17 (2.833)
	TOTAL	***135/150 (90%)***	***420/600 (70%)***
2	**Types of school**	National school	125
		Mission school	10
	TOTAL		***135***
3	**Grade of school**	Grade A	115
		Grade B	16
		Under enrolled	4
	TOTAL		***135***
4	**Gender of school head**	Male	88
		Female	54
		(Missing cases)	13
	TOTAL		***135***
5	**Location of school**	Urban	70
		Rural	57
		Remote	8
	TOTAL		***135***

Out of 135 sampling units, 125 schools represented the NPS while the rest (10 schools) were mission schools. In terms of school size, 115 schools we re categorized as A-grade, 16 were categorized as B-grade and the remainder as under-enrolled schools. Looking at the gender of school heads, 88 were males compared to 54 females (missing cases of 13). From the list, 70 were urban schools, 57 were rural and eight (8) were from the remote areas. In general, the respondents seemed evenly distributed and almost covered the whole of Malaysia.

As discussed earlier, the study employed SEM for its statistical technique. Because of that, the study needed to overcome some practical issues such as sample size and missing data, multivariate normality and absence of outliers, linearity, absence of multi collinearity and singularity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). As the researcher was very much aware of these requirements, he managed to conduct data screening prior to the segment of model testing. With the final sample size of 406, the study considered the sample size adequate (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998).

6.2 Hypothesized Model: Factors Underlying Strategic Leadership Styles

Table 2: Fit Indices of the Hypothesized Model

Measures	Fit Indices	Threshold Values
CMIN/df	6.974	Less than 5
GFI	0.906	0.90 and above
AGFI	0.837	0.90 and above
RMSEA	0.121	0.08 and less
TLI	0.955	0.90 and above
NFI	0.962	0.90 and above
CFI	0.967	0.90 and above
RMR	0.184	The nearer to zero the better

Note:

- Number of variables in the model = 20
- Number of observed variables = 9
- Number of unobserved variables = 11
- Number of exogenous variables = 11
- Number of endogenous variables = 9
- Number of distinct sample moments = 45
- Number of distinct parameters to be estimated = 19
- Sample size = 406; Degrees of Freedom (45 - 19) = 26
- Chi-square **(X^2) = 181.33; p = 0.000**

The study applied Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the data collected (N=406) in order to confirm the factors underlying strategic leadership styles of the NPS heads. For this specific purpose, the study applied AMOS 7.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 2006) for maximum likelihood estimation in generating estimates of parameters in the measurement model. The results of the CFA produced fit indices which some of it exceeded their shown respective critical value. More precisely, the fit indices are exhibited as in Table 2 below.

As emphasized by Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998), likelihood-ratio chi-square statistic (X^2) is the most fundamental measure of overall fit. As exhibited by Table 2, the hypothesized model exhibits likelihood-ratio chi-square **(X^2) of (26, N=406) = 181.33; p = 0.000**. The hypothesized model yield an unacceptable level of discrepancy between the observed data and the hypothesized model divided by the degrees of freedom (CMIN/df = 6.974). Other fit indices particularly GFI, AGFI and RMSEA did not fulfill the threshold values indicated although the values of other fit indices such as TLI, NFI, CFI and GFI somewhat better than their respective threshold. These values reflect the needs for the study to revise the model in the next step.

Figure 3 below exhibits the generated output of the hypothesized model of the study. While four indicators of RESTLESS (0.89), ABSORB (0.91), ADAPT (0.91) and WISDOM (0.95) measured the INDVCHAR, five indicators of ORIENTAT (0.88), ACTION (0.92), ALIGN (0.89), POINT (0.90) and CAPABILI (0.91) measured ORGACAPAB. The correlation between the two latent variables (INDVCHAR & ORGACAPAB) is at 0.97. At this point of time, the study assumed that all indicators or measured variables for INDVCHAR and ORGACAPAB stayed intact and relevant.

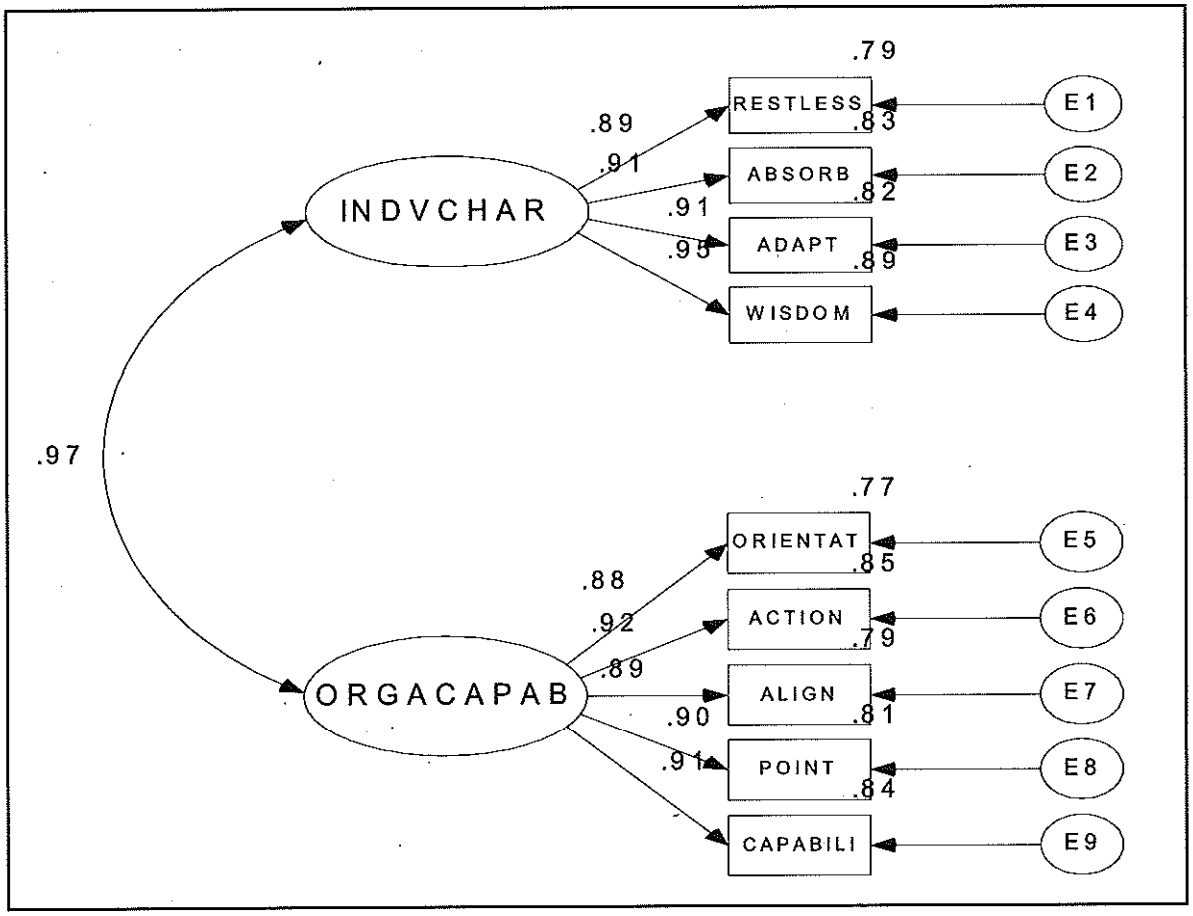

Figure 3: Generated Output of the Hypothesized Model

6.3 Evaluation of Revised Model

Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) suggested that there are at least two reasons for modifying a SEM model. Firstly, is to improve fit and parsimony, and secondly is to test the hypotheses. The re-specification of the model involved omitting certain parts of the model with the aim of improving the significance of the model and hence improving its goof-fit. Thus, the revised model supposedly able to display better causal relationships compared to the original or hypothesized model. The study used the revised model (Figure 3) below to discuss the overall model fit.

Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) considered a Chi-square difference test as one of the basic methods for model modification. The Chi-square for the hypothesized model with 26 degrees of freedom was ?2 = 181.33; p = 0.000, and the Chi-square for the revised model with 8 degrees of freedom was ?2 = 23.34; p = 0.000. Therefore the Chi-square difference test (or likelihood ratio for maximum likelihood) yielded ?2 = (181.33-23.34) = 157.99, df = (26-8) = 18, p = 0.000. This proved that the model's fit was significantly improved after the re-specification of the model.

In general, all goof-fit indices as in Table 4 show very remarkable results. The level of discrepancy between the observed data and the revised model divided by the degrees of freedom yielded better fit at CMIN/df = 2.917 compared to 6.974 for the hypothesized model. As for absolute fit, GFI = 0.982 and RMR = 0.087 for the revised model. The RMSEA value was at 0.069 well below that of the threshold value of 0.08. All these indicated better fit for measurement model.

Table 4: Fit indices of the Revised Model

Measures	Fit Indices	Threshold Values
CMIN/df	2.917	Less than 5
GFI	0.982	0.90 and above
AGFI	0.954	0.90 and above
RMSEA	0.069	0.08 and less
TLI	0.989	0.90 and above
NFI	0.991	0.90 and above
CFI	0.994	0.90 and above
RMR	0.087	The nearer to zero the better

Note:

- Number of variables in the model = 14
- Number of observed variables = 6
- Number of unobserved variables = 8
- Number of exogenous variables = 8
- Number of endogenous variables = 6
- Number of distinct sample moments = 21
- Number of distinct parameters to be estimated = 13
- Sample size = 406; Degrees of Freedom (21-13) = 8
- Chi-square **(X^2) = 23.339; p = 0.003**

In terms of incremental fit measures, AGFI, TLI and NFI values were at 0.954, 0.989 and 0.991 respectively. All these values satisfied the threshold values. There were also no indications of insignificant values, thus proving that the revised model fitted the dataset almost perfectly. As a conclusion, all three types of good-fit indices, which the study discussed previously, proved that the study had successfully developed and identified better fit and parsimonious model.

6.4 Revised Model: Strategic Leadership Styles of NPS Heads.

Having assessed the overall model and the aspects of measurement model, the next step was to examine the estimated coefficients for both practical and theoretical implications (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). After the re-specification of the measurement model, both latent variables (INDVCHAR & ORGACAPAB) possessed three indicators each. Indicators as measured by their respective standardized regression weights RESTLESS (0.90), ABSORB (0.92) and ADAPT (0.88) measured latent variable INDVCHAR. Indicators as measured by their respective standardized regression weights ORIENTAT (0.90), ACTION (0.94) and ALIGN (0.89) measured latent variable ORGACAPAB.

As a conclusion, the study confirmed and identified the presence of six (6) indicators of strategic leadership styles of heads of the NPS that involved in SIP. The study excluded three indicators (WISDOM for INDVCHAR; and POINT and CAPABILITY for ORGACAPAB) in its attempt to confirm the presence of all nine (9) styles of strategic leadership.

6.5 Testing of the hypotheses

Byrne (1994) suggested that SEM is a statistical methodology that takes on hypotheses testing (i.e. confirmatory) approach of the multivariate analysis. Further, Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) in Hairuddin (2006) also viewed SEM as a confirmatory technique for model testing. Thus, all research hypotheses would be accepted or rejected based upon the employment of SEM to the dataset.

The study used the SEM results and significance level of 0.05 to test all the hypotheses. The study also used the results in Table 4 and the generated output as in Figure 4 to examine whether the revised model supported the research hypotheses (or vice-versa) of the study.

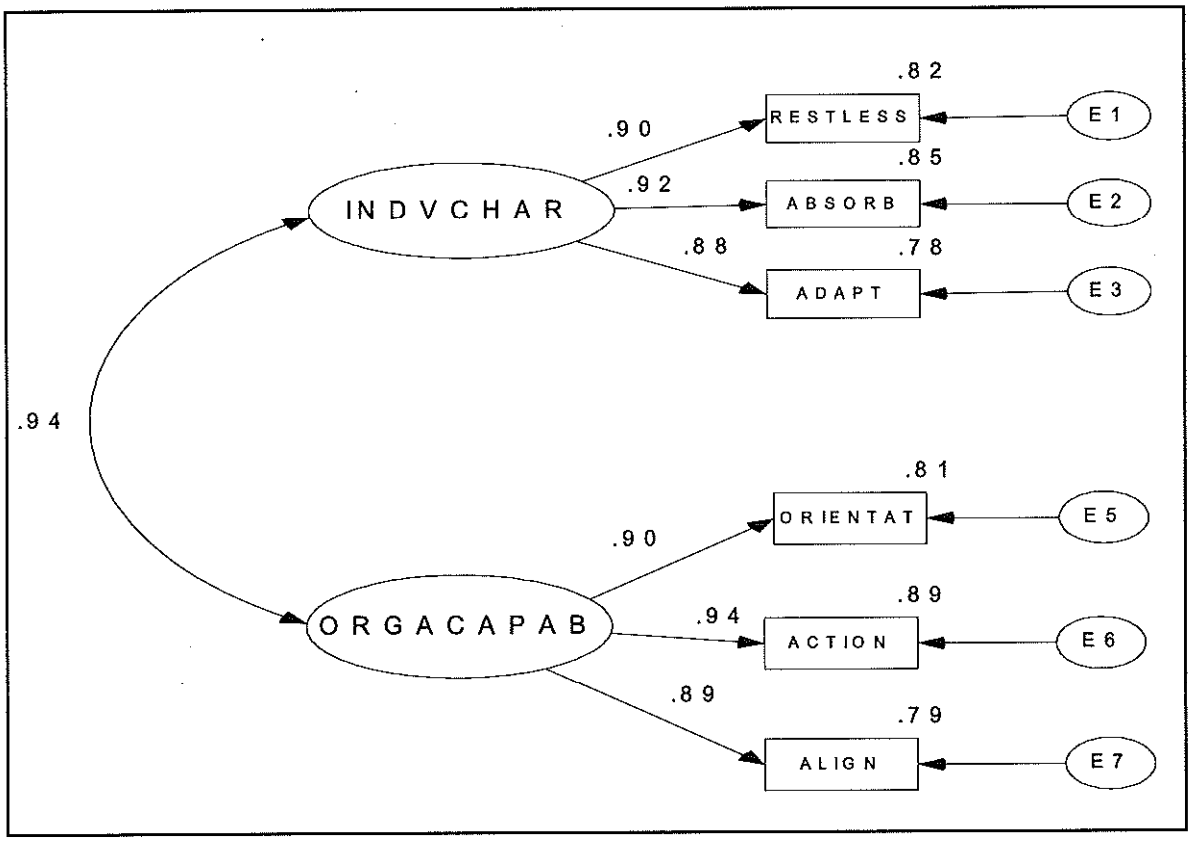

Figure 4: Revised Model of the Study

The study conducted the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by employing the AMOS 7.0. As a result, SEM and AMOS 7.0 confirmed that the latent variable INDVCHAR (as one of the strategic leadership components) was represented by three indicators (RESTLESS, ABSORB & ADAPT) while ORGACAPAB (as one of the strategic leadership components) was represented only by three indicators (ORIENTAT, ACTION & ALIGN). The study omitted two indicators for ORGACAPAB (CAPABILI & POINT) and an indicator for INDVCHAR (WISDOM) as they possessed small loadings (Figure 4).

Although the study attempted to examine and prove that NPS heads for SIP in Malaysia possessed five organizational capabilities. The findings from the study however confirmed the presence of only three (out of five) organizational capability dimensions. The confirmed organizational capability dimensions were "strategically oriented" (ORIENTAT) [H1.1 (a)], "translate strategy into action" (ACTION) [H1.2 (a)], "align people and organizations (ALIGN) [H1.3 (a)]. The study was unable to confirm the presence of the remaining two organizational capability dimensions among the NPS heads "determine effective strategic intervention points" (POINT) [H1.4 (a)] and "develop strategic competencies" (CAPABILI) [H1.5 (a)]. As a conclusion, the study only supported three out of five hypotheses.

Pertaining to the strategic leadership styles of the NPS heads for SIP, the study intended to examine and to prove that all NPS heads concerned displayed four individual characteristics dimensions. The confirmed individual characteristics displayed by the NPS heads were "a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present" (RESTLESS) [H1.1 (b)], "absorptive capacity" (ABSORB) [H1.2 (b)], and "adaptive capacity" (ADAPT) [H1.3 (b)]. However, the study failed to confirm that one indicator (WISDOM) was one of the strategic leadership styles of the NPS heads. Hence, the study supported only three hypotheses (out of four individual characteristics displayed by the NPS heads).

7. DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study identified that all senior management staff/teachers such as senior assistant for administration, senior assistant for student affairs, senior assistant for extra co-curricular activities and the afternoon session supervisor (who were the respondents for the study) were the most powerful group in the schools studied. This study assumed that they managed to influence and exert considerable pressure on to the leadership of the schools concerned. As the deputies were always shadowing their school leaders, they were the most appropriate subordinates who could evaluate their school heads very well.

7.1 Organizational Capability of the NPS Heads

In the case of NPS heads for SIP in Malaysia, the study confirmed that they possessed three dimensions of organizational capability of strategic leadership styles as discussed previously. Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004) described the first dimension as "be strategically oriented" (ORIENTAT). It was obviously clear that the leaders of the NPS for SIP were strategically oriented as required by the stakeholders (MOEM) and hence conformed to the Standards of Competency for Malaysian School Principals (2006). With the possession of this particular capability, the NPS heads fulfilled the Quality Standards for Malaysian Education (2004). This is one of the prerequisites and predictors to be an excellent and effective school in Malaysia. As compared to the United Kingdom (Preedy, Glatter & Wise, 2003), strategic planning and leadership concept was introduced quite recently in the Malaysian education system especially in conjunction with the inception of the Educational Development Master Plan (PIPP) 2006-2010. Hence, the year 2010 will witness the achievements of the strategic implementation of the plan.

Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004) described "ability to translate strategy into action" (ACTION) as one of the organizational capability dimensions of strategic leadership styles. Kaplan and Norton (2004) viewed "ability to translate strategy into action" as an essential factor for the success of the strategy management implementation. In case of Malaysia, the study confirmed that the NPS heads possessed the "ability to translate strategy into action". With the possession of this particular capability, would enable the stakeholders to differentiate the true strategic implementers (NPS heads) from the mere rhetoric and mediocre leadership. The

strategic implementers were those who were able to turnaround the schools as contrasted to the rhetoric leaders who were just holding on to the status-quo and survived. As the ability to translate strategy into action is one of the main components in strategy management implementation (Kaplan & Norton, 2004) and strategic planning for public organization (Bryson, 2003), the study successfully identified it to be one of the leadership skills needed by the NPS leadership. Hence, this will fulfill both the Standards of Competencies for Malaysian School Principals (2006) and Quality Standards for Malaysian Education (2004).

Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004) described, "align people and organizations"(ALIGN) as one of the dominant organizational capability dimensions of strategic leadership styles. This study however successfully confirmed that ALIGN was one of the dimensions underlying the organizational capability of the NPS heads. The NPS deputy heads that evaluated his or her school heads confirmed this. From the perception of the deputies, the heads possessed the required leadership powers that enabled them to align his or her staff with the organization". Such powers were legitimate powers, coercive powers, reward powers, expert powers and referent powers.

Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004) described "ability to develop strategic capabilities" (CAPABILI) as one of the organizational capability (ORGACAPAB) dimension of strategic leadership. The study confirmed that the NPS heads for SIP did not possess the CAPABILI. Among others, CAPABILI comprised "ability to identify strategies to improve student learning", "no culture of "scape-goat", "ability to interpret data for student achievement", and "team problem solving". As an instructional leader, it was accepted that the NPS heads must be skillful in identifying the learning improvement strategies as the student-learning factor was considered the most important component in the Standards of Competencies for Malaysian School Principals (2006) and Quality Standards for Malaysian Education (2004). In addition, team problem solving and the absence of the "scapegoat culture" will fulfill the statement that "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (Hargreaves, 2003). With the absence of this dominant component, this might become the great hindrance for NPS heads to steer his or her school successfully in future.

Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004) identified "determine effective strategic intervention points" (POINT) as one of the underlying indicators for organizational capability, however the study confirmed that this dimension was not a dominant one for the NPS heads. The implication would be disastrous as this situation exhibited the inability of the NPS heads to control and monitoring the strategic implementation of the school plan. However the study did not able to confirm the specific derailment of the strategic process as the study only focused on the presence (or absence) of the strategic leadership styles among the NPS heads for SIP.

Although in terms of ORGACAPAB, the study confirmed that there were three dominant dimensions (ORIENTAT, ACTION & ALIGN) among the NPS heads concerned. However, as a contrast, the study also confirmed that the NPS heads for SIP did not possess two dominant qualities (POINT & CAPABILI) that were very important to them. In-depth study of how these imbalances of characteristics affect the strategic leadership performance of the NPS heads of SIP badly needed here.

7.2 Individual characteristics of the NPS heads

The study proved and confirmed that NPS heads for SIP possessed three (out of four) dimensions of individual characteristics (INDVCHAR) of strategic leadership styles as discussed earlier. The dimensions as confirmed in the study by CFA process were "a dissatisfaction or restless with the present" (RESTLESS), "absorptive capacity" (ABSORB) and "adaptive capacity" (ADAPT).

Pertaining to "a dissatisfaction or restless with the present" (RESTLESS), the study proved that the NPS heads possessed this particular individual characteristic. Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004) described this characteristic dimension as one of the most important aspect of the strategic leadership styles because "vision without action is merely a dream and while vision with action can change the world" (Barker, 1992). From this point, the stakeholders could expect the best from the NPS heads of SIP and thus enable to fulfill the "third goal of Malaysian Educational Development Master Plan (PIPP) 2006-2010.

The study also proved and confirmed the presence of the second dimension of the individual characteristics of strategic leadership. As described by Davies (2004), Davies and Davies (2004), one of the most important aspects of the individual characteristic was the NPS heads' capacity and ability to absorb the available information (ABSORB) which obviously important for the students' performance achievement. Bryson (2003) emphasized, by having this ability and capacity, the school heads were able to conduct the strategic analyses (including environmental or situational aspects) prior to the preparation of the school strategic development planning. Preedy, Glattter and Wise (2003) supported and emphasized the importance of the internal and external environment scanning as well as the outcome of its interpretations. Thus, all NPS heads for SIP should see that ongoing learning, through interaction with environmental information, was equally important in developing the individual's and organization's capacities to interpret external events and identify key trends that needed to be responded to (Senge, 1990).

The perception of the NPS deputies' supported the presence of "adaptive capacity" (ADAPT) characteristics among the NPS heads for SIP. The finding of this study shows this. In accordance with the strategic planning literature (Bryson, 2003), the adaptive capacity characteristic of a leader is deem important. By having this characteristic, the NPS heads might be able to adopt and adapt the generated strategies following the changes in the environment. This ability is vital to a strategic leader, as the effective strategies generated would ensure the achievement of the organizational goals. The creativity and the authentic experiences of the strategic leaders would also influence and affect ones' adaptive capacity.

Despite of having three dominant individual characteristics (RESTLESS, ADOPT & ADAPT), however the study also proved and confirmed that the NPS heads for SIP did not possess the "leadership wisdom" (WISDOM) which was obviously important. The literature described leadership's wisdom comprised intellectual aspect, wise judgment, believe in the team's ability and excellent application of knowledge for the of organizational success. The absence of WISDOM characteristic among the NPS heads for SIP, what the stakeholders of NPS heads could expect the best out of NPS heads. What would be the destiny of an organization that led by a less wisdom leader? As a conclusion, again the study believed that these individual characteristics dimensions of strategic leadership styles of NPS heads were deem important for the success of SIP. The success of the implementation would be able to propel the schools well ahead and hence successfully fulfill the third goal of the Malaysian Educational Development Master Plan (PIPP) 2006-2010.

8. CONCLUSION

Pertaining to the study, several limitations and hindrances cropped up when the study commenced. The most prominent limitation was the lack of response from the respondents especially towards the end of the data collection period (about two months). There were instances where at least thirty (30) envelopes (containing at least 90 completed questionnaires) came in two months later (after the data collection period). There were also situations where three different senior management teachers provided three different demographic data although they were from the same school.

Generally, the study provides us some insight on the status of the strategic leadership styles among the NPS heads for SIP. The study also confirmed that all NPS heads generally possessed six (out of nine) dominant strategic leadership styles. Despite that, there was a setback as the NPS heads concerned also found to be lacking in three important strategic dimensions that too important for the success of the schools. The implications could be very great as it might hinder the achievement of the MOEM's Master Plan (PIPP) goals. The findings from this study will obviously enhance the nation's indigenous knowledge in the area of strategic educational leadership styles.

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