IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN SABAH
Kesan Gaya Kepimpinan terhadap Tekanan Psikologi dan Kepuasan Kerja dalam Kalangan Pekerja di Sabah

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Abstract *This research was aimed at determining the effects of toxic leadership on psychological distress and job satisfaction. Data were collected from among 200 employees who are working in the public sector in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The empirical results through Pearson Correlation found employees' psychological distress indicating a positive relationship with toxic leadership. Meanwhile it was found that there is negative relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction. This study provides a strong evidence that could help the top management and individuals in the public sector to find strategies to prevent a growth of toxic leadership.*

Keywords: *Toxic leadership, psychological distress, job satisfaction, public sector, leadership.*

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of the public sector is to provide a strong set of rules, encourage innovative competition, correct externalities, ensure economic stability and growth, provide public goods and services, and aligned unintended market values for undesired market results. This goal would definitely benefit the society but it may also create challenges to management in the public sector. For these reasons, it must specify competence leader in promoting a sector growth. Therefore, leadership in public sector is viewed as a critical success factor. Leadership represents a positive descriptive word.

However, the selection of public sector leaders is subject to problems such as lack of qualified candidates for administrative positions and are filled by those who are inadequate to face the internal and external challenges (Abu Bakar, 2014).

Leadership in any organization is important, but developing a good leader in the public sector are challenging. A certain skills such as conceptual skill, technical skill and human skill is needed during their tenure (Ali, 2012). There are many forms of training, education and professional development for leaders to gain knowledge about leadership. Moreover, understanding the key concept of leadership may lead to an effective management. Leader effectiveness have strong influence on their followership. Good and bad leadership style is important for followers because it will indicate both positive and negative outcomes on followers. In general, leader must be responsible on their conduct towards followership.

People around the world appear to be afflicted by toxic leadership. This can be seen in the case of British workers which 82.2 per cent have had a toxic leadership, with some of the worst bosses being based in Cardiff (88.5 per cent), Liverpool (86.4 per cent), London (84.2 per cent) and Newcastle (83.7 per cent) (http://www.onrec.com/news/statistics-). In a similar case, 22,000 army in 2009 and 2010 revealed that up to 20 per cent of leaders were considered to be toxic leadership (https://www.harmonycrew.com/toxic-leadership/). This toxic leadership within the organization has created a problem on individual, group and organization. In public organization, this problem stands out and create a situation on how toxic leadership emerged. A growing evidence shows toxic leadership exists in public corporation (Kim, Burns & Prescott, 2009). Thus, there are several factors influencing the development of toxic leadership. Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser (2007), have identified leaders personality, type of follower and cultural environment influence the growth of toxic leadership.

According to world public sector survey, nurse and army had experienced with toxic leadership (Bullis & Reed, 2003). Whilst in Malaysia context, empirical research done by Aishah, Sarah and Adina (2017) shows

that toxic leadership emerged in a selected public organization in Sabah. However, this finding cannot be generalized because the selection of sample does not represent the population as a whole. While it is being addressed in this manner of toxic leadership development, therefore there is a need for this study in order to determine the impact of toxic leadership. Literatures have argued broadly about the impact of toxic leadership on the decrease of work performance among employee (Harris, Kacmar & Zivnuska, 2007), increased employee workplace deviance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), organizational commitment (Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002; Tepper, 2000) and increased levels of work–family conflict (Tepper, 2000) and suicide (https://www.harmonycrew.com/toxic-leadership/).

Although extensive research has been carried out on impact of toxic leadership, psychological distress and job satisfaction was adequately discussed. Both psychological distress and job satisfaction is an important element to be considered in an organization because it can reduce employee's job performance (Soshi, 2006; Long, Frederick, Ho & Xiaomeng, 2012; Renee, Chantal, Jocelyne & Michel, 1996; Alain, Andre & Pierre, 2005; Jun, Takeshi & Isao, 2012; Alia, et al., 2014; Norito, Yuka, Kobasyashi & SoshiTakao, 2005; Inoue, 2013; Cynthia, Craig, Neumanc & Paul, 2014; Madelaine, 2002; E. Kevin, 2012). In addition, there is a data documented that a number of 21 employees in public organization in Sabah having their counselling session due to emotional breakdown (Counselling Department, 2018). Since the psychological distress and job satisfaction have a huge impact to individual, identifying the relationship between toxic leadership style, psychological distress and job satisfaction are essential for public organization in Sabah. Thus, the research objectives of this study are as follows:

1.   To determine the relationship between toxic leadership and psychological distress among employees in public sector.
2.   To determine the relationship between toxic leadership and job satisfaction among employees in public sector.

TOXIC LEADERSHIP THEORY

Jessica, Robert, William, Jeremy, Robert and Jinyu (2014) has widely explored leadership theory development and grouped it by thematic category. Two broad themes emerged from the analysis namely established leadership theory and emerging leadership theory. Whilst two themes being classified, toxic leadership theory was found located under emerging leadership theory.

One of the most well-known researcher in toxic leadership world is Lipman-Blumen (2005). She had an in-depth discussion about the toxic leadership. Ascending to the toxic leadership can be defined as a leader who is engaged in a serious destructive behaviour and they display dysfunctional personal qualities. Destructive behaviour refer to leaders ruthless and lasting continuing damage physically, emotionally or sexually abusing by bullying, undermining, demeaning, seducing, marginalizing, intimidating, demoralizing, disenfranchising, incapacitating, imprisoning, torturing, terrorizing or killing those they intend to control (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Whereas, dysfunctional personal qualities refers to lack of integrity, ego, arrogance, immorality, greediness, self-centredness, cowardice, inability to comprehend the problem and ambitious (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Secondly, this theory discussed four dimensions of toxic leadership limitations. It explained about the limitation of toxic leadership action or occurrence. The dimensions include intention, intensity, duration and impact. For intention dimension, the toxic leadership can be observed as intentional or unintentional. Intentional toxic leaders whereby a leader deliberately injures others. Whilst unintentional toxic leaders include a leader which is incompetence, ignorance, lack of attention to the followers, reckless disregard follower well-being. Taken together, these dimensions suggest that toxic leadership range not mainly occurred on their intent but also inadvertent. Next is intensity, where it measured the level of toxic leadership action. The level range from very mild and very intense. The action level will result on seriousness and enduring harm to others. For duration, it provides a time frame for toxic leadership action. The specific

period is either one-lasting for long period or short-term action. One lasting for long period create more serious harmful to others than short term period action. The last dimension is the impact of toxic leadership. It could affect organizations, institutions, environments and nations. However, there is difficulty to access the impact of toxic leadership especially in different societal and history. There are no specific measurement tools to examine the impact of toxic leadership on this.

This theory also determined the factors that influence the formation of toxic leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Leader's existential dilemmas have been found to contribute in toxic leadership development. Leaders who can protect, convince, act as saviour and have a strong power (Lipman-Blumen, 2005) might influence their followers. Furthermore, psychological factors also play an important role. Leaders who need for security, need to feel chosen, fear of isolation in human community, fear of personal powerlessness and opportunities for heroism elevate to toxic leadership. The mixing of leader's existential dilemma and psychological needs exerts a powerful effect upon toxic leadership development.

Finally, this theory gives a specific prediction. Prediction is often quantitative that is forecasting what would happened. For example, this toxic leadership theory mentioned that toxic leadership depends on the leaders existentialism dilemma and psychological. Thus, we can test this theory by looking at whether personality indeed predicts toxic leadership development in psychology data. Findings from the relationship would provide evidence to support the theory.

It can be summarized that this theory has discussed on variable definition, limitation, relationship and prediction. It can therefore be assumed that the theory comply with general procedure for theory building (John, 1998). One of the limitations with this explanation is that it does not explain the impact of toxic leadership on individual specifically on psychological distress and job satisfaction. Therefore, this study would only test the theory by looking at the impact of toxic leadership on employee psychological distress.

Impact of Toxic Leadership on Psychological Distress

The literature to date was tended to focus the toxic leadership outcomes on followers' point of view. Theoretically and in line with toxic leadership definition, highlighting on follower related outcome are rational, as part of the definition is that toxic leadership is focussed on influencing followers. Outcomes under the field of toxic leadership can broadly to differentiated into organizational, group and individual outcomes. However, this study only focussed on individual outcome. This research summarized psychological distress under the individual outcome as it is a consequence that is related to the individual follower. Therefore, this study outline the expected relationship between toxic leadership. To avoid a confusion with the concepts of organization performance, thus this study categorized this variable under individual follower-related outcomes.

Toxic leadership bring to bear negative effect on employees' psychological distress. In Model of Stress proposed by Robbins (2003), explained that potential sources and actual loss stimuli the stress process which produced a negative symptoms such as psychological distress. Toxic leadership in a workplace will deplete employees' psychological resources and these resource levels impact employees. There was a positive relationship between toxic leadership and psychological distress. Consistent and long term exposure to toxic leadership inflict harmful on employees psychological distress (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Sample studies examining psychological distress are Gabriele, Milda, Francesco, Javier, Nicola and Guilio, (2016), Anna (2015), Krum (2013), Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, (2011), Nazan, Serpil and Nuran, (2006), Lipman-Blumen (2005), Fitzgerald and Eijnatten (2002). Finally, employees who have a chronic psychological distress experienced lead to performance (Lars, Anders, Guy & Stale, 2010; Steven & David, 2007; George, 2009).

Impact of Toxic Leadership on Job Satisfaction

In the context of toxic leadership, the dimension, which most influenced employee outcome, is job satisfaction. Prior studies argued and showed that toxic leadership is negatively related to job satisfaction (Mehta, 2013;

Cynthia, 2014; Steele, 2009). Yelling and threating by the leader create unpleasant experience and lead to employee low satisfaction (Zagross, 2016). Positive attitude such as dedicated, self-motivated and strong work ethic possess by the employees tend to decrease if toxic leadership exists (Schmindt, 2008). While, the long term impact on employees will cause job dissatisfaction and well-being disturbance. Job dissatisfaction will give the impression of being unhappy in the organizations. This will prolong to turnover, absenteeism and demotivated.

METHODOLOGY

The research samples are based on 200 employees in ten public sector targeted in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. One most important reason rated were psychological impact among employees exist in public organization in Kota Kinabalu (Counselling Department, 2018). The unit of analysis in this study were employees who have been working with a current leader at least for seven years. The primary data is based on self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire is distributed to employee in public sector in Kota Kinabalu. Respondents were selected based on stratified random sampling technique. The sample was chosen because it represents a group of individuals who have the experience working with a current leader for seven years. 270 questionnaires were personally sent to the targeted respondents. The distribution were conducted within four month time frame. Eventually, 200 questionnaires were returned which is 75 per cent from the total number distributed.

Data from this study were collected using Toxic Leadership Scale by Schmidt (2008). The questionnaire consist of three sections. Section A requires respondents' background such as ethnicity, gender, age and year of services. In Section B contains questions about the employees' perception towards leadership style. Likert Scale of a five point scale was used to allow the individual to express how much they agree or disagree with leadership style. Meanwhile, Section C determines employees' level of psychological distress in a workplace. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was used to collect the data. The K10 scale consists of 10 questions

about emotional states each with a five-level response scale. Finally, Job Satisfaction was measured using Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss, Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1967). It consists of 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = very low level of satisfaction; 6 = very high level of satisfaction).

Next, the data were analysed using Statistical package IBM version 24 based on frequency and percentage distribution. Frequencies were used to identify the distribution of respondent's demography. Meanwhile the relationship between toxic leadership and psychological distress and job satisfaction were access using Pearson Correlation Analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section provides information on the percentage of respondent demographic such as ethnicity, gender, age and year of service. The total numbers of demographic profile is depicted in Table I. The top three highest ethnics were Bajau (25.7 per cent), following by Dusun (16.7 per cent) and Brunei (11.4 per cent). For gender composition, 62 per cent are males and 38 per cent females. As illustrate in Table 1, the age range was between 35–44 years old. Therefore, the highest years of service was between 16–20 years. It was noted that this groups have a wide experienced with different leadership style in their workplace.

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity		
Malay	13	6.5
Chinese	19	9.5
Indian	6	3
Bajau	54	27
Dusun	35	17.5
Bugis	14	7
Brunei	24	12
Rungus	11	5.5
Iban	10	5
Iranun	9	4.5
Lundayeh	5	2.5
Gender		
Male	124	62
Female	76	38
Year of Service (years)		
1–5	27	13.5
6–10	45	22.5
11–15	45	22.5
16–20	63	31.5
21–25	16	8
26–30	4	2
Age (years)		
18–24	27	13.5
25–34	50	25
35–44	65	32.5
45–54	48	24
55–64	9	4.4
65	1	0.5

Reliability Testing

The research instruments were tested for reliability using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. A value of 0.70 or greater is considered to be high in validity (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2010). Table 2 shows that no item deletion was performed as the reading of Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables exceeds the criterion of 0.70. It indicates that the survey instruments are reliable to measure all constructs consistently.

Table 2 Reliability analysis

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Toxic Leadership	15	0.80
Psychological Distress	10	0.80
Job satisfaction	20	0.87

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Pearson correlation measures the correlation between two or more variables. Correlation coefficient (r) value of −1 indicates a negative correlation and +1 indicates a positive correlation (Pallant, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Table 3 shows that there was a positive correlation and significant relationship between toxic leadership and psychological distress ($r = .213$, $p < .05$). The positive correlation indicates that strong toxic leadership style may produce a strong psychological distress among workers. It is believed that employees in public sector in Sabah vulnerable to toxic leadership due to demand on emotion therapy (Counselling Department, 2018). However, a correlation merely specifies the presence or absence of relationship not the nature of the relationship. These findings cannot be extrapolated to causation. It is possible that other variables influenced the result. These findings further support the idea of Lipman-Blumen (2005) where superior that violates the human rights may lead to higher perception of toxic leadership.

Table 3 Correlation between toxic leadership and psychological distress

Correlation	r	Sig**
Toxic leadership - Psychological distress	0.213	0.002

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

To further test the objectives of this study, the result is performed in Table 4. The analysis revealed that there was a negative and significant correlation between toxic leadership and psychological distress (r = − 0.371, p < .05). Thus, it indicates that the level of job satisfaction is low when toxic leadership developed. Moreover, this study produced findings, which corroborate the output of a great deal of the previous work in this field. One study by Mehta (2013) examined that toxic leadership have a strong influence or contribute to employee job satisfaction. More than 16 years of service also influence the employee satisfaction. They have spent all their time and life for the organizations. In return, they need leaders who support their psychological need. Psychological need is important for career satisfaction. Job dissatisfaction increases the organizational cost if employees' performance reduces form time to time.

Table 4 Correlation between toxic leadership and job satisfaction

Correlation	*r*	Sig**
Toxic leadership - Job Satisfaction	− 0.371	0.000

**significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study extend an understanding about toxic leadership and psychological distress among employees specifically in Malaysia context. Empirical analysis of Pearson Correlation supports that toxic leadership behaviour has a relationship with employees' psychological distress. In terms of application to the practitioner, empirical results would benefit to top management in public sector for developing an effective strategies to prevent the aggressiveness of toxic leaders. Organization has exclusive right of setting policy options to prohibit toxic leadership behaviour. An example strategy would be assessment method using periodic 360 degree on leaders. This evaluation process is confidential and anonymous. Each employee have the opportunity to give a feedback about their leader. The feedback will provide information about the leader strength and limitations. Furthermore, protective system for whistle-blowers policy is used. Some whistle blowers were threatened by their superior for disclosure of any information. Actually, the whistle blowers provide important information

concerning the organization. Thus, organization can formulate a mechanism to protect those who have particulars about leaders' wrongdoing without being punished.

Since this research revealed that employees suffer a psychological distress from toxic leaders, a number of ways can be used to cope with toxic leaders such as avoiding unaccompanied confrontations. Forming small group during confrontations with leaders. By forming this small group, leader will be aware that there are other members who are in the know of the issue discussed. This is to avoid the possibility to twist the information given. In addition, it is advisable to do research about a particular leader who is involved with toxic behaviour. Toxic leaders usually has the same behaviour as their past. Employees have to gather information about the toxic leaders past performances. As a result, employees can used the data to deal with toxic leader in the future.

The analysis provides a better understanding on the impact of toxic leadership on employees in public sector. However, the current data were only collected from the respondents, which may not represent the entire population of Malaysia. Therefore by increasing the sample size and geographical area would improve the generalizability of the findings.

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