

# **THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**An Investigation of the Construction of the Leadership in Higher Education in  
Malaysia**

**Being a thesis submitted for the degree of**

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**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the construction of leadership and identity in higher education in Malaysia. It is a qualitative research, adopting a postmodern view in favour of social constructionist approach. The study is looking into the relational process of the leadership, examining how the social identity of the leadership being constructed around the contextual phenomena. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) how do the external factors affect the leadership in public higher education? 2) how do the internal factors affect the leadership in public higher education? 3) how do the emerging leadership identities constructed from the context?

This study employs an in-depth interview as the main method in collecting data. The respondents were leaders from the central administration office of the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, and the public universities. They were selected based on purposive sampling. The interviews were conducted in both language - English and Malay, ranging from one to two and half hours for each interview. The interviews were digitally tape recorded, transcribed and translated into English, and analysed manually.

The findings suggested both the external and internal factors plays significant roles in constructing the leadership and leadership identities in Malaysian higher education, with the external being the stronger influencing factors. The historical and cultural factors become the backdrop of the construction process. Subsequently, the findings provide the basis for developing a new model of the construction of the leadership and leadership identity in this context. The rigour and richness of the findings will contribute to the development of organisational behaviour knowledge particularly in leadership and organisational studies, by providing empirical evidences from a Malaysian perspective.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ASHE	Association for the Study of Higher Education.
APEX	Accelerated Program of Excellent
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
KRA	Key Result Area
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMX	Leader Member Exchange
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MHE	Malaysia Higher Education
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MKRA	Main Key Result Area
MNP	Malayan National Party
MOSTI	Ministry of Science, Technology and Industry
NEP	New Economic Policy
NHESP	National Higher Education Strategic Plan
NHEAP	National Higher Education Action Plan
NUS	National University of Singapore
PESTEL	Political, Economic, Social, Technology and Legal
UM	University of Malaya
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
UUCA	University and University College Act
VC	Vice Chancellors

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# CHAPTER 1

## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is entitled ‘An investigation of the construction of the leadership in Higher Education in Malaysia’. This chapter sets out the parameters of the study in terms of the background and context of the study; the problem statement, which explains the rationale and justification for the study; the purposes of the study based on the research questions; the scope and limitations of the study; a review of relevant literature; an account of the research methodology; and, finally, the expected output of the study.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

After the long history in institutional thought and practice of considering leadership as an individual property, trend in one or two decades ago has demonstrated some momentum in entertaining alternative perspectives. These perspectives are not meant to dethrone the individualistic paradigm for its own sake, but rather to affirm the value of detaching leadership from personality in order to allow leadership to focus on social interactions and behavioural change within organizational life (Raelin, 2011). Studies on leadership have shown some shifting towards focusing on the daily practice of leadership including its moral, emotional, and relational aspects, rather than its rational, objective, and technical ones (Carroll *et al.*, 2008). The focus is looking for leadership in its activity rather than through the traits and heroics of individual actors under the longstanding ‘great man’ theory (Realin, 2010).

Since leadership has become an increasingly central component in many organizational settings, Ford (2010) suggests that there needs to be a more critical and reflexive approach to the study of leadership, in which attention should be given to situations, events, institutions, ideas, social practices and processes. The

development of more critical approaches needs not only to adopt a culturally sensitive and locally based interpretive approach, that takes account of individual experiences, identities, power relations and inter subjectivities, but also one that allows for the presence of a range of both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ workplace behaviours. Furthermore, Ford asserts that the whole notion of leadership is arguably constructed through a leader-follower pairing, with the followers being the subordinated in respect of the leader’s dominant position, which implies that followers are placed in a feminized position.

The consideration of social processes and cultural context provides leaders with a means of self-regulation and self-monitoring, in which leaders are ‘cultivated’ to become ‘autonomous, self-regulating and proactive individuals’ (Du Gay, 1996; Rose, 1999). This is how leaders’ identities and senses of self are constructed and crafted by their experiences in workplace settings. Specifically, a more critical exploration encourages local and culturally sensitive research into how the concept of leadership is being enacted at a local level, and how the masculine discourses that dominate inform the feminine subordinated discourses and practices in the organization (Ford, 2010).

Talking in the same vein, Uhl-Bien (2006) suggests the concept of a relational dynamic of leadership and change and defines leadership as a relational social influence process through which emergent social structure and changes in attitudes, values and behaviours are constructed and produced. The process or relational dynamic does not have to be attached to positions of power and hierarchy, but can occur at any level throughout a system. She calls for a change in how leadership is studied, and suggests a move from examining how leaders create alignment to observing how leadership emerges.

Looking at higher education establishments, they are undergoing a phenomenal amount of change driven by various factors (e.g., Government, economy, international market, technology, and others). Traditionally, universities have been governed on a collegial basis, focusing on developing knowledge both in the students attending and through research activities (Middlehurst & Elton, 1992). In today’s dynamic environment, an increasing level of public scrutiny is now

widespread across the higher educational system around the world. This focuses on the efficiency of the public scrutiny of universities and is associated with management and developmental responses (Davies *et al.*, 2001). Such changes include more scrutiny and accountability in the usage of public funds, value for money in the deployment of resources, combined with pressure to increase entrepreneurial activities and enhance the quality of individual and institutional performances. Universities now substantially conduct their activities in a more business-like manner, and, as such, need a concerted effort by all to succeed. Academics and support staff struggle, on occasion, to identify what they are trying to do and even to identify who the customers are. McCaffery (2010) asserts that higher education staff have become alienated and the prevailing mentality within the sector is survivalist – one of endurance rather than enjoyment; a frustration over a perceived lack of resources, excessive accountability and the erosion of traditional university values.

The impact of changes are manifested in institutional cultures and structures; in individual and collective roles; as well as in associated skills and experiences that resonate in the experiences of higher educational reform in many countries.

It is undeniable that those changes have closely related and impacted on leadership as a gearing power in institutional changes. What becomes the multifaceted issue is that leadership itself is a complex process consumed by the complications of timing, circumstances and individuals. The perfect scenario of the right person, at the right time, in the right situation, with the right followers is an idealised circumstance often written about in the literature, but seldom realised in the real world (McCaffery, 2010). Those leaders and their styles can come in many forms. Institutions can and do vary enormously in their missions, circumstances, cultures and historical heritages. External environmental factors can, and do change at a pace today that can best be described as exponential. All of these intricate variables come together in each unique institutional situation to define the circumstances that exist. Thus, a simple formula for leadership does not and never will exist; it is being constructed by the surrounding environment (Taylor & Machado, 2006).

With regard to the Malaysian context, the higher educational sector is one of the global players that need to be prepared to deal with uncharted and unprecedented national and world challenges. It plays a vital role in the intellectual, economic, cultural and social development of Malaysia. It educates the country's future workforce, nurtures future leaders, drives much of the economic and regional success, facilitates cultural and trade links with other countries and enriches our social and environmental landscape. It holds the national expectation that it will stimulate knowledge and inspire an innovative and creative society based on economic well-being (Hassan, 2004).

Hence, there is considerable reason to assess how the context in higher education (particularly the public higher institutions) may shape or influence leadership and further construct leadership. It is particularly important at this time when many scholars are talking about public sector reformation and transformation, and how the role and responsibility of the leaders need to be revised. Leaders and managers in public higher institutions are expected to act innovatively and deconstruct any management orthodoxies. Effective learning from experience and the tacit way of developing leaders (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004) are worth considering.

Therefore, this study aims to look closer into the contextual or surrounding factors that may construct leadership in the public higher education sector in Malaysia. The role of higher education as the catalyst of socio-economic development in Malaysia is undoubtedly critical. Measures to enhance the activities, performance and reputation of higher educational institutions are therefore crucial to ensure that these organizations are capable of meeting the increasing demands for higher education from local and foreign markets. It is in this context that the study intends to investigate the extent and practices of higher educational leadership in encountering and facilitating challenges.

### **1.3 Statement of Problems**

The rationale and justifications for this study are established from the following lines of argument:



- (i) Leadership has been presented as one of the important elements that have a sound impact on the performance and future direction of an organization.
- (ii) Although leadership theories were very well developed in the business world, its application in the public domain needs further critical investigation to strengthen the management system.
- (iii) Regardless of a private or public organization, to remain competitive in today's knowledge-based market, every aspect of the organization needs to operate effectively, including how leaders could effectively operate in a particular context.
- (iv) A review of the mainstream leadership literature indicates that research from a wider perspective on leadership is still lacking. Many leadership schools of thought have focused on building individual leaders' capability theories, and few researchers realize that the trend should be extended to a wider spectrum of organizational agendas.
- (v) Despite such compelling needs and in spite of overwhelming comments from the public concerning the desire to increase the reputation of higher education in Malaysia, initiatives to assess the organizational and management practices remain, however, relatively unexplored. There seems to be an absence of rigorous studies on its practice. It is this gap that this study seeks to bridge.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

As a developing country, Malaysia's economic, political, and social environment have undergone some dramatic transformations during the last two decades. Over the past 20 years of economic reform, Malaysia has moved forward to compete in international markets and wishes to become a global player. This factor has inevitably shaped areas of government and the way governmental agencies are being managed and led.

In this respect, the Malaysian higher educational sector, which has undergone substantial growth as a result of efforts made by the Ministry of Education to expand the education industry, is not excluded. It is the Government's long-term

goal to make Malaysia a regional centre of excellence in education. The growth of higher education in Malaysia can be seen in several areas: an increase in student enrolment; an increase in the number of higher educational institutions (HEIs); an increase in government spending; additional government policies in promoting education and the country's continuous need for human resource. There is strong demand to review higher education system in Malaysia, as well as to enhance its leadership credibility and the organizational environment that encompasses those leaders. The desire to improve performance and delivery systems in higher education in Malaysia is reflected significantly in the report by Wan Zahid *et al.* (2005) –Report by the Committee to Study, Review and Make Recommendations Concerning the Development and Direction of Higher Education in Malaysia:

*“Feedback obtained by the Committee through dialogue and discussion session as well as website commentaries overwhelmingly call for positive action towards excellence in higher education...serious attention should be paid to the concerted voices emanating from all walks of life to garner our effort to achieve excellence. There is no question but that change is an absolute necessity requiring concentrated effort and the courage to implement bold measures.” (p.32)*

In that sense, the government has invested a large amount of money in promoting and improving the educational sector, as that is highly likely to be a prominent way of achieving national goals and interests. Thus, higher institutions, such as universities, colleges, polytechnics and community colleges, have set out to strengthen their resources and strategies to support national policies and meet their own target markets at a local as well as international level (Wan Zahid, *et al.*, 2005). Human development will remain as cornerstones of the country's plan and strategies for years to come. Giving careful attention to various factors that affect leadership performance could assist the plan for Malaysian higher education to attain success and stay competitive (Kanji &Thambi, 1998).

Therefore, one of the key ingredients in promoting and improving organizational delivery systems and outputs is effective leadership. With respect to effective leadership, not only is it important to investigate the strategy to develop leaders,

but also, most importantly, to explore the root of how the leaders are enacted within the system. In other words, greater focus should be given to the context in which leadership is constructed and developed.

Looking at the Malaysian Higher education, the interest to engage with and serve the public needs seem to have faded away. The question of “sustainability” of higher education emerges quite strongly, given that it has been in crisis since the 1990s, even in the Western hemisphere (Dzulkifli, 2011). With the general collapse of support for the Social Sciences and Humanities in Malaysian higher education, it has been "silenced" or otherwise involved in self-censorship. Dzulkifli (2011) asserts that at the same time, the Sciences have been broken up into smaller compartments, without much public engagement in the process, let alone alignment with larger views, or an attempt to shape them. All these have to do with the changing nature of the power relationship in the university. At one level, it is the erosion of the democratic process, ironically, amid the claim that higher education is undergoing democratisation. Talking from his own experience as a Vice Chancellor of one public university, the higher education process has become more tightly "regulated" under the pretext of public accountability closely related to the issue of public funding. The reality, however, is that public funding is fast decreasing whereas regulatory dimensions are being enhanced. The situation has dragged higher education even further away from the arena of public debate when universities are expected to merely accomplish short-term goals dictated by the marketplace. As such, he confesses that the higher education worldview is very much skewed towards the economic agenda set by the marketplace, and not necessarily for the interest of the community at large. Therefore, many of the issues in the limelight are economy oriented, such as job placement, industrial collaboration and the commercialisation of research and university ranking.

The Public Higher Education Department in Malaysia is fully administered by the Government. In addressing research to improve delivery systems and output in order to regain public interest in public service, Kelman's (2005) arguments are worth consideration. He argues that the field of organization studies has grown

enormously over the last few decades, the attention to public organizations and public policy problems has withered. Thus, he suggests that two things need to change in public management. First, the small band of scholars working on public administration/public management need to connect to the broader world of mainstream organization theory, which can help enrich the understanding of the public sector problems under study. Second, more scholars in the mainstream organization theory/behaviour communities need to study from a broader perspective on public organizations and public problems. Kelman's suggestions are applicable to any government body including those in Malaysia. There is little evidence that research has been done on this particular department regarding leadership, thus, this study is expected to provide an important contribution to improve the department's accomplishment.

Reviewing another highly disputed aspect in organizational study –embedding leadership in an organizational context – the literature has found that many of the new theories of leadership appear context-free. That is, they do not consider how the environmental or organizational context influences the process. Only recently have researchers begun to examine how contextual factors influence either charisma or transformational leadership (Boal & Hoijberg, 2000). Hence, Shamir and Howell (1999), in analysing contextual variables, suggest nine factors that influence the emergence and effectiveness of charismatic leadership: environmental circumstances, organizational life cycle, organizational technology and tasks, organizational structure, mode of governance, culture, leader succession, leader level, and organizational goals.

With respect to the contextual study, this study tries not to ignore postmodernist ideas that are at the centre of some recent debates. Quoting the ASHE (Association for the Study of Higher Education) Higher Education Report (2006), postmodernism emphasizes subjective and local experiences, history and context, fluidity and change. Some of the main underlying concepts in postmodernism are local conditions, subjective experience, ambiguity, and power. Postmodernist thinking promotes a view of leadership as a human process filled with ambiguity and contradiction and driven by values and ethics. In addition, it focuses on the

way that leadership is interpreted and socially constructed in a particular context and how it is affected by culture and history.

Based on the above elaboration, this study is important in addressing the following interests:

- (i) Providing input for Higher Education reviewing process

Malaysia is at a peak of an epidemic to strive for excellence in its educational delivery system as well as the output. The effort is placed at the centre stage of economic and social development agendas as a key to achieve national 2020 vision – to become a developed and industrialized country. As quoted from the Malaysian Prime Minister’s speech at the NEAC (National Economic Advisory Council) Dialogue Forum on 13 January 2006,

*‘...we will need nothing less than an “education revolution” to ensure that our inspirations to instil a new performance culture in a public and private sectors is not crippled by our inability to nurture a new kind of human capital that is equal to the tasks and challenges ahead’.*

*(Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 2006)*

Prior to the Dialogue, in 2005, the Ministry of Higher Education has formed a committee headed by Wan Zahid (former Malaysian Director General of Education) to review, revise and make recommendations for the higher education sector. The team highlights the necessity for educational departments, agencies and institutions that have been articulated clearly with the desire for higher education in Malaysia to be reliably depicted as excellent, pre-eminent and world class. The development and change is an absolute necessity requiring concrete effort and courage to implement bold measures(Wan Zahid *et al.*,2005).

- (ii) Evidence for elevating organisational receptivity to future challenges and demands

Due to the changing role of business(e.g., demographic shifts, globalization and degradation of natural resources) and the corresponding critical challenges that

demand immediate responses from organizations, a new paradigm for leadership development is evolving. One example is from a centre for creative leadership, one of the leading leadership trainers in North Carolina, USA, which is examining leadership at the organizational level, focusing on building connections across boundaries, establishing leadership practices for interdependent work and developing interdependent cultures (Martin & Ernst, 2005).

(iii) The need to look at the systemic approach to leadership issues

The gaps in the existing leadership literature suggest that more attention should be given on how the larger organizational context affects specific areas in human development, such as individual and group behaviour. Porter & McLaughlin (2006), recommend some of the specific areas, among others, motivation, communication, teams, and, **leadership**. (Other advocated scholars include Mowday & Sutton, 1993; Bryman *et al.*, 1996; Day, 2000; Hernez-Broom, 2004; McCall & Hollenback, 2007; Lockwood, 2006; Shamir & Howell, 1999 and Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002).

As a conclusion, the contributions of the research are:

- (i) to provide a robust research base for investigating how leadership is enacted in a particular context;
- (ii) to contribute to the body of knowledge on the construction of leadership and leadership identity, particularly in a cultural background other than Western culture; and
- (iii) to propose a practical contribution in providing strong evidence for leadership change in this context of the study.

## **1.5 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to add to the incipient literature on a contextual approach to the study of the leadership processes by examining how leaders are constructed in the minds of followers within the context of the public higher education organizations. The word “leader” in this study refers to the one who is designated as a leader in the central administration office at the Ministry of

Higher Education and in the Malaysian public universities. This study attempts to view leadership as the emergence of a way of thinking among the leaders and the followers. Rather than the actions of the leader, the focus of the research is on how the leadership is constructed within the external and internal environment of the organization, and how these constructions are transmitted through the organization following the formal and informal social networks, or grapevines. The underlying idea is that individual perceptions of the leaders can be, to a certain extent, understood and predicted from the pattern of the formal and informal communication networks within the social system. The formal network represents the stated, sought-after structure of the administration, whereas the informal represent the emergent and natural ways of interacting between the individuals and groups.

In light of that, the overarching aim of the study is to examine how far the current leadership system is appropriate with future, global challenges in the Malaysian HE sector.

Nonetheless to understand the organizational context, Capon (2000) suggests to look from the outside to the inside environment—organizations have to understand their external environment before they can begin to understand what it is that the organization should be concentrating on internally and in response to the external environment and the consequences of those factors.

Specifically, the purposes are:

- (i) to explore the effect of environmental factors on the construction of leadership in higher education in Malaysia;
- (ii) to explore the effects of organizational factors on the construction of leadership in higher education in Malaysia; and
- (iii) to explore the emergence of leadership identity in this context.

## **1.6 Research Questions:**

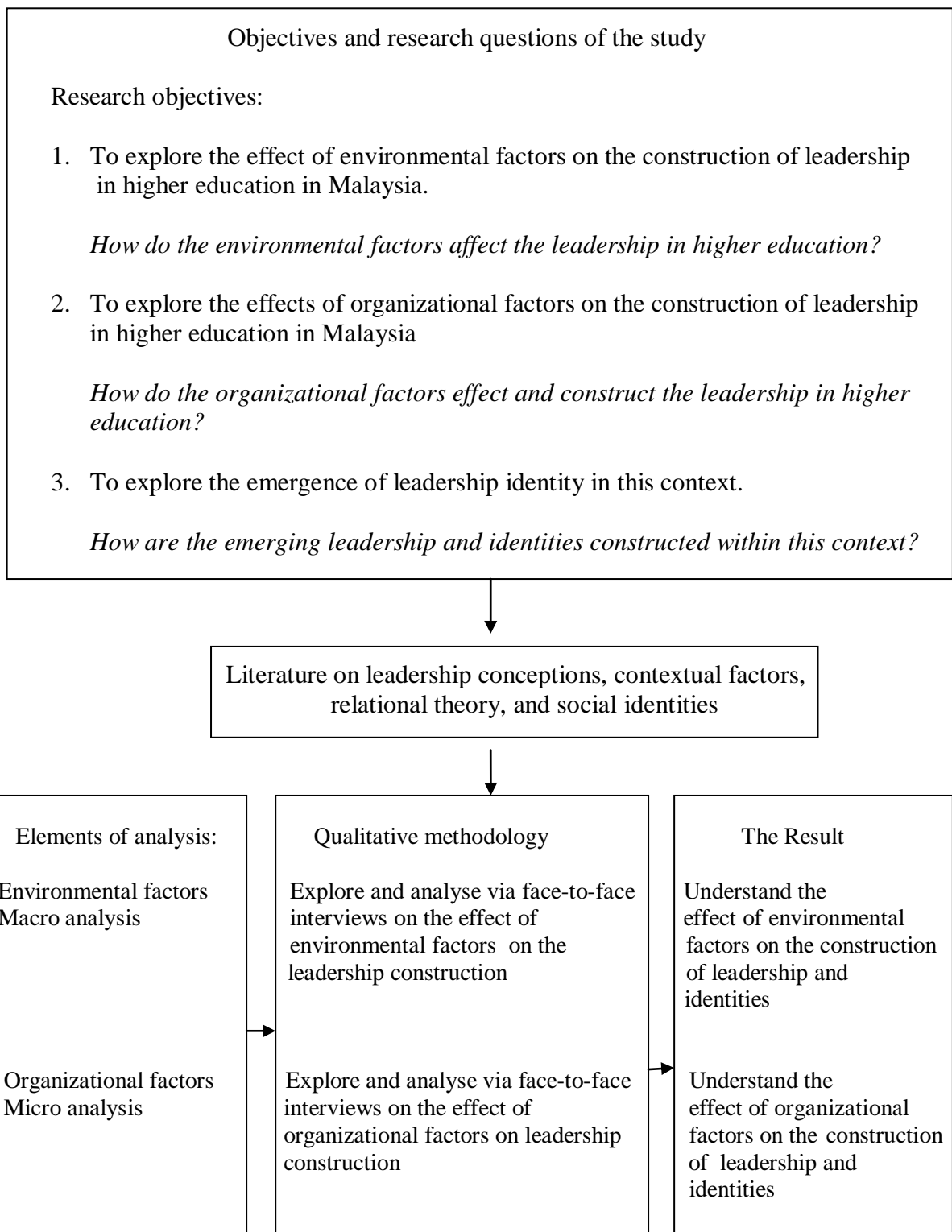
The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How do the environmental factors affect the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia?
- 2) How do the organizational factors affect the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia?
- 3) How are the emerging leadership and identities constructed within this context?

## **1.7 Research Implementation**

The following diagram exhibits the implementation of this research, in which it informs the linkages between research objectives and questions (Chapter 1), the literature (Chapters 2 and 3), methodology that will be employed (Chapters 4 and 5) and the expected results (Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

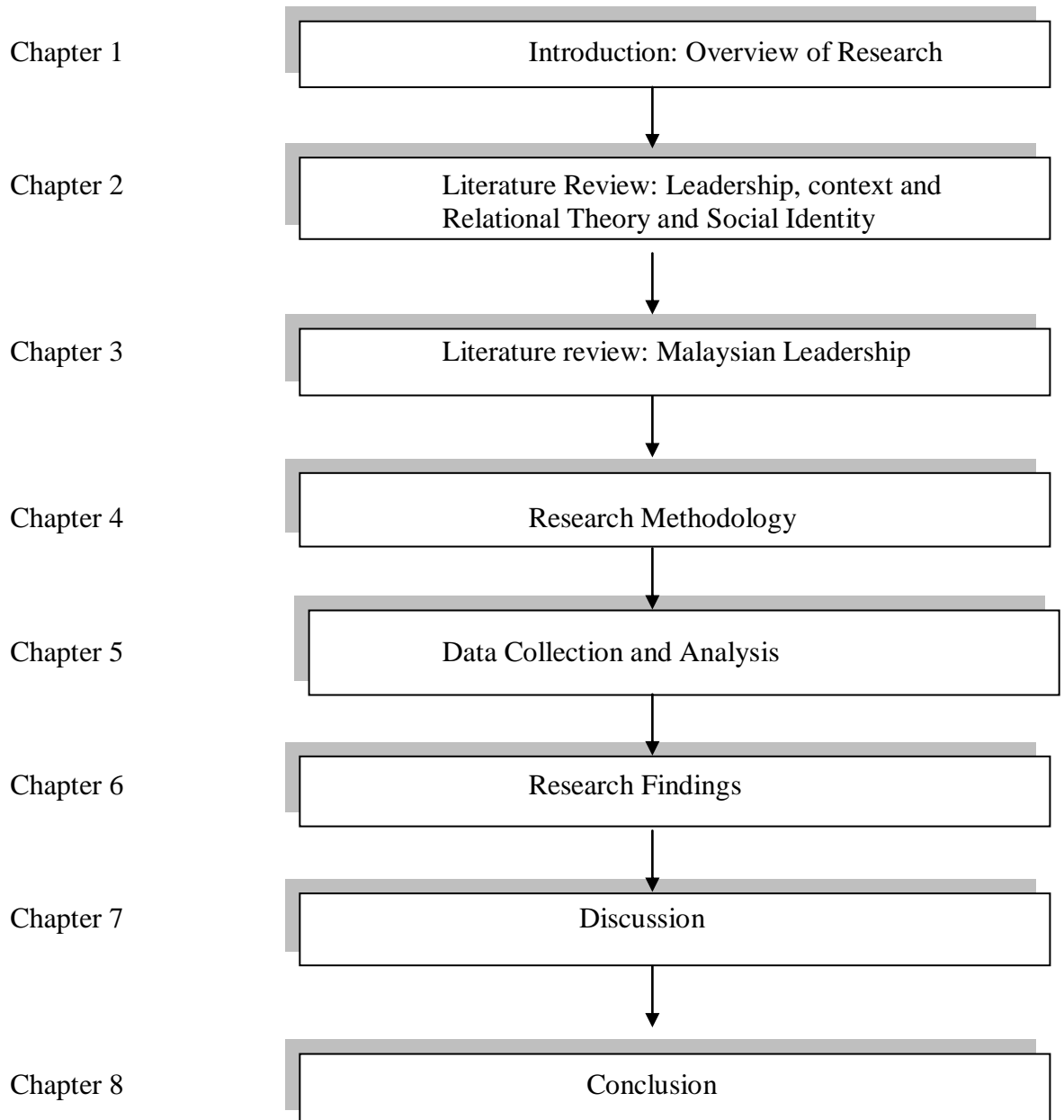




**Figure 1.1 Research Implementation**

## 1.8 Presentation of the Thesis

The following diagram depicts the presentation of this thesis.



**Figure 1.2 Presentation of Thesis**

## **1.9 Operational Definition of the Terms**

*Higher Education* –refers to post-secondary education at tertiary institutions, such as universities, university colleges, polytechnics and community colleges in Malaysia.

*Higher Institutions* –higher institutions with regards to this study refer to the public or private universities, university colleges, polytechnics and community colleges in Malaysia, which provide post-secondary education/courses to students.

*Public university* –refers to government-funded universities under the administration of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia.

*Private university* –refers to privately funded universities under the administration of the Private Higher Education Division, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia.

*Public sector* – the public sector is the part of the economic and administrative organization that deals with the delivery of goods and services by and for the Government whether national, regional or local/municipal. It is fully funded by government funds – mainly from tax and duties collection.

*Leadership* –leadership is an interactive process of influence amongst individuals towards a goal. It is an interpersonal process of inspiring and motivating followers with a focus on achieving organizational aspirations and changes.

*Management* –a structured or mundane process that focuses on achieving organizational objectives.

*Organizational context* –organizational context refers to one or more elements of the organization itself internally and externally that could determine the type of leadership used and/or affect the impact of the leader(s) on their followers/subordinates. Organizational context does NOT include elements pertaining strictly to the individual, such as personality traits, gender, intentions, and attitudes.

*Environmental factor* – the macro environmental factors that are beyond the control of the organisation. For example: political factors, economic factors, socio/cultural factors, technological factors and legal factors.

*Organizational factor* – the micro environmental factors that can be controlled to an extent by an organisation. For example: policies and styles, system and procedures, employees' attitudes, and others.

*Neoliberalism* – neo-liberalism is a political movement advocating economic liberalizations, free trade, and open markets. It supports privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation of markets, and promotion of the private sector's role in society. In the higher educational sector, corporatization of higher institutions is one of the neo-liberalism examples.

*Power relation* –power relation refers to the state of an imbalance of power between the people involved. One is often more powerful than the other –this person feels strong and in control of themselves and the situation.

*Polytechnic* –is a public tertiary institution in Malaysia that provides education and training for semi-professionals in technical, business and hospitality fields.

*Community College* –is a public technical training college that aims to produce skilled graduates to become skilled workers for the job market.

*Social construction* – refers to the interaction processes amongst individuals through on-going actions, negotiation, agreements and disagreements that lead to the shaping of the minds, beliefs and behaviour of the individuals.

*Leadership identity* –the leadership identity used in this thesis refers to the social identity of the leadership.

*Social Identity* – refers to the identity, in which the individuals are seen as part of a collective entity in the mind of themselves and others (Haslam,2001).

*RMIT University* - (officially the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) is an Australian university of technology and design based in Melbourne, Victoria.

*Tenth Malaysian Plan* - is a comprehensive blueprint prepared by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Department and the Finance Ministry of Malaysia with approval by the Cabinet of Malaysia to allocate the national budget from the year 2011 to 2015 to all economic sectors in Malaysia.

### **1.10 Delimitation**

The study is delimited to the analysis of data obtained from interviews with leaders from all levels or positions in the office of the Ministry of Higher Education and higher institutions/universities in Malaysia. A total of 32 interviews were conducted based on purposive sampling. Analysis of the impact of contextual factors on the construction of leadership and identities is based on the data obtained from the interviews and document surveys. The findings reflect the Ministry of Higher Education office and higher institutions or universities, but are not large enough to be representative of the whole higher education system in Malaysia.

### **1.11 Limitations**

The study has the following limitations:

- (i) The researcher's limited ability as an interviewer to interpret accurately the perceptions of respondents regarding contextual factors encompassing leadership conducts and performance.
- (ii) The limited ability of some of the respondents to be reflective.
- (iii) Respondent's answers are bounded to their knowledge and job experiences, which could place limitations on their perceptions towards contextual effect and leadership construction.
- (iv) There is a possibility of bias from the researcher, which could be reflected in the interpretation of data.
- (v) The researcher will not be able to interpret and report all facets of data collected.

- (vi) In a matter of difficult access to the designated respondents, replacement of respondents will take place.

### **1.12 Assumptions**

- (i) Contextual factors have a direct impact on leadership construction as well as the identity of the leaders.
- (ii) Abiding cultural value and norms are in the interests of everybody.
- (iii) The construction of the leadership can be predicted from the pattern of interaction between people and there are no other contributing factors involved.
- (iv) There is a direct connection between the external and internal environment.

### **1.13 Summary**

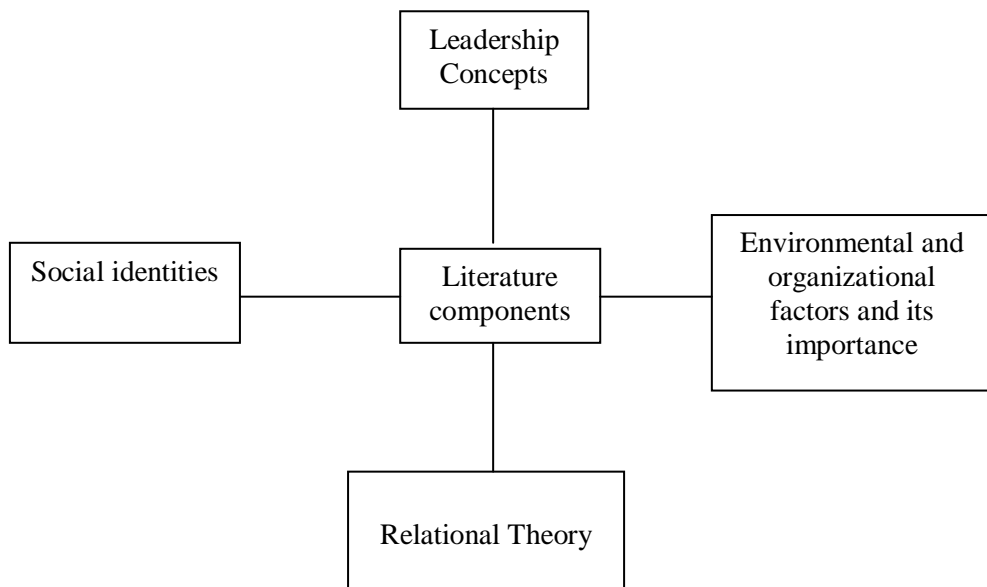
This study is an attempt to move from the current leadership research into another area that is incomplete and on-going. Since the world is becoming more cooperative, collaborative and complex, the traditional model of leadership based on individual position or power becomes ineffective. Therefore, this study intends to explore the leadership from the perspective of the inductive paradigm, which becomes more relevant to the multifaceted scenario. Leadership is no longer viewed as an individual's role, but, instead, as a dynamic and interwoven function of the overarching system. This study proposes the Eastern cultural background (Malaysian context) for its research setting to expand the outlook of leadership research. The adoption of qualitative methodology hopefully would be able to capture and reveal the less explored leadership phenomena – how the leadership and its identities are enacted and constructed in a specific cultural setting. Consequently, it intends to propose a model of the construction of the leadership as part of the contribution to the knowledge.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Overview of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature pertaining to the construction of leadership and leadership identity. It reviews the extant literature on leadership conceptions and definition, the contextual factors affecting leadership, the social construction of leadership and leadership identity. Leadership construction occurs within the broader organizational context. Therefore, it is important to understand this context in order to anticipate the nature of the construction of the leadership and leadership identities. The contexts that are considered pertinent to this study include the environmental factors (politics, economy, social, technology and legal) and the organizational factors (organizational culture, organizational structure, people, resources, processes and time). Hence, the key areas of the literature are illustrated in Figure 2.1 below:



**Figure 2.1 Key areas of the literature**

## 2.2 The Concept of Leadership

The concept of leadership has received a great deal of attention over the past decades, as demonstrated by the plethora of articles and books on the subject by both scholars and practitioners. Not surprisingly, researchers have developed differing definitions of leadership and a variety of ways of categorizing and describing the leadership, in which this fascination has led to many different interpretations of the concept and social phenomena of leadership. Burns (1978) believes that “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth”. Fleishman, Mumford, Zaccaro, Levin, Korotkin and Hein (1991) advocated this assertion by noting that “in the past 50 years, there have been as many as 65 different classification systems developed to define the dimensions of leadership”. Among the dimensions or classifications highlighted by Burns (1978) and Rost (1991), they emphasise the significance of a relationship or influence as a central element to understand the leadership.

On deliberating the seminal works on leadership research, Rost (1991) underlines that the leadership scholars and theories that have developed concentrated largely on the peripheries of leadership: traits, personality characteristics, “born or made” issues, greatness, group facilitation, goal attainment, effectiveness, contingencies, situations, goodness, and styles. The upshot of all this is that leadership research focuses more on aspects surrounding leadership and its content instead of on the nature of leadership as a process, and on leadership viewed as a dynamic relationship. Thus, Rost proposes that it is crucial for scholars and practitioners to de-emphasise the understanding of leadership from its essential nature.

Nonetheless, a review of the scholarly studies on leadership shows that there is a wide variety of different theoretical approaches to explain the complexities of the leadership process (e.g., Antonakis, Cianciolo & Stainberg, 2004; Bass, 1990; Bryman, 1992; Gardner, 1990; Hickman, 1998; Mumford, 2006, Rost, 1991). Some researchers conceptualize leadership as a trait or behaviour, whereas others view leadership from an information-processing perspective or relational standpoint (Northhouse, 2010).



The most common approaches in leadership (Yulk, 1994) attempt either to identify or describe leadership by focusing on specific behaviours of leaders and/or the attributes, such as knowledge, skills attitudes and personal traits, that the individual leader possesses, or by focusing on situational factors, such as the department or organization in which the leadership is performed. In the former case, leadership is defined in terms of a specific set of attributes inherent in a person; in the latter it is defined by situational factors, a specific set of situational factors requiring a specific type of leadership.

Meindl (1993) asserts that the conceptualization of leadership is still equated to the figure of the leader. While in the traditional view, it was the leader's ability and style, and his/her vision and charisma. Thus, the focus is on the figure of the leader that misses an important part of the leadership process, namely the followers and the situation. Hence, the traits viewpoint conceptualises leadership as a property or set of properties possessed by different people in varying degrees. This suggests that it resides in selected people and restricts leadership to those who are believed to have special and usually inborn talents.

In contrast, the process viewpoint suggests that leadership is a phenomenon that resides in the context of the interactions between leaders and followers and makes leadership available to everyone. In advocating the concept, Northouse (2001) depicts leadership as a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Thus, leadership is not a one-way but rather the interaction of a two-way process between a leader and a follower. It concerns the cognitions, interpersonal behaviours, and attributions of both the leaders and the followers as they affect each other's pursuit of their mutual goals. Such leadership can be enacted by any member of the group, not only formally elected or appointed leaders, and can include anyone, at any level, and in any organization.

Talking in a similar vein, Drath (2001), in his book "The Deep Blue Sea: Rethinking the Source of Leadership", expands the concept of leadership beyond the individual attributes. He explicates that the creation of leadership is an endeavour that emerges from the relational dialogues between each other, is built

on shared meaning making and is conscious of the dynamic contexts in which the leadership operates and lives in.

Parallel to Drath's observation, other leadership scholars also unfold corresponding discourses of leadership. They suggest a new approach: a complexity theory, that account precisely the complex nature of leadership as it occurs in practice, (Lord, 2008; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Osborn & Hunt, 2007). The traditional models of leadership are insufficient for understanding the dynamic, distributed, and contextual nature of leadership in organizations. Hence, the complexity approach provides justification that leadership is embedded in context and "socially constructed in and from a context" (Osborn et al., 2002, p. 798) and requires consideration and examination of context in both theorizing and operationalization. Correspondingly, the researcher believes that understanding leadership from this view is central to understanding the social construction of leadership.

### **2.2.1 Defining Leadership**

A dominant theme in the current literature is the search for an all-encompassing definition, paradigm, or model of leadership. Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves intentional influence exerted by one person over the other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization (Yulk, 2002). Despite many years of leadership research and thousands of studies, there is still an unclear understanding of what leadership is and how it can be achieved. In particular, there appear to be many theories that address different aspects of leadership but little cohesion among the theories that help to understand how they all tie together (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The early sociological theories tended to explain leadership in terms of either the person or the environment. Most theories developed over the past half century have emphasized leader characteristics, and it has been common practice to limit the focus to one type of leader characteristic, namely, traits, behaviour, or power

(Yulk, 2002). Later researchers tended to view leadership as an aspect of role differentiation or as an outgrowth of the social interaction process (Bass, 1990).

A major controversy involves the issue of whether leadership should be viewed as a specialized role, 'the leader' or as a shared influence process, such as 'the leadership as a social process' (Yulk, 2002). As researchers disagree in their identification and definitions of leaders and leadership processes, the selection of phenomena to investigate differs, as does the interpretation of results.

Yulk (1994) and Avolio (1999) offer a perspective that defines leadership in organizations as the influence process that interprets events for followers, the choice of objectives for the group or organization, the organization of work to accomplish the objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationship and teamwork, and the enlisting of outsiders to support and cooperate with the group or organization.

Nonetheless, Burns (1978) defines leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers. Similarly, Rost (1991) defines leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes”. The relationships are often built around common goals and objectives, as well as mutually held values. On the other hand, Drath & Palus (1994) offer another perspective in which the assumption of the leadership is viewed as a dominance-cum-social-influence process, and the dominance is about meaning making and social influence is about motivating people to get them going. They contend that most existing theories, models and definitions of leadership proceed from the assumption that leadership is about getting people to do something.

Furthermore, Bennis & Nanus (2003) introduce the concept emphasizing the importance of meaning making as it relates to the building of relationships that are critical to leader effectiveness. They assert that an essential factor in leadership is the capacity to influence and organize meaning for the members of the organization. Thus, leaders and followers evolve and develop ways in which

they make meaning of their own, others, and the organizational processes around them.

According to Drath & Palus (1994), in the constructivist view, people make meaning individually – they construct their own experience so that it makes sense for various periods in their lives as they grow and develop, and people make meaning socially – they construct their experience together (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), so that they can communicate and cooperate and agree about what is happening. The processes of individual meaning making and social meaning making are deeply interrelated, as individuals are deeply related to the social systems in which they live.

In summary, leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviours, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a different role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions (Bass, 1990).

### **2.2.2 Leadership and Management**

Leadership is normally associated with the role of manager. However, a leader and manager are not necessarily equivalent, as providing a manager with position and certain rights in an organisation is no guarantee that they will be an effective leader. Formal leaders are appointed and exist within the formal structure of organisation. Equally, informal leaders can emerge from outside the formal procedures and structure of the organisation. Both are important and can make a difference in the performance of groups and organisations (Capon, 2004).

The concepts of leadership and management of higher education institutions (HEIs) are often confused and misunderstood, and, therefore, rigorously debated within the academic community (Birnbaum, 2001; Cohen & March, 1983). It is generally held with little disagreement that leadership is a process for influencing decisions and guiding people, whereas management involves the implementation and administration of institutional decisions and policies (Bennis & Nanus 1985;

Gayle, Bhoendradatt & White 2003). There are, however, many other less universally agreed upon attributes of each concept that can mitigate against their effective co-existence (Cohen & March, 1983; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2001). It can be argued that leadership and management cannot be addressed as discrete and autonomous entities. A meaningful understanding of both concepts can only be reached when they are examined in relation to one another. Each depends on the other for support and to provide the institution with the multifaceted decision-making, policy development and administrative roles necessary to function effectively (Taylor & Machado, 2006).

Leadership and management are not the same things. Not every leader manages well, and not every manager has leadership capabilities. However, the concepts are sufficiently intertwined that an understanding of their relationship to one another is important. Management is often seen as a relatively structured process for achieving organisational objectives within the parameters of prescribed roles. Leadership is more often viewed as an interpersonal process of inspiring and motivating followers with a focus on long-term institutional aspirations and changes. The leader-manager operates within a complex and dynamic environment. The leadership component requires a focus on the external environment as well as the internal workings of the institution. As stated by Taffinder (1995, p. 37), “Management is complex, fragmented, its activities brief, opportunistic, predominantly verbal; leadership is more so. Management reacts. Leadership transforms. It makes a difference”. As stated by Adair (1986, p. 123), “...you can be appointed a manager but you are not a leader until your appointment is ratified in the hearts and minds of those who work for you”.

## **2.3 Leadership Theories**

### **2.3.1 Overview of Theories**

The development of leadership literature over the years has been truly cumulative and expanding. Several theoretical contributions in the 1960s led to the development of new models and theories beginning in the 1980s and which continue to be researched today. One of the earliest leadership theories, known as

the *great-man theory*, examined individuals who were selected to lead the people due to physical characteristics and superior traits. As leadership research focused on identifying the traits of leaders in the 1930s, a shift in focus, due mainly to inconsistencies of the work on traits, led researchers to begin to study leadership ranging from leadership styles and behaviour; situational and contingency factors; charismatic paradigm, which focuses on supportive, symbolic and emotionally appealing aspects of the leadership; and, more recently, on the relational processes of the leadership. For example, in the 1940s, researchers sought a better explanation of the critical factors required for leadership. In the 1960s, it became evident that managers needed to adapt to different leadership styles for different situations, leading to the contingency leadership theory. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the contingency theory became the organizing idea and several new theories were created. In the 1980s and 1990s, the advent of the neo-charismatic paradigm broadened the field of the theoretical leadership research and introduced several theories and models that focus on supportive, symbolic and emotionally appealing aspects of the leadership phenomenon.

Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, the conception of leadership is perceived as ‘leaderless’ or as Shamir (1999) regards it as ‘weak leadership’. The leadership roles are being dispersed across different levels of the organization.

The following table (Table 2.1) summarizes the major theoretical categories from the literature.

**Table 2.1 Leadership Theory**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Leadership Theory</b>
Early 1900s	Great Man Theory (Bowden,1927;Carlyle, 1841;Galton, 1869)
1930s	The Trait Theory (Bingham,1927)

- McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory (1940s)
- Leader Motive Profile Theory (1975)
- House's Theory of Charismatic Leadership (1976)
- Leaders Flexibility (1980s)

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1940s

The Behaviour Approach

- Iowa State University Studies (1930s)
- University of Michigan Studies (mid 1940s-1950s)
- Ohio State University Studies (1946)
- The leadership Grid, Theories of a 'high-high' Leader (1964)
- Theory X and Y (McGrefor, 1960)
- Mintzberg's Ten Managerial Roles (1973)

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1950s-1970s

The Contingency and Situational Approaches

- Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (1964)
- The Path-Goal Leadership Theory (1971)
- The Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model (1969)
- The Normative Decision Model of Vroom, Yetton and Jago (1973)
- Multiple Linkage Model (Yulk, 1971;1989)

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1980s-1990s

Neo-charismatic Theories (Bass, 1985; Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; House & Shamir, 1993)

- Charismatic Leadership Theory
- Transformational and Transactional Leadership
- Value Based Theory of Leadership
- Dyadic Approach
- Vertical Dyadic Linkage Theory

- Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory
- Implicit Leadership Theory
- Relational Theory
- Connective Leadership Model
- Servant Leadership
- Ethical Leadership

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21 <sup>st</sup> century	Towards ‘weak leadership’ (Shamir, 1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed leadership</li> <li>• Shared leadership</li> <li>• Self-leadership</li> </ul>

**Source: Seters and Field – Evolution of Leadership Theory (1990)**

The above table summarizes the numerous theories that have been developed to understand leadership in an organization. However, this research has no intention of exploring all the theories in detail; instead it will focus on the related seminal works that have become the basis of this research, and which are presented as follows.

**2.3.2 The Contingency and Situational Approach**

One of the leadership theories that explain the role of the organizational context on shaping the leadership and the construction of leadership is the Contingency and Situational Approach. The theory was proposed by Fred E. Fiedler in 1951. Apparently, this was the first theory to specify how situational variables interact with leader personality and behaviour. In the late 1960s, it became apparent that there was no best leadership style in all situations and the need to adapt to different situations became the third major leadership paradigm. Fiedler’s widely researched and quoted contingency model theory classifies a manager’s leadership style as relationship-motivated or task-motivated and holds that the best style of leadership is determined by the situation in which the leader is working (DuBrin, 2001). Fiedler believed that leadership style is a reflection of



personality and behaviour, and that leadership styles are basically constant. There were various situational variables that might affect the leadership conduct; the main three variables— leader-member relations, task structure and position power —are weighted to determine the level of situational control (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Fiedler found that task-motivated leaders were most effective in high and low control situations and relationship-motivated leaders had more success in moderately controlled situations (Fiedler, 1996). However, Lussier & Achua (2001) argued that despite its ground-breaking start to the contingency theory, Fiedler's work was found to be inconsistent in empirical findings and its inability to account for substantial variance in group performance.

Beside Fiedler, the situational theory developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard was substantially referred to by many researchers. Their theory was originally published in 1969 as the *Life Cycle Theory of Leadership* and published in 1977 as the *Situational Leadership Model*. The theory focuses on characteristics of the followers as the important element of the situation, thus determining effective leader behaviour (Bryman, 1992). The theory, representing a life-cycle model of the followers, prescribed four styles – selling, telling, participating and delegating – that appropriately match the followers with certain kinds of situations. The key point of situational leadership theory is that as group member readiness increases, a leader should rely more on relationship behaviour and less on task behaviour. When a group member becomes ready, a minimum task or relationship behaviour is required of the leader (House & Aditya, 1997). Hence, the theory demonstrates the matching of the construction of the leadership and the followership based on the situational circumstances throughout the life cycle of the followership.

### **2.3.3 Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

The most prominent relationship-based approach is the Leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe & Wayne, 1997). According to Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) the central concept of LMX theory is that leadership occurs when leaders and followers are able to develop an effective relationship (partnerships) that results in incremental influence and thus gains access to the

many benefits these relationships bring. The theory describes how effective leadership relationships develop (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2000) among dyad partners to generate bases of leadership influence, as well as demonstrates the benefits of these leadership relationships for organizational outcomes.

LMX is an entity perspective because it focuses on the properties and behaviours of individuals as they engage in interactions with one another (Dachler & Hosking, 1995). Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2000) describe the relationship as beginning with the interactions or exchange sequence of two individuals. Hence, Dachler & Hosking (1995) illustrate the relationship as a 'subject-object', wherein the individuals are viewed as a subject, and the relationship as an object.

#### **2.3.4 Relational Theory**

Relational leadership is a relatively new term in the leadership literature, and, hence, its meaning is open to interpretation (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The relational focus is one that moves beyond unidirectional or even reciprocal leaders/follower relationships to one that recognizes leadership wherever it occurs; it is not restricted to a single or even to a small set of formal or informal leaders; and, in its strongest form, functions as a dynamic system embedding leadership, environment, and organizational aspects (Hunt & Dodge, 2000). Some scholars (e.g., Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Hosking, Dachler & Gergen, 1995) describe the relational concept of leadership as a view of leadership and organization as human social construction that emanates from the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their members as opposed to traditional orientation that views relationships from the standpoint of individuals as independent and discrete entities.

In addition, Dachler & Hosking (1995), on viewing the relational perspective, explain that organizational phenomena exist in interdependent relationships and inter subjective meaning, in which the phenomena occur simultaneously, and that knowing is always a process of relating, and is a constructive, on-going process of meaning making – an actively relational process of creating (common) understanding on the basis of language –and meanings are limited to socio-

cultural contexts. In the leadership sense, a relational orientation does not focus on identifying attributes of individuals involved in leadership behaviours or exchanges, but rather on the social construction processes through which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology (Meindle, 1995). Relational approach recognizes that self-concepts are constructed in the context of interpersonal relationships and larger social systems.

Nonetheless, relational perspectives view leadership as the process by which social order is constructed and changed (Uhl-Bien, 2006), and the self and other are not separable but coevolving in ways that need to be accounted for in leadership research (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). As Gergen quoted, a relational discourse does not view process as 'intra' or 'interpersonal' or as individual cognitions and acts, but rather as a 'local-cultural-historical' process that is moving constructions of what is 'real and good'. Hosking *et al.* (1995) assert that the relational perspective does not seek to identify attributes or behaviours of individual leaders; instead it focuses on the communication process; on dialectic movement between and among human phenomena in which true interaction or real meaning emerges. Leadership is being viewed as social reality, emergent and inseparable from context (Dachler & Hosking, 1995) – an iterative and messy social process that is shaped by interactions with others.

## **2.4 Organizational Context**

In the past 15 years or so, there have been increasing calls in the literature for the necessity to give more attention to the role of the organizational context as a major factor affecting leadership behaviour and outcomes (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006).

Critically analysing using a scientific approach, Fairholm (2004) suggests a new way of looking at organizational leadership. He claims that rethinking leadership and organizational metaphors from a new sciences perspective asks us to revisit the way we conceptualize our organizations. This postmodernist way of looking at organizations allows us to concentrate on relationships and culture more than controlling and measurement techniques. As the tools and principles of the new

sciences have allowed us to see the nature in different ways, this perspective explains the leadership in a novel way.

Leadership is a highly contextual construct that emerges through a complex interaction of leaders, followers and situations (Fiedler, 1996). Schien (1996), in his research, said that most of the leadership research focused on productivity defined in terms of the individual's ability to be productive and creative but did not consider the systemic forces that operated in organizations to make managers, particularly at the top of organizations, behave in the autocratic way that they tended to do. They focused on charismatic leadership and became prescriptive, rather than studying the realities of what executives in organizations dealt with on a day-to-day basis. They viewed the organization from the bottom up and took the employee's point of view rather than seeing it as a complex system consisting of many conflicting points of view. They acknowledged the existence of group norms but failed to note that norms across wider social units, such as entire organizations or occupations, had a decisive influence on how those systems operated. Moreover, if those norms were inimical to "organizational health", then leaders should change them.

Fiedler (1996), in a very strong argument, states that organizations should design situations that allow leaders to utilize their intellectual abilities, expertise, and experience more effectively. In this highly competitive age, this is likely to be of considerable practical importance.

Research indicates that effective leadership is not universal, but depends on a wide variety of environmental (culture, economic, industry setting, etc.) and organizational (strategy, size, technology, structure) conditions (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). The meaning and importance of various leadership dimensions varies according to contexts. Contexts can be so complex that no single microscopic view is sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to suggest a singular productive view of leadership or leadership effectiveness. There is a need for a series of theories rather than a theory of leadership alone to understand the leadership conception (Shamir & Howell, 1999).

The contextual factors play important roles in shaping organizational leadership and leaders need to adapt to the demands and changes of the external environment (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Similarly, Bennis *et al.* (2001, p. 242) draws attention to the importance of the leadership in continuously scanning the environment and trying to make sense of it in a global context, particularly in today's uncertain and unpredictable situations. On the other hand, Marginson & Considine (2000, p.7) suggest looking from a broader perspective in understanding leadership by examining the encompassing external and internal relationship and the intersection between the two. Thus, this study will be looking into the system through which the leadership in Malaysian public higher institutions is constructed within the external and internal directions and controls.

#### **2.4.1 The Environmental and Organizational Factors**

##### **2.4.1.1 The Environmental Factors**

Wallace & Tomlinson (2010) assert that with increasing awareness that leadership is contextualized, interest is emerging in a contextual orientation that foregrounds key factors surrounding leaders and their relationships with followers. In this sense, context is seen as a mediating variable that affects leader action and follower response. Hence, context tends to be seen as external to and impinging on leadership (Johns, 2001; Osborne *et al.*, 2002), rather than as partially endemic and partially implicated in a two-way causal relationship with leadership. They assert that leaders proactively 'read the situation', interpreting their context and mediating it through shaping contextual factors that are manipulatable (Mowday & Sutton, 1993), and feedback the consequences of their actions into this context. In analysing the context (environmental and organisational context) of the leadership, Stewart (1982) defined context as the set of overall demands constraints and choices for leaders. As Browning *et al.* (1995) highlight, the key problem for leaders is not one of engendering subordinate motivation; rather, the challenge is in terms of "how ordered systems arise from apparent chaos".

On this ground, Shamir & Howell (1999) propose nine factors that may influence the emergence and effectiveness of charismatic leadership: environmental

circumstances, organizational life cycle, organizational technology and tasks, organizational structure, mode of governance, culture, leader succession, leader level, and organizational goals. On the environmental side, the literature often categorises the forces into six broad categories, namely, political, economic, social, technological and legal factors (McGee *et al.*, 2005). Various and continuous changes of environment as a result of globalisation, competitiveness and market dynamics, deregulation and privatisation, rising of accountabilities, lack of resources and rising of new invention of technologies obviously would affect the leadership circumstances. With regard to this study, higher education has not been excluded from the continuous environmental changes. For example, Thomas (2007) highlights that demographic, technology; globalisation and entrepreneurship are the key forces and drivers that influence the future evolution of higher education. These forces impinge directly on the competitive dynamics of the market of higher education. The growth of global economy creates new opportunities and challenges that create higher competition amongst institutions, and the emergence of new technologies provide broad and diverse communication and networking opportunities for institutional development.

#### **2.4.1.2 The Organizational Factors**

Porter & Mclaughlin (2006) claim that there is no universally agreed-upon set of components that comprise the context for leader behaviour, or other types of behaviour, occurring within an organizational setting. Nonetheless, an examination of several relevant sources in the literature (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; Mowday & Sutton, 1993; Osborn *et al.*, 2002; Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Shamir & Howell, 1999; and Tosi, 1991) suggest a fair degree of consensus that the following components (listed alphabetically in Table 2.2 below) are important and deserve to study in their own right:

- Culture/climate
- Goals/purposes
- People/composition
- Processes

- State/Condition
- Structure
- Time

**Table 2.2:Organizational Factors**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Examples of elements</b>
Culture/climate	•Types of culture (e.g.,bureaucratic, adaptive)
	•Norms that reflect the culture
	•Cultural emphasis on ethics
Goals/purposes	•Goals, strategies, and missions of individuals, groups and organizational units
People/composition	•Demographic variability within the organization
	•Capabilities of individuals and groups
Processes	•Type(s) of technologies in use
	•Task factors (e.g.,differentiation, complexity, ambiguity)
	•Mode of governance
	•Degree of standardization of processes within the organization
	•Policies (e.g.,HRM policies)

<b>Component</b>	<b>Examples of elements</b>
State/condition	•Stability or crisis
	•Availability of resources
	•Organizational health (e.g.,financial, reputational)
Structure	•Size, shape, and type of organization
	•Degree of formalization and centralization
	•Hierarchical levels of individuals and groups under consideration
	•Spatial distances between individuals/groups
Time	•Duration of leadership effects
	•Organizational life cycle stage effects
	•CEO/TMT succession history

**Source: Porter & McLaughlin (2006)**

According to Weick (1995), the organizational context (organizational factors) in which an individual operates will influence not only how one constructs definitions of his/her different roles, but also how individuals enact such roles. Even though Porter & McLaughlin (2006), acknowledge that organizational context can be a dependent variable of leadership action as well as a variable of influence on leadership, in their study entitled “Leadership and the organizational context: Like the weather?” they recognised that organization also plays an important influencing factor. Pawar & Eastman (1997) suggest that although leadership can shape the context, the nature of this shaping process is influenced by the initial context in which it was introduced. Thus, the initial and post-



transformation configurations of context are temporally interconnected by the leadership process that itself is influenced by the initial configuration of the context. Although there are a number of different variables that work together to create organizational context (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006), it may be that certain elements of the context will have more influence than the other. Thus far, researchers have not systematically identified a set of contextual factors that comes as key features of organizations that would affect the leadership. Pawar & Eastman (1997), however, note that many researches do include two main features in organization – organizational structure and culture –beside the other factors depending on the nature of the organization.

#### **2.4.1.2.1 Organizational Structure**

Structural components are the most frequently mentioned or tested of any of the organizational context components, both in the conceptual and in the empirical articles (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Structure provides the context that mediates the relationship between behaviour and power (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993), and power is the essence of leader behaviour (Yukl, 2002). From this perspective, the connection between organization structure and leadership is quite clear. Whereas leaders exercise free will in making behavioural choices, structural norms determine the appropriateness of their selection (Ammeter *et al.*, 2002).

For example, Tosi (1991) explains the structural effect on leadership behaviour. Tosi addresses the organizational context in terms of “mechanistic” vs. “organic” structure. He proposes that the ‘mechanistic’ or ‘organic’ types of structure would affect the attributions of the leaders, and, subsequently, shape the leaders’ choice of behaviour.

To differentiate between mechanistic and organic organizations, Shamir & Howell (1999) offer a discussion around two dimensions –the degree of status stratification and the degree of interdependence between operating units. According to them, the mechanistic structures are more formalized than the organic structures, and, therefore, have more hierarchical differentiations and are

more tightly coupled, which then limits power-striving activities. Thus, organizations that maintain a tight bureaucracy or reinforce an authoritarian system will create a climate of top-down decision making. Such a context reinforces the notion that leaders are more capable and competent than followers, and provides little opportunity for leaders to make a substantial contribution to organizational processes (Shamir & Howell, 1999). Hence, under a hierarchical and bureaucratic system, leadership should be obedient and deferent in nature, and ascribe to the power and status differences.

As mentioned above, a mechanistic structure is linked closely to a bureaucratic system. Bureaucracy is a social invention, perfected during the industrial revolution, to organize and direct the activities of the business firm. Bureaucratic forms of organization are becoming less and less effective; hopelessly out of sync with contemporary realities; new shapes, patterns, and models are emerging that promise drastic changes in the conduct of the corporation and of managerial practices in general. Bureaucracy relies exclusively on the power to influence through rules, reason, and law. In bureaucratic systems social roles were institutionalized and reinforced by legal tradition; emphasis was placed on technical competence rather than the idea, policy or creativity of the leaders (Shamir & Howell, 1999).

In contrast, organic structures are more loosely structured; more flexible and innovative; and less specialized. They have open, lateral communication, decentralized decision making processes, less formalization and standardization, fewer hierarchical distinctions, and a less strict division of labour. In organic organizations, commitment to the organization's mission is more highly valued than loyalty and obedience. Role conduct is presumed to derive more from having a stake in the organization's survival, growth, and prosperity rather than from a contractual relationship with the organization.

#### **2.4.1.2.2 Organizational Culture**

Culture (Schien,2004) is defined as shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has

worked well enough to be considered valid. It defines what one needs to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situation. Such assumptions become a ‘thought world’ or ‘mental map’ of the group. This ‘thought world’ provides a basic sense of identity and defines values that provide self-esteem (Schein, 2004). Therefore, culture enables the leaders to identify who they are, how to behave towards their superiors, peers and followers, and how to act in order to be accepted by their groups.

Organizational culture, however, is mainly shaped by dominant groups and by reinforcing the values of groups in power (Velsor *et al.*, 2010). Organizational culture implicates the social identity of the staff. According to them, often the dominant groups have wider influence in shaping the silent languages of an organization in all forms –explicit communication and policies, implicit communication (such as the grapevine and informal networks), and technical aspects, such as procedures and requirements. Thus, organizational culture teaches the leaders and followers to externally adapt and internally integrate with the workplace environment and problems, and need to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to organizational circumstances (Schieen, 2004). According to Schien, organizational culture and leadership is seen as two sides of the same coin, as they explain how leaders create and embed culture into the people in the workplace, and, at the same time, how culture constrains, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to the leaders. In other words, it defines what kind of leadership and followership is acceptable in the organization.

Organizational cultures differ in many respects and vary from one context to another. Thus, there is no set of standard dimensions to do the analysis. With regard to this discussion, the extent to which the organizational culture becomes the predominant mode of control and coordination in the organization is preferable to observe its effect on constructing the leadership. From the literature, three dominant methods of control or modes of governance in organizations are normally discussed –market, bureaucracy, and clan modes of governance (e.g.,

Shamir & Howell, 1999; Yagil, 1998; Mumford *et al.*, 2002). According to them, in the market mode of governance, activities are regulated and controlled by market or price mechanisms. Competition amongst units within the organization is evident. In contrast, in bureaucratic modes of governance, the control and coordination depend highly on rules, policies, hierarchy of authority, standardization, written communication, and other mechanisms to standardize behaviour and assess performance, in which this type of mode is visually evident in the Malaysian higher education. While, in the clan mode of governance, shared values, traditions, beliefs, and commitments are used to control behaviour. Acceptance of organizational beliefs and values by organizational members creates the basis for concerted collective action, and the control emerges through mutual understanding and cooperation between each other.

Understanding the external and organizational factors provides a good basis to look deeper into the relationship of the leadership and context, as explained below.

## **2.5 The Leadership and Context**

### **2.5.1 The Historical and Cultural Impact on Leadership**

History creates essential elements that shape the kind of leaders and leadership. It has a close relationship with culture. History is the presentation of information about the past events or phenomena. History gives the reasons for the circumstances or problems of the present.

Ali (2009), in his article entitled “Islamic perspective on Leadership: A Model”, specifically discusses the impact of history and culture on leadership. He observes that throughout history, thoughtful and awful leaders have left their legacies in developing the civilization of mankind. Certain circumstances have led to the rise and fall of the leaders. The emergence and demise of leaders and their impact seems to vary significantly across cultures. Some have left everlasting achievements and have become a source of cultural pride and identity, while, conversely, others have been rated as unfavourable and discredited. Even though every culture views leaders differently, they appear to value contributions that energize and sustain cultural continuity and revitalization (Ali, 2009). He asserts

that rich cultures offer intellectual depth and a nurturing environment for transforming potential leaders into great leaders. Hence, the depth and strength of a culture are pivotal for the emergence and evolution of leaders. Likewise, the presence of a great leader strengthens cultural vitality and continuity (Ali, 2009).

Further, Ali (2009) mentions, “There is a dialectic relationship between culture and leaders, which the culture does not only shape the art of leadership but also nurtures and facilitates the emergence of leaders. In this sense, culture provides meaning to what leaders do and eases or impedes the influence processes and induces followers to respond and act in a particular way”. Indeed, culture serves as a yardstick to what works and what does not work for the people, and tends to become the crucial point for determining effective and sound leadership. Furthermore, each culture has its own assumptions and notions about idealism and pragmatism. Some of these assumptions change overtime but others persist and are deeply cherished. The latter differentiate among cultures and are assumed to shape perceptions about leaders and leadership.

Societies differ in their perception of leadership and the effectiveness of the leader. Hofstede (1980, 1999) attributed such differences to cultural values. He argues that values are specific to national cultures, never universal. Values represent what is desirable and generally they are a preference of specific states of affairs over others. These broad tendencies are ranked hierarchically according to their relative importance. Societies differ not only in their values but also in the way they rank these values –value system. The value system helps in establishing priorities, solving conflicting demands, and categorizing leaders. Shaw (1990) suggests that each culture appears to categorize leaders differently. He argues that cultural perceptions of whether or not a person is a leader involve simple categorization. In fact, he proposes that in each culture there are pre-existing leadership prototypes and expectations that are a potential source for variation across cultures. The attributes and practices that differentiate cultures from each other are predictive of the leader attributes and behaviour (House *et al.*, 2001). Recent empirical studies provide support for such proposition. Brodbeck *et al.* (2000) led a group of researchers to study cultural variations of leadership

prototypes across 22 European countries. The results indicate that the leadership concept is culturally bound. Clusters of European countries that share similar cultural values are found to share similar leadership concepts albeit different from other European clusters. Nordic countries, for example, ranked high the attributes for outstanding leadership as integrity, inspirational, visionary, team integrator, and performance. In contrast, managers in Latin countries ranked the attributes of team integrator, performance, inspirational, integrity, and visionary, in order, as the most desired.

### **2.5.2 Leadership and Power**

Leadership is a diachronic process. It requires responsiveness to the dynamics of social life (Lee-Chai & Bargh, 2001) that emerge from the context. It depends upon interdependent relations with followers, the vicissitudes of social change and the fortune of being effective and successful. Through that relationship and socialization, leaders earn influential power automatically. In this sense, as stated by Dahl (1969), power is an attribute of relationship among actors, and (Lee-Chai & Bargh, 2001) leaders do not need to exercise power in order to be influential.

However, leadership and power are inseparable, since leadership needs power to influence the followers. Over time, in a certain context, and, particularly, in conjunction with power-distance culture, the processes create a latent and steeply hierarchical intergroup orientation between leaders and followers that provide the potential for unilateral and coercive exercise of power by the powerful over the powerless (Lee-Chai & Bargh, 2001).

The earlier conception of power depicts that there are two conceptions of power that have dominated the Western political thought in the modern period. First, power is a quantitative and cumulative phenomenon, a kind of generalized capacity to act. Second, which is more complex, involves not only a capacity but also a right to act, in which both the capacity and right is seen to rest on the consent of those over whom the power is exercised (Hindess, 1996). Here, power implies that the wishes of those with more power will normally prevail over the wishes of those with less. On this ground, Weber (1978), who contributed to the

debate about power and authority, identifies power as the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will even against the resistance of others who are participating in action. In this regard, Weber perceived power as an act of repression or suppression.

However, later on, when the research on power developed, the literature shows that there are various concepts of power and no clear definition of power is proposed. The importance of power to leadership has been perceived from different points of view according to the aim of the leadership. This is advocated by Brynion (2004) in that there are many and varied definitions and perspectives seeking to explore and explain the concept of power. She noted that writers as different as Mullins (2002) or Handy (1993), from the managerialist perspective, and Foucault (1969, 1980), from a poststructuralist perspective, offer contrasting and incompatible theories. The literature demonstrates that it depends on who, what and why they are studying the concept, thus there are different concepts for different phenomena, as mentioned by Clegg and Hardy (1999).

Clegg and Hardy (1999) further viewed power as a useful resource, which is “legitimate” when leaders use it and “illegitimate” if a non-leader utilizes it. This is advocated by Shackleton (1995) in that it is “impossible to talk of leadership without also discussing the question of power and influence”.

This is in line with the concept of leadership in which one exercises power over others to achieve organizational success. Many leaders have invested considerable effort to maintain their powerbase, and, as a result, they inhibit creativity and flexibility. The leader is assumed to always know the best, and, in this concept, there is a potential for leaders to abuse power or use it irresponsibly (Clegg and Hardy, 1999).

#### **2.5.2.1 Types of Power**

Among the most widely used conceptualisations of social power is the fivefold typology – Bases of Social Power Model –developed by French and Raven in 1959. This is the fundamental model used by many leaders to build up power to

exert greater influence over his/her followers (Handy, 1993). These powerbases are:

### **Coercive power**

This type of power is based on control over punishment, such as warnings and suspension. It is also used to secure compliance. Leaders with coercive power may find difficulty in balancing between leniency and harshness (Vecchio, 1987). However, coercive power is useful when it comes to daily compliance, such as meeting deadlines and taking care of schedules. It gives a strong incentive in terms of instilling a fear in the people of losing their job (Shackleton, 1995).

### **Reward Power**

This gives the leader the ability to reward as the leaders have more control on the organization's valued assets, such as pay, promotion, information, etc. The more the access of the leaders to these rewards, the more they are considered influential. Therefore, the more the access, the stronger will be the base. This power may however be limited in the presence of formalized pay structures, union influence and career progression (Shackleton, 1995).

### **Legitimate Power**

This type of power is dependent on the belief of the follower that the leader has the legal right or the authority to influence them. There might be certain variations as the followers may follow the order because of a promise of a reward previously done (Podsahoff & Schriesheim, 1985). Legitimate power is rather cheap in comparison to other powerbases, as it is characterized by authority (Hatch, 1997). According to Hatch, this structure has emerged from the social structure, the followers will accept the power and will not disown it as they accept it and will respond to it.

### **Referent Power**

This type of power is based on the recognition of the followers on the basis of the



leaders. The followers want to be associated with the leader as they like and admire him and want to be like him. The leader therefore exercises his power on the basis of the people's perception of him as an attractive personality with charisma and warmth (Mullins, 2002). Nevertheless, in this type of a system, it is important to build trust and confidence among the people, as was pointed out by Hersey *et al.* (2001).

### **Expert Power**

This type of system is based on the belief that the leader is superior in terms of skills and abilities that are valued by the followers. According to Shackleton, (1995), this system is the most controversial among all the powerbases, as, in the current setup of the society; we consider the experts to know all and organizations will seek the knowledge of experts. Nevertheless, this powerbase is comparative in nature, as explained by Handy (1993), as anyone who possesses more knowledge in comparison to those around will automatically be more powerful. This powerbase needs to be continuously constructed by acquiring new knowledge and skills.

There have been studies conducted to assess the practice of different types of the abovementioned power. However, studies demonstrate that there were conflicting results pertaining to the use of power. For example, Podsahoff & Schriesheim (1985) review some of the results that showed that reward power was positively associated with performance and satisfaction while others showed unrelated or were negatively related to "subordinates" outcome variables.

Braynion (2004), in further analysing the development of the power concept, put forth Steven Lukes (1974) perception in which Lukes proposes the 'one dimensional view' that looks upon who has the decision making power. Lukes illuminates his view by giving an example: "A" has the power over "B" to the extent that he can get "B" to do something that "B" would not otherwise do. The object of power is to have decisions ratified. If a decision is put forward and agreed then it is deemed successful.

Bachrach & Baratz (1970), however, disagree with the one-dimensional view, inasmuch as there is too much emphasis on the observable behaviour (who controlled the decision making processes). They criticise the one-dimensional view, as it fails to identify the decision making process as accessible or fair. For example, many complaints or grievances may not have the opportunity to be conveyed or expressed and remain outside the decision making process (Clegg & Hardy, 1999). One dimension also fails to recognize how power is being used to exclude issues from the agendas that could restrict diversity and voices (Braynion, 2004). Due to these weaknesses, Bachrach & Baratz introduced the 'two dimensional view' with the argument that power has two faces.

The first face is the first dimensional view, which concentrates on actual decision making processes, while the second face concentrates on how the leaders in power create barriers to prevent those who are not in power from being able to change the status quo through not being able to fully participate in the decision making process. The use of these barriers has been termed as non-decision making as it acknowledges how those in power work behind the scenes to prevent discussion and change (Clegg and Hardy, 1999). Bachrach & Baratz believe that this kind of power, which only highlights issues that are in favour of their interest and buries deeply issues that might threaten them, is an essential mechanism to maintain power. It acts to control the rules of the game and ensures that the rules benefit those who make the rules in the first place (Braynion, 2004).

However, following the two dimensional concept of Bachrach & Baratz, Lukes offers some improvement to the concept by expanding the focus to not only assess the individual power but also to the social context. He argues that the status quo is maintained not through the actions of individuals but through the practices and rituals of groups and institutions. It is through this collective agreement that the interest of those in power is maintained, as the societal forces to which the individuals are subjected are greater than their own power. In fact the individual might not be aware of this kind of domination and biasness, and, thus, they will

not challenge or resist those in power. This is the shaping process that Lukes (1974) outlines in his third dimensional view.

These one, two and three dimensions of power demonstrate how leaders maintain positions of leadership. The one dimension approach depicts the need to develop networks and alliances, as it is necessary to ensure their ideas are placed high on the agenda. The second dimensional view depicts how the leaders not only build powerbases, but are also aware of more subtle and complex issues of power, and ensure that those in opposition are not on the agenda or are marginalized. The third dimension demonstrates how leaders not only set the agenda but also create the working reality that is shared by all. This reality would shape employees' thoughts, beliefs, desires and hopes. The leader would never be challenged (Braynion, 2004).

### **Post-modern Concept of Power**

The concepts of power that have been discussed above are from the modernist views. Modernist look for "truth" as fact and the belief that science is processed by which we will know the world and ourselves (Pryce, 2003). However, from the postmodernist perspective the concept is more divergent. Postmodernist belief that there is no one reality or one truth, rather there are multiple realities that co-exist and are fractured (Hatch, 1997). This sets an immediate challenge to the concepts of power and leadership, for the claim to the truths of leadership become open to challenge, because the effects of truth create our identities and how we make sense of the world and our place in it (Brynion, 2004).

One of the influential postmodernist scholars is Michael Foucault with his popular writing entitled "Power Knowledge" (1980). Foucault's concern was not only on how the power is established and maintained, but also on how inequalities and the status quo are maintained through subtle and complex patterns of power. Through his research he found that there is power over and power within the body. He asserted that for power to be real and effective it has to be able to gain "access to bodies of individuals and shape their attitudes and everyday behaviour"

(Rabinow, 1994). This emerges through the disciplines being internalized and normalized in every action and thought. Unconsciously, people are in a web of invisible and insidious power, through which individuals internalize their perceptions and become self-regulating through their constant and internal search for the truth (McNay, 1994).

Furthermore, Foucault sees power as always productive and never merely repressive, hence the concept of power relations emerged. Power relations explain the connection between the visible and the sayable through the primacy of discourse (Kendall & Wickham, 1999).

In the leadership context, power is so important and may have multiple consequences. As has been discussed above, power is the ability to produce a causal effect or bring about something, and social power is power over another person. This notion seems rather repressive and thus too restrictive, as one can only understand the effect of power as observable changes in circumstances or behaviour (Detel, 2005). On the other hand, Foucault looks at power from a wider and dynamic perspective, and analyses power through three different levels: first, the forms of structure that certain power relations take on in certain historical situations. In other words this level looks into the point from where the power is exercised. Second, the dynamics of local forms of power, that looks into the historical shift or progression of power. Third, it looks at the complex strategic situation of power in a particular society. The central and most illuminating feature of Foucault's conception of power focuses on a detailed differentiation of the forms of power and their complex dynamic (Detel, 2005).

Foucault's normalizing processes and processes of surveillance can be seen throughout organizations (Clegg and Hardy, 1999). Normalizing promotes visibility and compliance within organizations to achieve the organization's objectives and goals. Foucault's work can also inspire managers and/or leaders to explore the discourses, which constitute their identities and develop an understanding of how these discourses have shaped their role as a manager and/or

leader (Braynion,2004).Thus, Foucault’s account of power is not as an attribute (and ask ‘What is it?’) but as an exercise (and ask ‘How does it work?’).

### **2.5.3 Islamic Leadership**

As different cultures, societies and communities construe leadership in different ways, the need to explore these constructions becomes highly significant in multi-ethnic contexts. One of the significant cultural contexts that are embedded in the context under study (Malaysia) is Islam. Islam is a religion in which public life is very much a collective responsibility of the community, and the Quran(Word of God) provides regulations according to which the community should discharge the responsibility (Mottahedeh, 2001).

#### **2.5.3.1 Islamic Conception of leadership**

From an Islamic perspective, leading has strong connotations with leading towards knowledge and righteousness, through ‘words’ and ‘acts’, entailing a knowledge status for the leaders, as well as perceiving him/her as a role model in a holistic sense (Shah, 2006). Leadership in Islam is a **trust**, as mentioned by Prophet Muhammad:

*“Every one of you is a leader and every one of you shall be questioned about those under his supervision; the Imam is a leader and shall be questioned about his subjects; and the man is a leader in his family and he shall be questioned about those under his care; and the woman is a leader in the house of her husband, and shall be questioned about those under her care; and the servant is a leader in taking care of the property of his master, and shall be questioned about those under his care.”*

The above *hadith* (as preached by Prophet Muhammad) reflects the **trust** concept in which it will be asked by God (in the Hereafter life) about one’s roles (in this circumstance – the leadership roles). The belief is that any good deed will be rewarded and any wrongdoing will receive just punishment by God. Therefore, it demonstrates here that the leaders have a social contract with the followers in terms of moral and ethical bindings given by God (Ali, 2005). The leader is held accountable for his/her doings, and will try his best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly with justice. Hence, integrity and justice becomes the

central focus that needs to be performed through virtuous practices. As such, Muslim leaders should behave as a leader and/or follower in accordance with the Quran, which was modelled by Prophet Muhammad. This belief is supported when God says the following about Prophet Muhammad in the Quran (46:3):

*“And you stand an exalted standard of character”.*

Prophet Muhammad has set an example that Muslim leaders and followers ought to emulate. Because of the trust concept, a leader should be appointed from the most trusted person endorsed by the followers. Preferably, the leader should be the most religious/faithful, knowledgeable, and highly ethical in conduct.

The fundamental of Islamic leadership is rooted in the belief and willing submission to the Creator, God. It centres on serving Him and embracing the Unity of God. In an organizational setting, it means a deep consciousness to lead the people to the unity of direction, clarity of purpose, avoidance of wrongdoing, and of equality among people (Ali, 2005) based on the underlying virtue of the objective to serve God. In this sense, Islam provides the broad range of conduct that is viewed as appropriate for leaders and provides a framework to become guidelines in determining what is considered to be good or bad. In turn, the guidelines become the foundation for ethical principles that simultaneously form a societal and organizational ethical system. Precisely, within that ascribed framework, the primary role of the leaders is to do good deeds (Beekun & Badawi, 1999) and to work towards the establishment of the livelihood of humankind. Hence, the leaders' roles are construed within this broad and dynamic virtuous ultimatum. This is visibly explicated in the Quran:

*“And We made them leaders guiding (mankind) by Our Command and We revealed to them the doing of good deeds, performing regular prayers and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only)”. (21:73)*

Clearly, from the above verse, the core of Islamic leadership is to guide the people in accordance with the injunction of the God and His Prophet, (Beekun & Badawi, 1999). By having and developing a sound Islamic moral character (Beekun & Badawi, 1999) manifested by intrinsic drive and motivation from

regular prayers, leaders are supposed to be able to perform this enormous task. Practising regular charity implies the moral binding form (Ali, 2010), which accentuates the concept of generosity in serving the people (Ali, 2005), and doing sincere or beneficial deeds (Ali, 2010). In this sense, the leaders are not only required to treat the followers with kindness, sincerity, and responsibility, but also to be generous in leading and providing assistance to the followers. Nonetheless, leadership is not only inclusive of the religious and ethical, and values-based approaches (Fry, 2003), but the basic tenet is doing good deeds (Ali, 2010), as the Prophet said, “God blesses those who benefit others”.

Good deeds are fundamental in Islamic practice. Good deeds must be preceded by good intentions, in that intention is the primary criterion upon which work is evaluated in terms of benefit to the community. Any activity that is perceived to do harm, even though it results in significant wealth to those who undertake it, is considered unlawful. Prophet Muhammad stated, ‘God does not look at your matters (shapes or forms) and wealth, rather God examines your intentions and actions’ (Ali, 2005). Hence, Islam prescribes that the obligations of both leaders and followers must be grounded in ethics with great emphasis on high morality in conduct and intention.

From the above illustration, Muslim leadership is perceived to be the most significant instrument for the realization of an ideal society. With high morality in the conduct and intention of the leaders, the ideal society would be developed based on justice and compassion (Ali, 2009). Ali describes that both qualities become an integral part of leadership, in which creativity and order cannot be sustained without justice and compassion. That is, justice “is the mainstay of a nation” (Imam Ali, died 661 A.D.). Leaders are held responsible for promoting and enforcing justice. The Quran (4:58) instructs its believers: “When you judge between people, judge them with justice”. Indeed, the thriving of justice is closely linked to the subject of leadership and leaders. Again, Ali (2009) noted that Muslims hold the early period of Islam (about 622-661 A.D.) as the most just, compassionate, and ideal in Islamic history, that Islamic society most closely resembled the ideal state during this period. Many Muslim scholars argue that

probably, this ideal state has not regained hegemony except during the era of Caliph Omar Bin Abdul Aziz (717-720 A.D.) and for a short period during the Abbasid Empire (750-1258 A.D.).

The justice leader is perceived to be faithfully guided and responsible. This internal strength develops passionate and caring kinds of leadership that reflect the traditional view of leadership in Islam as a shared influence process.

There is another leadership concept proposed by Islam – sovereignty. In Islam, only God is Sovereign of the whole universe. In the spirit of such a position, in the Islamic realm of thought, the ruler or leader of the state is no more than God's messenger or vicegerent on earth. Being the representative of God, the ruler is not authorised with powers other than those delegated to him, and stipulated in the broad guidelines of the Quran. Hence, in this context, a government or the legislature of the state cannot make laws or pass policies that contradict God's commandments (Husin, 1993).

### **2.5.3.2 Bases of the Construction of Islamic Leadership**

As elaborated above, Islamic leaders should be of high morality in conduct and intention. Those characters would develop by his increasingly strong belief in God as he progresses through four stages of spiritual development, as described in the following sections. Each stage is discussed in terms of how it affects a Muslim leader's behaviour.

#### **Iman**

*Iman* is the key Islamic moral character or faith in God. *Iman* implies the belief in God as the Creator and confession of the Oneness of the True God and in Muhammad as His Last Messenger (Ali, 2010). Such conviction would have an impact on the personal and social behaviour of the individuals, that he/she may enjoin the right and avoid wrongdoing. For the leaders, they would construct the meaning of their roles to presume positive and constructive actions to oneself and to the society by following God's command and guidance.



## **Islam**

Building upon *Iman*, *Islam* is the second layer of the moral personality of an Islamic leader and followers. Islam means the practice that leads to the achievement of peace with God, within oneself and with the creation of God, through willing submission to Him. Because of his or her *Iman*, a leader who practices Islam will never see himself as supreme.

## **Taqwa**

This concept carries the meaning of forever mindful of the Almighty (Ali, 2010), which would make an individual from behaving inappropriately and would command his/her soul to be in tune with good deeds, piety and justice (Ali, 2010). *Taqwa* implies a self-control mechanism for leaders in performing their roles, and would lead them to steadfastness in seeking and articulating truth and justice.

## **Ehsan**

*Ehsan* refers to the feeling of the presence of God, and entails a struggle to work towards attaining God's satisfaction and that individual would behave at his/her best without the need of any human supervision (Ali, 2010). *Ehsan* promotes motivation for leaders to serve at the highest attainment and remain conscientious for self and collective improvement.

### **2.5.3.3 History of Islamic Leadership**

Islamic leadership has evolved over time. The evolution has been greatly shaped by events, ideology and the power of the leaders and influential individuals. These factors have changed the images and religious concepts of leadership. Under the early leadership of Islam, particularly during that of Prophet Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Ali, 2009), the power and authority of the leaders was based entirely on the Quran and *Hadith* (as preached by Prophet Muhammad). Then the perception and reality of Islamic leadership changed over time depending on "the rise and fall of ideology (faith) and openness in the society" (Ali, 2009). Ali asserts that whilst these factors have

primarily influenced the phenomenon, outside forces and instability have accelerated the trend.

Nonetheless, historical evidence suggests that leaders and leadership in Islam have gone through seven stages: the Prophet era, Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Ommeyade dynasty, the early Abbasid era, the late Abbasid era, the era of stagnation, and the era of instability (Ali, 2005).

Many Muslim scholars believe the first two periods are the ones that capture the essence of Islam and genuine practices. The Prophet Era (610-632) demonstrated that Muhammad served as a prophet and as a statesman. Under his leadership, profound cultural and political changes took place in the Arab region (Ali, 2005). Ali (2009) quoted Armstrong (1992) who argued that the immediate spread and acceptance of Islam reflected the unique message of Islam and was clearly a reflection of the genius of Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet strongly believed that leadership must be based on three foundations – *Rahema* (mercy), *Ehsan* (kindness), and ‘*Adel* (justice). Once these foundations are met, race will not be an issue in selecting a leader. As the Prophet asserted, “Listen to and obey whoever is in charge, even though he is an Ethiopian (black)”. The Prophet developed not only the civilised individual life but also a vital community of believers that envision life beyond this world and which encompassed the Hereafter. Hence, the emphasis of living with faith was very fundamental and became the important instrument in energizing his followers, as well as the leaders.

According to Ali (2009), Prophet Muhammad had a deep understanding that Arabs are highly individualistic and unreceptive to central authority and strict personal order. Therefore, contrary to the prevailing practices of showing power he declared that he was not a compeller, but a messenger of God; that his job, primarily, was to preach, warn and guide, to do good and avoid vice. This demonstrates how Mohamed understood the unique Arab psyche and situated himself as an impersonal conveyer of the new faith.

In early emergent Islam, Prophet Muhammad’s persistence was to promote the

message of Islam and create an environment to facilitate cultural change. Once the new community developed and extended, an Islamic state was established in Madinah, and the “*wahyu*” (verses from God) regarding laws and orders were revealed. Furthermore, cooperation among members of the Muslim community was encouraged and brotherly relationships were extended far beyond the original Muslim community (Ali, 2009). Despite assigning “*walis*” (governors), local administrators and market commissioners to govern several parts of the state, various forms of alliance were established with Jewish communities and other tribes. These alliances were aimed at ensuring safety and stability besides, more importantly, to strengthen and spread the faith.

Prophet Muhammad viewed leadership as a process of shared influence. In this regard, the consultative approach was the one that was emphasised by him. For example, in the Quran (42:38) it says that the faithful are those “Who conducted their affairs with consultation among themselves”. Ali (2005) quoted Jasim (1987) in explaining the verses that indicate that Prophet Muhammad was guided by a genuine and uncompromising commitment to democratic principles in his life and in the conduct of government affairs. He argues that, for the Prophet, consultation was a primary principle in his life, stemming from his spiritual and rationalistic nature and his rich experience. That is, for the Prophet, democracy was a natural tendency and a solid political choice that he never compromised.

Furthermore, in his general conduct of affairs, whether religious or otherwise, the Prophet utilized a public open forum where members of the community had immediate input and contributed on the spot to civic and administrative matters. He instructed his representatives by saying, “God blesses those who benefit others”. That is, leadership is only valid when it results in a benefit to society, regardless of the setting. In this broad concept of leadership, Prophet Mohamed implied that shouldering responsibility is essential for cohesiveness, smooth performance and improving the welfare of society.

#### 2.5.3.4 Leadership Roles in Islam

Islam outlines two primary roles of a leader: as a servant-leader and as a guardian for the people (Beekun & Badawi, 1999). The first role as a servant of his followers is based on the divine concept “*Ikhlas*” that a leader’s foremost intention is to serve the people, to bring them to harmonious and peaceful living in this world and the Hereafter. Thus, the welfare of the people becomes the top priority of a leader, and how a leader should operate to achieve this goal is guided by the Islamic principles. The idea of a leader as a servant has been part of Islam since its beginning, and has only recently been developed by Robert Greenleaf.

Prophet Muhammad also emphasized a second major role of the Muslim leader – to protect his community against tyranny and oppression, to encourage God-consciousness and “*Taqwa*”, and to promote justice (Beekun & Badawi, 1999).

Although the nature and view of leadership in Islam have changed over centuries, leaders are not expected to lead or to maintain their roles without the agreement of followers, and, at the same time, decisions made by these leaders should be consensual in nature. Thus, (Ali, 2009) the leadership process is dynamic and open ended and the ultimate aim is to sustain cohesiveness and effectiveness. The Quran clearly calls for a leader to be flexible and receptive to followers based on wisdom and spirited debate and states, (16:125) “*Argue with them in manners that are best and most gracious*” as (3:159) “*Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would [break] away*”.

The leader is obliged to exemplify openness, willingness to listen and compassion in dealing with subordinates or followers. In Islamic history, during public dialogue, an individual criticized the second Caliph, Omar. Omar’s answer was very enlightening, in that it was the duty of the leader and followers to listen to each other and to voice their concerns (Ali, 2009). Omar laid a solid foundation for leaders that followers’ participation is fundamental, as evidenced by another situation when he informed his followers, “*When you see me engage in a wrong doing, straighten me out*”. This humanistic value founded by Islam teaches the

followers not to blindly follow the leaders. As Prophet Muhammad said: *“Obedience is due only to that which is good”*.

## **2.6 The Construction of Leadership From Relational Approach**

As mentioned above, the studying of leadership has moved from being static to being action oriented, leadership gradually started being viewed as a process; thus, putting the focus on the interaction between the many factors that occur within an organization – the environmental and organizational factors. This thinking juxtaposed with the conditions of society and past research orientation influenced many noted leadership researchers to advocate a social constructionist approach to leadership. As has been illustrated in 2.3.4 above, relational approach is one of the way in leadership research that fits better in the new shift of thinking because researchers see the theory focusing on an interactive social process carried out by individuals within organizations. Relational approach is a constructionist approach. Therefore, leadership is not an objective generic force that influences others but a human interactive process through which both followers and leaders work together to create meaning (Drath & Palus, 1994). The approach view leadership and organization as human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organizations and their members (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995). Thus, leadership is occurring in relational dynamics throughout the organization, and recognizes the importance of context in analysing these relational dynamics ( Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002).

Looking from this perspective, Brewer & Gardner (1996) illustrate that the construction of leader's identity occurs from the responses and satisfaction of the other person in the relationship. Leader's self-worth comes from the feeling that he/she is behaving appropriately and acceptably with respect to others. Leader's would define, evaluate, self-regulate, and most importantly be functioning as expressed in relation to others. On the other hand, at collective level, identification implies “a psychological ‘merging’ of self and group that leads individuals to see the self as similar to other members of the collective, to ascribe

group-defining characteristics to the self, and to take the collective's interest to heart” (van Knippenberg et al., 2004, p. 828). This results in a “depersonalized” sense of self, “a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person”

Leaders emerge, maintain their position, and are effective as a result of basic social cognitive processes among group members that cause them to conceive themselves in relation to others, then cognitively and behaviourally assimilate themselves to the prototypical features of the others, and perceive others through the lens of himself/herself as a member of the group (Hogg, 2001). The implication is that if leadership is produced by these social psychological processes, then for an individual to be effective as a leader, he/she must display the prototypical or normative characteristics of the group members.

By viewing the construction of leadership and identities from the perspective of relational or constructionist, the study would be more subjective and complex from the flexible viewpoint. Miendl (1995) advocated that using a constructionist approach, the focus would be looking from how the people constructing leadership as a normal part of their social experiences. Talking on similar vein, Drath & Palus (1994), state that:

*Seeing leadership as an individual is only seeing the white caps of the waves that are flashing in the sun, which misses why the waves are rising. By looking at the deep blue water underneath these waves, leadership may be more productively understood because that is where we all work together (p.25).*

Drath (2001) pointed out that organizations have evolved to the stage that one's interpersonal influence or agency is not sufficient. From the social constructionist view, the notion of leader or how leadership happens needs to be examined from multiple perspectives and levels. The focus will not only be on the leadership as a sole entity, instead, it is necessary to explore how all members can co-create a future that maximizes the group's effectiveness. The interactions occur in a

multiplicity of options that can happen only through dialogue. From this perspective, leadership does not even exist without interrelationships or context.

Hence, it is very much related to discuss the construction of leadership and identity from the perspective of constructionist. The general tenet within constructionist approach is that reality is not objective and given, but it is socially constructed. It is argued that all aspects of social reality can be seen as socially defined through on-going actions, negotiations and agreements. Identity construction is mediated through a specific culture, historical time and language, which imply that one, to a large extent, reproduce rather than produce reality, and the subject and the world are inseparable. For example, within the constructionist approaches, leadership is constructed and reproduced over time embedded within the historical and cultural values.

For the constructionist, leadership emerges from the people. Leadership creates meaning and generates action for the future by finding the best in the organization and promoting positive change through inquiry. Therefore, leadership is shared by everyone, through a collective capacity for innovation and excellence. Instead of stagnation, individuals, groups and organizations are actively interacting and sharing the leadership process. Schiller, Holland, and Riley (2001) further elaborated the relational and social constructionist views of leadership in their model of appreciative leadership. Two underlying assumptions of this model assert that the leadership lies in the domain of all members and that it emerges as the result of social influence processes and dynamics. They assert that appreciative leaders can reside within any level of an organization, hold a holistic world view, employ practices that encourage empowering, challenging, coaching and promoting dialogue with others in the group, and interact with genuineness, credibility and respectfulness.

### **2.6.1 The Social Identity**

In the social identity theory, there is a great deal of personal value and meaning from our group membership, so that the self-concepts depend in significant ways upon the ways in which the group are regarded by themselves and by others, and

the only way to assess value and regard in the social world is through processes of comparison, so that the value and worth of one group is always relative to the value and worth of another reference group (Spears, *et al.*, 1997). Indeed, social identity theorists have argued that, because people need to evaluate themselves favourably and because group memberships are an important constituent of the self-concept, group members tend to evaluate their groups more favourably than they evaluate other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This phenomenon is referred to as in-group bias or in-group favouritism, and it may take the form of trait ascription, resource allocation, and the evaluation of group products.

Under the social identity approach, leadership is viewed from two perspectives:

- a) Leadership is a relational property; that is, leaders and followers are interdependent roles embedded within a social system bounded by a common group or category membership.
- b) Leadership is a process of influence that enlists and mobilises others in the attainment of collective goals, it imbues people with the group's attitudes and goals and inspires them to work towards achieving them.

Messick & Kramer (2005), on describing social identity, highlight that the basis of self-conceptualisation, perception, attitudes, feelings, and behaviour is contextually fluid, thus they assert that self-conception can vary from being entirely based on idiosyncratic personal relationships to being entirely based on the shared representation of 'us' defined in terms of an in-group prototype. In the case of social cognition, in which the situation represents a group situation, and perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behaviour, social identity might acquire the familiar characteristics of inter and intragroup behaviours, such as conformity, normative behaviour, solidarity, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, intergroup discrimination, in-group favouritism, and so forth. In this sense self-definition, perception, cognition, affect, and behaviour based upon prototypicality will be stronger.

Identity is not just 'there', it must always be established. In this account, Jenkins (1996) describes identity as a process, as 'being' or 'becoming'. One's social identity – indeed, one's social identities, for who we are, is always singular or



plural – is never final or settled. Social identity refers to the way in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities. It is a systematic establishment of signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference. Similarity and difference are the dynamic principles of identity, the heart of social life (Jenkins, 1996). Social identity is the understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others, it is an on-going process of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives. It is a product of agreement and disagreement, and is negotiable.

According to Hogg and Terry (2001) the concept of social identity was first introduced by Tajfel (1972), whereby he defines the concept as “the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership”. His earlier consideration focused on social, largely intergroup perceptions and consideration of how self is conceptualized in intergroup contexts; how a system of social categorization creates and defines an individual's own place in society.

On the other hand, Hogg (2000) perceives that social identity rests on intergroup social comparisons that seek to confirm or establish in-group-favouring evaluative distinctiveness between in-groups and out-groups, motivated by an underlying need for self-esteem.

Based on the work of Cooley (1962) and Mead (1934), Jenkins elaborated an understanding of the ‘self’ as a non-going and, in practice, simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the external definition of oneself offered by others. Thus, it is the process of internal-external dialectic of identification whereby all identities – individual and collectives – are constituted. While Goffman (1969), cited by Jenkins (1996), described social identity as the ‘presentation of self’ during interaction.

Identities are never unified and are increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation (Du Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000).

### **2.6.2 Leadership Identity**

In theorizing the development of leadership identity, many scholars take different views in explaining the concept. For example, DeRue & Ashford (2010) highlight that many scholars, such as Ancona & Backman (2008), and Bedeian & Hunt (2006), have begun to question the traditional conceptualizations that position leadership as top-down, hierarchical, and equivalent to formal supervisory roles in organizations. They argue that a formal position within an institutionalized hierarchical structure does not explain why some supervisors are not seen as leaders (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006) or why some individuals are seen as leaders despite not holding leadership positions. Thus, DeRue & Ashford present recent seminal works, such as those from Bedeian & Hunt (2006); Collinson (2005); and Gemmill & Oakley, which proposed a broader conceptualization of leadership as a mutual influence process between the leaders and followers, regardless of any formal role or hierarchical structure.

DeRue & Ashford assert that if leadership is not simply prescribed because of one's position in an institutionalized hierarchy, then a fundamental question that remains to be answered is how leadership and leader-follower relationships develop in organizations and how the relational and social processes are involved in coming to see oneself, and being seen by others, as a leader or a follower. Hence, they attempt to explain the dynamics of the leader and follower identities, which are not only on the cognitions that reside within an individual's self-concept but also to recognize that they are also socially constructed and inherently related. These views are advocated by Day & Harrison, (2007); Day & Lance, (2004) and DeRue *et al.* (2009).

DeRue & Ashford further propose that leader and follower identities can shift among group members through a social construction process, which contrasts with much research that generally portrays leader identities as intrapersonal, one-directional, and static.

### **2.6.3 Leadership Identity Construction**

DeRue & Ashford (2010) explicitly delineate the process of leadership construction. Starting from explicating the concept of identity that refers to the meaning attached to the self (Gecas, 1982), they further propose that identity can be conceptualized along three levels of self-construal: individual, relational, and collective (quoted in Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Thus, they suggest that leadership identity comprises three elements: individual internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement. Individual internalization is a state where individuals come to incorporate the identity of a leader or follower as part of their self-concept; the self is tied to various roles (as asserted by Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000) and certain roles are reciprocally related (e.g., leaders and followers). In this sense, leadership “is not something the leader possesses”; rather, it expresses a recognized relationship among individuals. Hence, the construction of leadership identity is relational.

Through the relational identity process, leadership identity will be stronger as it is recognized through the adoption of reciprocal role identities as leader. Then, the collective endorsement for those identities will occur through social interaction within the group. The related identities will be reinforced and stronger and more stable. They give the example that an individual might not perceive him or herself as possessing the attributes of a leader (follower) or as being in a leader-like (follower-like) position, but the social context within which that individual works might collectively endorse him or her as a leader (follower), and, thereby, initiate the leadership identity construction process. Thus, the construction of leadership identity is about the construction of relationships (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). As a result, the leadership relationship would develop a pattern of influence between the leaders and followers. Finally, they propose that the

leadership identity is always changing due to the social interaction and is always free, fluid, and continuous.

#### **2.6.4 Minority/Female Leadership and Identity**

One of the critical aspects that the postmodernist or constructivist view suggests to observe concerns the marginalised group. In the context of the marginalised group, Hogg & Terry (2001) praised Simon's (1992) theoretical account of the in-group homogeneity effect that owes much to social identity theory. Simon argued that being in a minority, which is often associated with lower status, tends to make group membership more salient and may pose a threat to group member's self-esteem. Hogg & Terry advocate that minority members may respond by perceiving their in-group as more homogenous, thus promoting in-group solidarity and accentuating social identity. The effects of gender and group size converge when being in a distinct minority heightens women's consciousness of their stigmatized status and/or gender group. This awareness does indeed increase their perceived similarity to women as a group.

According to Hogg & Terry (2001), in a highly cohesive culture, the dominant group is always in the limelight rather than the minority group, and thus excludes minorities from top leadership position. In Western societies, demographic minorities (e.g., people of colour, ethnic minorities, and women) may find it difficult to attain top leadership positions in organizations – there is a glass ceiling (Eagly *et al.*, 1995), and there is no cultural fit with the dominant group (Hogg, 2001b).

However, Hewstone *et al.* (2001) assert that ethnic and gender different identities should be viewed from a pluralistic perception, in that diversity can be a resource to be exploited, rather than something to be eliminated or avoided and minority views can offer vital and creative challenges to organizations, broadening their perspective and actually increasing productivity.

Even so, there is a view that the terms of an executive career are shaped according to a traditional male pattern of life. According to this pattern, the man is

primarily loyal to the organization. Moreover, women are perceived as lacking the right experience, the right contacts or the right style, since the constructions of leadership and masculinity are closely linked. This, in turn, creates a contradiction in the very idea of being a woman and a manager. Since women do not signal potential success, they are consequently not given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to perform. If they are promoted to higher positions, it is only to those that are considered suitable, and that, in most cases, do not lead to the very top. Naturally, the recruitment system does not only exclude women, but also those men who do not match the prevailing construction of leadership (Sjostrand *et al.*, 2001). Critical studies of men and masculinity have also indicated a dialectic relationship between the constructions of masculinity and construction of leadership (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). The studies offered other explanations for the dominance of men at the executive level, that the male dominance among leaders could be understood as a question of men choosing men, rather than of men rejecting women.

Nevertheless, Briskin (2006) argues that in order to gain credibility as competent individuals, and to show their willingness to be absorbed into the organization, female leaders often deny the importance of gender. The gender-neutral strategy is adopted in order to blend in with the majority, and to establish a distance relative to other women. Women have to adapt to the norm, by showing that they are equally competent.

### **2.6.5 Multiple Identities**

An individual tends to be a member or occupant of multiple categories/roles, and is likely to have multiple social or role identities. The notion of multiplicity is particularly relevant to role transitions because it raises the question of how a particular role is activated and reconciled with other roles one may retain (Ashforth, 2001). In SIT, identities will assume salience or psychological prominence in a given situation. The salience of role identity to an individual in an organizational context is determined by both sets of factors, specifically, subjective importance and situational relevance (Ashforth, 2001). These factors

can be regarded as dimensions or continua that range from low to high and that are conceptually independent but tend to be correlated in practice.

### **2.6.6 Temporary Role Identities**

According to Ashforth (2001), a temporary role identity is an identity that one knowingly adopts for a relatively short period of time. As such, temporary identities are usually associated with short-term reversible role transitions. Temporary identities have at least three distinct origins: short-term enactments, games and play, and long-term role enactments where identification is low.

A short-term enactment refers to when one is temporarily immersed in the experience of the role in which the roles or occupancy is circumscribed in time (Ashforth, 2001), while the games and play is the situation when one's normal social identities and rules of everyday life are temporarily suspended when the role entails a strong element of playacting for a limited period of time.

Ashforth further elaborates that the role provides a basis for both self-categorization and the categorization of self by others and thus become a basis for interpersonal relationships. In short, the individual is psychologically and socially grounded in the context. For example, they may be more inclined to go through the motions and refrain from investing themselves emotionally, cognitively, and behaviourally in the role identity.

Role identities are role-based personas developed with goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons. The more these features are tightly coupled and widely understood, the stronger the identity is said to be. In addition, the more subjectively important and situationally relevant the role identity, the greater salience of role identity. The key implication for role transition is that *to exit one role and enter another* is to switch personas, and if one identifies with the roles, it means to switch the very conception of the self. This, in turn, suggests that role exit may at times be quite traumatic and that it may be very difficult to earn a new role and be accepted by one's role set as a bona fide role occupant (Ashforth, 2001).

### **2.6.7 Role Transitions**

A transition occurs when an individual either moves from one role to another (inter-role transition) or changes his or her orientation towards a role already held (intra-role transition). Role transitions occur because of the escalation of changes due to the 'boundaryless' realities that the organizations and individuals are becoming a more temporary type. For example, the shifting of the job of the leader, at one time they are the superiors and another time they are the subordinates of their top management.

Individual social identity is likely to consist of an amalgam of identities, identities that could impose inconsistent demands upon the person. The inherent conflict between the demands of multiple identities is typically not resolved by cognitively integrating the identities, but by ordering, separating or buffering them. Further, these demands might also conflict with those of individual personal identity. A conflict of identities might also occur due to the values, beliefs, and norms (Ashforth & Mael, 1998). Thus, in order to avoid the conflict, the individuals tend to reconstruct their identities from one role to the other. However, this compartmentalization of identities suggests the possibility of double standards, apparent hypocrisy, and selective forgetting.

### **2.7 Summary**

The above literature precisely illuminates the ideas concerning how this study was initiated; the gap in the literature and it how will be empirically conducted to achieve the research objectives. The complex nature of leadership indicates that the role of leadership should no longer exist as an entity, but be played on a relational basis, as the world is markedly interconnected. However, to understand how the leaders play their roles and how they are enacted in society, the surrounding factors, which consist of environmental and organizational factors, inevitably have a great impact on them. Essentially, historical and cultural background undeniably also has their contributive factors. To address the complex reality of the construction of the leadership and their identities, the

exploration of the phenomena using qualitative methodology would be employed, which will be elaborated upon in Chapters 4 and 5.



## CHAPTER 3

### MALAYSIAN LEADERSHIP

#### 3.1 Introduction

It is deemed important to contextualize this study within the Malaysian scenario. This chapter provides a brief historical background concerning the different aspects of Malaysian leadership in different eras.

#### 3.2 Malaysia at a Glance

##### **Location:**

Malaysia covers an area of about 330,803 square kilometres, consisting of states in Peninsular Malaysia, namely, Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Pulau Pinang, Selangor, Terengganu and the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya; Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo and the Federal Territory of Labuan off Sabah. Malaysia lies entirely in the equatorial zone and the average daily temperature throughout Malaysia varies from 21°C to 32°C.

Located between 2 and 7 degrees north of the Equator, Peninsular Malaysia is separated from the states of Sabah and Sarawak by the South China Sea. To the north of Peninsular Malaysia is Thailand while its southern neighbour is Singapore. Sabah and Sarawak are bounded by Indonesia while Sarawak also shares a border with Brunei (Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister Department, Malaysia, 2010).

##### **Population:**

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society with three main ethnic groups – Malay, Chinese and Indian –and numerous other ethnic minorities. Malaysia has a total population of 29.6 million, with 67.4% being *Bumiputera* (literally Sons of Soil, a term normally used to refer to Malays and other indigenous groups), 24.6% Chinese, 7.3% Indians and 0.7% are other ethnic minorities. Islam is the most

widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3 per cent. As a multi-racial nation, other religions embraced are Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%) (Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, on December, 2012).

### **3.3 Brief History of Malaysia**

#### **3.3.1 Early History**

According to Shamsul (2004), the Chinese merchants arrived in Malacca (an early settlement in Malaya) in the fifteenth-century to protect Malaya from being invaded by the Siamese from the north. With this support, Malacca grew into the busiest city at that time. Simultaneously, Islam arrived in Malacca and soon spread throughout Malaya.

The development of Malacca attracted European countries to expand their merchandising activities, which led to further invasions of Malaya. These included the Portuguese who first took over Malaya in 1511, followed by the Dutch in 1641 and the British in 1795. The longest colonialism was by the British who were only interested in Malaya for its seaports and to protect their trade routes, however, subsequently, the discovery of tin prompted them to move inland and eventually govern the entire Peninsula (Shamsul, 2004).

The British role in the peninsula began in 1786 with the British East India Company searching for a site for trade and a naval base. The British brought in the Chinese to work in the tin mines and the Indians to work in the rubber plantations and to build the railways.

Then, in the late nineteenth-century, the British governed the affairs of Peninsula Malaya. However, in the Second World War, Malaya fell under the threat of a Japanese invasion, who occupied Malaysia for the next three and a half years. The occupation ended when the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed in August 1945. The British military then landed in Malaya and re-established their authority (Shamsul, 2004).

### **3.3.2 Independence (1957)**

In August 1957, Malaya was granted independence from British colonial rule. With independence, the country became a centralised Federation with a Constitutional Monarchy. Each state has its own fully elected State Assembly, its government chosen from the party that has a majority of elected members in the Assembly (Shamsul, 2004).

In 1963 the north Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak together with Singapore, joined Malaya to create Malaysia. However, due to political differences between Malaysia and Singapore, on 9 August 1965, Singapore left the Federation and became an independent nation.

### **The state of emergency**

In 1969 violent intra-communal riots broke out, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, and hundreds of people were killed. The government moved and declared a state of emergency and parliament was suspended to dissipate the tension, which existed mainly between the Malays and the Chinese (Shamsul, 2004).

### **Modern Malaysia**

Slowly calm returned and parliament was reconvened in 1971. The Malaysian government then adopted a new economic policy. It was remarkably successful. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Malaysia changed from being a poor, agricultural country to a developing country with the economic focus on developing the industrial sector. The standard of living of the Malaysian people gradually rose. In 1991 the new economic policy was replaced by a new development policy to drive Malaysia towards becoming a developed nation by the year 2020 (Shamsul, 2004).

## **3.4 The Government System**

Malaysia practises Parliamentary Democracy with a constitutional monarch, His Majesty the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*, is the Supreme Head of the country. He is

elected for a five-year term by his fellow rulers from the other nine states (Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan). In other states, namely Pulau Pinang, Melaka, Sabah and Sarawak, the *Yang Di-Pertua Negeri* or Governor of the State is the Head of State, appointed by the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*. In keeping with the concept of Parliamentary Democracy, which forms the basis of the government administration in Malaysia, the Federal Constitution underlines the separation of governing powers among the Executive, Judicial and Legislative Authorities. The separation of power occurs both at the Federal and State level.

The Federal Constitution of Malaysia is the supreme law of the nation that distributes the power of governance in accordance with the practice of Parliamentary Democracy. The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

The Parliament, the legislative authority for Malaysia, formulates laws applicable to the country as a whole. The Parliament passes Federal laws, makes amendments to existing federal laws, examines the government policies, approves government expenditure and approves new taxes. It also serves as the forum for debate and deliberation; and the focus of public opinion on national affairs.

The Malaysian Parliament is divided into three components – The *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*, Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate members are nominated and appointed by the King, and the members of the House of Representatives are democratically elected by the people. The Government is headed by the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet. Today, the ruling party is *Barisan Nasional* (The National Front), an alliance of parties representing different racial groups. At the state level, the Chief Minister is the head of state governments.

(Source: The Malaysian Government Official Portal).

### 3.5 The Social Milieu

As Malaysia is multicultural, each ethnic culture forms part of the Malaysian culture. For example, the Malays and Chinese do not differ significantly in terms of the importance they attach to money, profit, work, and company regulations. However they do differ markedly in terms of their views on loyalty, leadership, freedom at work, and big corporations. Ansari et al. (2004) assert that the loyalty of Malays has its limits, whereas the Chinese are more filial in their loyalty. On the other hand, they quoted Lim (1998) who argues that the Malays and Chinese differ in cultural attributes but share similarities in power distance and collectivism. Thus, any study on Malaysian leadership should incorporate the cultural diversity of different races.

Malaysian culture was characterised by high power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, high humane orientation, high collectivism, low assertiveness, and a high future orientation. Malaysians especially value humane orientation and gender egalitarianism. In GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) study by House (2004), Malay managers place higher value on decisiveness, team integration, diplomacy, modesty, and humane orientation compared to their counterparts. Malay managers are also rated high for autonomy as well as for performance orientation.

Nonetheless, Abdullah & Lim (2001), in their seminal work, propose that there is a great deal of emphasis on collectivism in all three groups – Malays, Chinese, and Indians. As a matter of fact, they suggest that the Malaysian work values are a blend of the Malays, Chinese, Indian, Anglo, and Japanese work values. Prior to that, Abdullah, in her study in 1992, identified several underlying values held by the Malaysian workforce, which include: non-assertiveness (extremely dedicated to do a good job, eager to please others), respect for senior/elderly people (will not argue with the boss, reluctant to ask for help or check for understanding), respect for loyalty (loyal to authority, act with deference and obedience), respect for authority (paternal), preserving face (avoid loss of face and self-esteem, avoid public criticism, not expressive, uncomfortable in critically evaluating peers and

subordinates, giving negative feedback), collectivism (performance orientation, teamwork, cooperation, strong sense of belonging, priority to group interest, satisfaction derived from respect from colleagues), harmony (compromise, consensus seeking, avoid overt display of anger and aggressive behaviour), status, good manners, courtesy (elaborate forms of courtesy and standardized ritual), respect for hierarchy (social formality), non-aggressiveness (non-confrontational), trust and relationship building (relationship based orientation, developing trust and goodwill), third party intervention (deal with ambiguities via indirect approach of a third party or deference and obedience), respect for authority (paternal), preserving face (avoid loss of face and self-esteem, avoid public criticism, not expressive, uncomfortable in critically evaluating peers and subordinates, giving negative feedback), collectivism (performance orientation, teamwork, cooperation, strong sense of belonging, priority to group interest, satisfaction derived from respect from colleagues), harmony (compromise, consensus seeking, avoid overt display of anger and aggressive behaviour), status, good manners, courtesy (elaborate forms of courtesy and standardized ritual), respect for hierarchy (social formality), non-aggressiveness (non-confrontational), trust and relationship building (relationship based orientation, developing trust and goodwill), third party intervention (deal with ambiguities via indirect approach of a third party or intermediary), and tolerance and respect for differences (religious sensitivities and observance).

Further, Abdullah (1995) proposes some ethnic values that are deeply embedded in the Malaysian multi-ethnic and multicultural workforce, such as trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, sincerity, hard work, participative decision-making, teamwork, and the desire for excellence. In her study in 1994, she identifies the common culturally based value orientation of the Malaysian workplace as follows: collectivism, hierarchy, relationship-orientation, face saving, religion, and the pursuit of success.

Ansari *et al.* (2004) categorized Malaysian culture into two broad dominant values: *preference for relationships and preference for hierarchy*. Preference for relationships describes the leadership role that is overwhelmed with hierarchical

relationships. Leaders in a high context culture, such as Malaysia, have to spend time in building personal relationships in the workplace. Harmonious relationships are emphasized; therefore, leaders shudder at giving negative feedback to their subordinates. Similarly, many followers hesitate to give negative information up the chain of command. This practice is referred to as the 'polite system'.

This is congruent with the collective culture (Hofstede, 1991) wherein Abdullah (1994) suggests that maintaining relationships is much more important than performing a task. By comparing with Western culture, Ansari *et al.* (2004) explicates that relationships are contractual in the West, whereas in the Eastern culture relationship is personalized. Thus, in many instances, the work is performed as a favour to others.

On the other hand, the preference for hierarchy (such as respect for senior/elderly people, non-assertiveness, respect for loyalty, status, good manners, courtesy, respect for hierarchy, respect for differences, non-aggressiveness, status differential, and power distance) is clearly identifiable. This value manifests itself in a strong status orientation, in which relationships are hierarchically arranged into superiors and subordinates (Ansari *et al.*, 2004). Seniors (superiors or elders) are respected and obeyed, and they are the decision-makers and subordinates are obliged to implement. Generally, (Abdullah, 1994) societal norm denotes that juniors are not always in agreement with seniors. Thus, in this context, anger and hostility against a superior are suppressed and displaced, and the tendency is to appease the superior. The superior, in return, is obliged to provide patronage. The superior must protect and guide the subordinates. Therefore, hierarchical relationships are maintained through "affective reciprocity" and could foster dependence and class-consciousness.

To conclude, the Malaysian socio-cultural milieu provides the backdrop to understanding leadership values, how leadership is constructed and how leadership identities are developed.

### **3.6 Malaysian Higher Education**

As in other countries, higher education in Malaysia has undergone massive expansion due to increasing social demands that have been brought about in part by the social democratization of secondary education and the growing affluence of Malaysian society.

With the expansion and diversification of higher education, the Malaysian government has had to expand its role from being the main provider to a regulator and protector of higher education (Lee, 2000). As a provider, the government allocates resources to higher education institutions and provides funds for scholarships and student aid, research, and capital expenditures. As a protector, the government takes on the function of consumer advocacy by improving access to higher education, formulating policies to promote social equality, and by monitoring the quality of academic programmes. As a regulator, the government ensures oversight of new and emerging institutions through institutional licensing and programme accreditation.

Malaysia's HEIs (i.e. public universities, private higher educational institutions, polytechnics and community colleges) housed more than a million students in 2011, of which about 93,000 were international students from more than 100 countries. In contrast, there were about 89,686 Malaysian students (27,003 receiving sponsorship and 62,683 self-funded) who were studying overseas in 2011.

With a multi-ethnic population, Malaysia has 20 public universities, 53 private universities and six foreign university branch campuses and two are coming; 403 active private colleges, 30 polytechnics and 83 public community colleges in 2012. These HEIs offer a wide range of tertiary qualifications at affordable prices.

There are also various HEIs from the UK, the US, Australia, Canada, France, and New Zealand which offer twinning and '3+0' degree programmes through partnerships with Malaysian private higher education institutions. At present,



some world-class universities such as RMIT University, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland have established their collaboration with the local public higher educational institutions.

Five of the 20 public universities in Malaysia have been assigned research university status with additional funding for research and development (R&D) and commercialization of research. The remaining 15 public universities have been categorised as either comprehensive or focus universities. In the 2012, five public universities have been given autonomy in administration, human resources, financial and academic management and student intake. They are University Malaya, National University of Malaysia, Science University of Malaysia, University Putra Malaysia and University Technology Malaysia. This move is aimed at encouraging excellence among local institutions of higher learning.

The quality of higher education is assured through the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) which undertakes the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework. MQA is also responsible for quality assurance and the accreditation of courses and other related functions, covering both public and private higher educational institutions.

The provision of higher education is well regulated. Below are some of the legislation :

1. The Education Act 1996 (Act 550)
2. The Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996 (amended 2009)
3. The National Council of Higher Education Act, 1996
4. Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007 (replacing the previous namely National Accreditation Board Act 1996 which has been repealed)
5. The Universities and University Colleges Act, 1996 (amended 2009)
6. The National Higher Education Fund Corporation Act, 1997 (amended 2000)

The internationalisation of the higher education sector is a high priority for MOHE. Efforts have been made to improve the world ranking of Malaysian universities; to have 150,000 international students by 2015; to create more 'Malaysian Chairs' at universities abroad; and to collaborate and cooperate with world-renowned universities on research and academic matters.

The government will continue to create a friendly environment and invite more world-class foreign university branch campuses or faculties to be set up in Malaysia. Currently, there are six foreign universities with branch campuses in Malaysia. They are Monash University (Australia), The University of Nottingham (UK), Curtin University (Australia), Swinburne University of Technology (Australia), Newcastle University School of Medicine (UK) and University of Southampton (UK).

Other initiatives undertaken by HEIs include the establishment of Malaysian university branch campuses in other countries and increasing transnational education collaboration with overseas institutions. Malaysian higher education is also aggressively promoted in many parts of the world through road-shows.

MOHE also aims to have 20 Research Excellent Centres which are of international standard by 2020. The nation has also targeted to achieve 100 researchers, scientists and engineers (RSE) per 100,000 workforce by the year 2020. The Tenth Malaysian Plan (2011-2015) sets to improve the quality of academic staff by increasing the number of academics with PhDs in public universities, with a target of 75 per cent in research universities and 60 per cent in other public universities. To achieve this target, the implementation of the MyBrain15 programme will be intensified to finance doctoral studies for the purpose of increasing the number of PhD holders to 18,000 by 2015.

Malaysia's first rating system, SETARA (Rating System for Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia) was implemented in 2009 to measure the performance of undergraduate teaching and learning in universities and university colleges in Malaysia. The SETARA result was measured using a six-tier category with Tier 6 identified as Outstanding and Tier 1 as Weak.

Subsequently, another rating system was introduced in 2011. My QUEST (Malaysian Quality Evaluation System for Private Colleges) was used to evaluate private colleges in Malaysia in terms of the quality of students, programmes, graduates, resources and governance. The My QUEST rating categorized an institution as either excellent, good, or weak. The institutions would also receive a rating based on their level of achievement which ranged from 1 star (poor) to 6 stars (excellent). These two rating systems serve as a reliable reference for students and parents in their selection of institutions and programmes of study offered by various HEIs.

### **3.6.1 The Governing of the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia**

The higher education sector is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The establishment of this ministry on 27 March 2004 was a result of the re-structuring of the Ministry of Education and marked an important part of history in Malaysia, particularly in the development and expansion of the higher education sector. The establishment of MOHE is in line with the vision of the government in making Malaysia a centre of educational excellence and internationalising Malaysian education.

MOHE is the governing authority for the Malaysian higher education sector. It oversees HEIs (both public universities and private higher educational institutions), community colleges, polytechnics and other government agencies involved in higher education activities such as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, the National Higher Education Fund Corporation, the Tunku Abdul Rahman Foundation and others.

Some of MOHE's key functions include :

- Determining policies and the direction of the higher education sector in order to build an excellent and outstanding nation that is rich in knowledge, culture and civilisation

- Acting as a catalyst to develop the sector that enables the nation to compete in the era of globalisation
- Dealing with the challenges of the present global economic scene, in line with the government's aspiration to produce adequate human resource with knowledge and high moral values (National Higher Education Strategic Plan and Vision 2020).

### **3.6.2 The Vision and Mission**

The Ministry of Higher Education has set its long-term goal to make Malaysia a centre of higher educational excellence by the year 2020. Its mission is to build and create a higher education environment that is conducive for the development of a superior centre of knowledge and to generate individuals who are competent, innovative and of noble character to serve the needs of the nation and the world. In order to achieve those vision and mission, MOHE has underlined five core trusts:

1. To create a strategic and systematic plan for higher education
2. To reinforce the management system of higher education
3. To increase the level of capacity, accessibility and participation in higher education
4. To enhance the quality of higher education in line with international standards
5. To internationalise Malaysian higher education

### **3.6.3 Organisational Structure of MOHE**

The MOHE comprises the following departments/sectors:

- The Management Sector
- The Development Sector
- The Department of Higher Education
- The Department of Polytechnic and
- The Department of Community College

### **The Management Sector**

This is the corporate and management services sector. It consists of the Information Technology Division, Human Resource Management Division, Human Development and Training Division, as well as the Finance Division. Overall, this sector handles the administration of the Ministry, the corporate image and other management functions.

### **The Development Sector**

The Development Sector consists of the International Division, Planning and Research Division, and Scholarship Division. Its many functions include preparation of physical development plans that cover the five-year Malaysian Plan, facilities of public higher educational institutions, as well as the Polytechnics and Community Colleges. It also handles the finances for management and development of public higher educational institutions besides making monthly, quarterly and half-yearly reports.

### **The Department of Higher Education**

The Department of Higher Education is supported by several sectors and divisions that are responsible for the development of both public and private higher education in Malaysia. It also ensures that the universities and colleges are of international standing. This department is also involved in the marketing of Malaysian higher education to the international market as well as being in charge of the international student welfare.

The sector designated with jurisdiction over public higher education is known as the Sector of Public Higher Education Management while the sector designated with jurisdiction over private higher education is known as the Sector of Private Higher Education Management.

### **The Department of Polytechnics and the Department of Community Colleges**

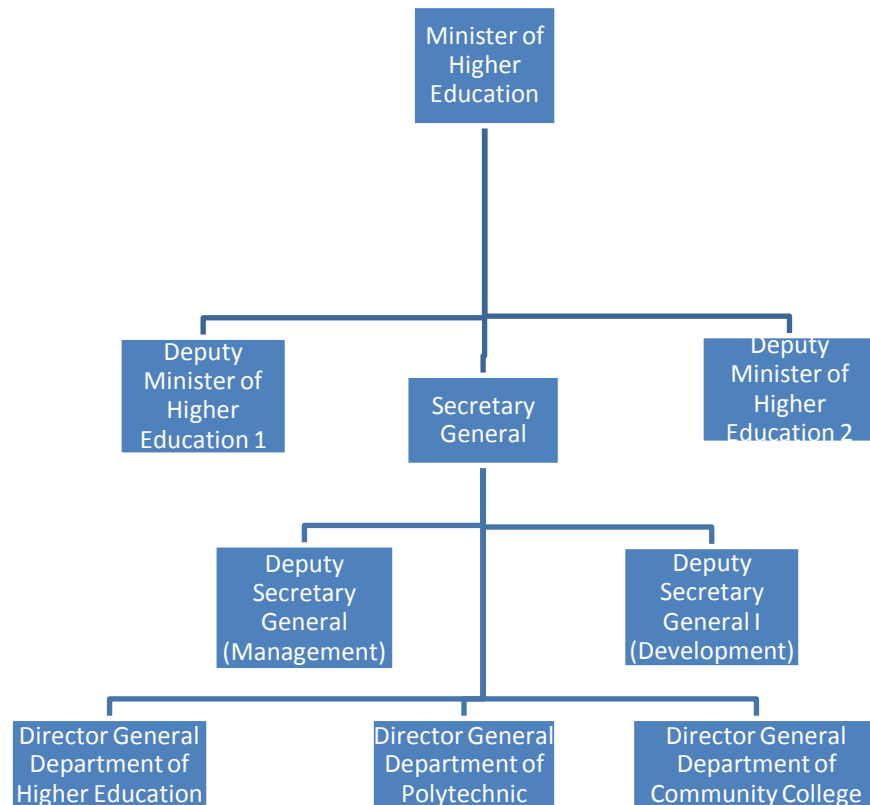
These departments are committed to providing education and training at Polytechnics and Community Colleges to fulfil the human capital needs of the

nation through strategic management, relevant and dynamic curricula, effective training and career development programmes, continuous quality assurance and strong support services based on the National Education Philosophy.

The Polytechnics and Community Colleges serve as alternative paths for high school graduates to further their education apart from public universities.

Polytechnic Education also provides relevant technological or entrepreneurial education and training. These are aimed at upgrading basic skills as well as promoting research and development projects in collaboration with businesses and industries.

Community Colleges aim to provide life-long learning opportunities for the community and high school graduates, particularly those who study under the vocational stream. Students will be trained, 're-skilled' or 'up-skilled', leading to the award of certificate qualifications.



**Figure 3.1: The Top Management Structure of MOHE**  
**Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia**

### 3.6.4 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Both public and private education providers play equally important roles in the provision of higher education. Together, the public and private sectors provide abundant study options. HEIs offer programs leading to the award of certificates, diplomas as well as postgraduate qualifications.

Higher education providers in Malaysia can be grouped into two major categories:

- Public higher educational institutions (government funded), which consist of :
  - Public universities

- Polytechnics
- Community colleges
- Private higher educational institutions, which consist of :
  - Private universities
  - Private university-colleges
  - Foreign university branch campuses
  - Private colleges

#### **3.6.4.1 Public Higher Educational Institutions**

The government-funded (public) higher educational institutions under the Ministry of Higher Education consist of :

- ❖ public universities which offer bachelor degrees and postgraduate programs, with some offering programs at diploma level and university foundation programs
- ❖ polytechnics and community colleges which offer certificate and diploma level programs
- ❖ public colleges which offer certificate and diploma level programs

**Appendix A** shows the list of Malaysian public university

At the beginning of 2012, five research universities (i.e. UM, UKM, USM, UPM and UTM) were conferred certain degree of autonomy by the Minister of Higher Education to act with full accountability and responsibility on matters related to administration, academic management, student intake, institutional governance, finance and human resource management.

With this autonomy, the Board of Directors of these universities would now be empowered to make decisions that were once decided by MOHE. However, the performance of these five universities would be audited to ensure that the integrity and accountability of the universities would be kept in check under the Code of University Good Governance (CUGG) and University Good Governance Index (UGGI).



### ***Polytechnics and Community Colleges***

There are currently 30 polytechnics and 80 community colleges operated throughout the country that offer TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training) programs, such as engineering, business and hospitality.

#### **3.6.4.2 Private Higher Educational Institutions**

All private-funded higher educational institutions come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education and comprise :

- Private universities, which award their own degree qualifications, diploma and foundation studies. Refer to **Appendix B** for the list of private universities.
- Private university-colleges, which award their own degree qualifications, diploma and foundation studies. Refer to **Appendix C** for the list of private university-colleges.
- Foreign university branch campuses, which award their own degree qualifications, diploma and foundation studies. Refer to **Appendix D** for the list of foreign university branch campuses in Malaysia.
- Private colleges, which award their own qualifications at diploma and certificate levels as well as 3+0 degrees, split-degrees and tutorial support for professional qualifications, and currently there are 403 private colleges in Malaysia.

It appears that private higher institutions were outnumbered the public higher institutions for the main reason to offer more places of higher education studies locally. The enrollment mostly consist of Malaysian Chinese as well as the international students. MOHE is directly responsible for the operations and performance of public HEIs, whereas private HEIs are guided by MOHE's policy guidelines and objectives.

#### **3.6.5 The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP)**

This plan was designed to achieve the National aspirations and National Philosophy of Education. Congruent with the National Mission laid out in the Ninth Malaysia Plan(NMP-9) –the second phase of the National Economic

Development Plan (1991-2020) – which put forth the focus on achieving the Vision2020, MOHE is responsible for the implementation to achieve the second core of the National Mission; that is, to raise the educational capacity and innovation, and to nurture the first class mentality of the people. Hence, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) was launched on August 27, 2007. It was designed with high-level plans covering both new initiatives and existing programmes with the vision to transform Malaysian higher education towards becoming an international hub for higher education excellence. This transformation spelt out the foundation for the sustainability and excellence of higher education beyond 2020.

It lays out the seven broad-based thrusts of the plan, namely; widening access and enhancing quality; improving the quality of teaching and learning; enhancing research and innovation; strengthening institutions of higher education; intensifying internationalisation; enculturation of lifelong learning; and reinforcing the Ministry's delivery system.

Critical implementation mechanisms and schedules are spelt out in four phases of implementation, namely, laying the foundation (2007-2010), strengthening and enhancement (2011-2015), excellence (2016-2020), and glory and sustainability (beyond 2020).

### **3.6.6 National Higher Education Action Plan (NHEAP)**

The National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 represents the implementation of Phase 1 (Laying the Foundation) of the NHESP. This action plan focuses more on public higher institutions since the Ministry is directly responsible for the achievement of this institution. However, attention is also given to private institutions by providing policies and guidelines to ensure that the quality conforms to a certain standard, and a conducive learning environment is provided to the students.

Since this action plan underlines the first phase of the NHESP, the focal point is to strengthen the public higher education institutions. In this strategy, five key areas are emphasized: aspects of governance, leadership, academics, teaching and

learning, and research and development. This is important to uplift the quality of the higher education system to be more competitive and resilient in the future.

In addition, five specific programmes have been designed to be achieved by this plan. These five programmes have become the critical agendas that need to be implemented within the stated period, and include setting up the APEX (Accelerated Programme of Excellent) University, My Brain 15, Life Long Learning, academic performance audit (based on Key Performance Indicators) and the Graduate Training Scheme.

### **3.6.7 Higher Education Legislation**

The legal regulatory frameworks that govern the provision of higher education in Malaysia are :

- The Education Act 1996
- The Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996
- The National Council of Higher Education Act 1996
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007 (replacing the previous namely National Accreditation Board Act 1996 which has been repealed)
- The Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act 1996 and Act 2009
- The National Higher Education Fund Corporation Act 1997
- The National Higher Education Fund Corporation (amendment) Act 2000
- Private Higher Educational Institutions (Amendment) Act 2009
- University and College University (Amended 2009)

#### **The Education Act 1996 (Act 550)**

The Education Act 1996 covers pre-tertiary levels of education under the national education system which comprises preschool, primary, and secondary education as well as post-secondary education.

This Act contains some provisions that apply to the Ministry of Higher Education in the establishment of polytechnics and community colleges. The Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996 & Act 2009 (amendment) This Act governs the establishment and operations of private higher educational institutions. It also makes provision for the establishment of private universities, university colleges, branch campuses of foreign universities as well as the upgrading of existing private colleges to universities.

In addition, the Act enables the liberalisation of higher education in the country to meet the increasing demand for tertiary education and a highly-educated and skilled workforce.

### **The National Council on Higher Education Act, 1996**

Under this Act, a national body was set up to determine policies and co-ordinate the development and rapid expansion of tertiary education in the country.

### **Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act, 2007**

(replacing the National Accreditation Board Act 1996 which has been repealed)

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act, 2007 paves the way for the establishment of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency as a national quality assurance agency to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), accrediting higher education programmes and regulating the quality and standard of higher education providers of both public and private higher educational institutions in the country.

### **The Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Act, 1996 & Act 2009 (amendment)**

This Act seeks to corporatize the management and administration of public universities. With corporatisation, these universities are given more

administrative and financial autonomy to chart programmes necessary for academic excellence.

### **The National Higher Education Fund Corporation Act, 1997**

The purpose of this Act is to establish a fund that provides financial assistance through study loans to students at higher educational institutions in Malaysia. It also provides for the establishment of a savings scheme with the objective of instilling saving habits in children, from as early as Year 1 in primary school, with the intention of enabling them to finance their own higher education in future.

All higher educational institutions operating in Malaysia are subjected to one or more of the above legislation, depending on whether the education provider is publicly or privately-owned.

The legislation has made possible the following major enhancements in the Malaysian higher education system :

- the provision for the establishment of privately-run universities and systematic expansion of private education at tertiary level
- the provision for fines and jail term on operators who have flouted the provisions of the laws
- the provision for setting up of a quality assurance agency by the government to implement the Malaysian Qualification Framework as a basis for quality assurance in higher education and also as a reference standard for national qualifications
- the allowance for greater administrative and financial autonomy of public universities
- the establishment of student loans for greater access to higher education

The above Acts are reviewed from time to time to ensure that Malaysia achieves its aim of becoming a centre of educational excellence.

### ***Medium of Instruction***

English is used as the primary medium of instruction at most of the private higher educational institutions in the country. It is however, only used for postgraduate studies at public universities as the bachelor degree courses conducted at these universities are taught primarily in the national language, Bahasa Melayu.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter covers the literature concerning the context in which this study has been conducted; that is, Malaysia with particular sampling on Malaysian Higher Education (MOHE). The illumination of the historical and social structure of Malaysia clearly demonstrates the strong inherent values that, until present, were significantly visible in the government administrative system. Malaysian higher education is one of the subsystems under that public domain. The setting up of the new MOHE governing system, with its specified goals, is exerting considerable effort to place itself competitively in the regional and world higher education arena. The centralised structure in the MOHE and the national policy (NHESP and NHEAP) deem to redefine the parameters for leadership roles in higher institutions.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Methodology is the study of the methods that are employed in research (Bryman, 2008). It refers to the paradigm, method or strategies employed to gather data in order to answer the research question. A research method is simply a technique for collecting data. It can involve specific instruments, such as: self-completed questionnaires, a structured interview, or observation (Bryman and Bell, 2007: p.40). It also refers to the tools used for analysing data.

This chapter discusses the details of the methodology employed in this study. It begins with a discussion of the six dimensions of a holistic view of the research process, as suggested by the literature. The six dimensions are Research Philosophies, Research Paradigms; Research Approaches; Research Strategies; Choices, Time Horizons; and Techniques and procedures (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). The explanation of each dimension will be based on the diagram in Figure 4.1 below. This will be followed by some discussions of the sampling techniques and the selection of respondents. Finally, this review will discuss the expected outcomes from the research.

#### **4.2 Dimensions of the Research Process**

The theoretical perspective is shaped by the philosophical assumptions that underlie the researcher's basic beliefs and worldviews. Guba and Lincoln (1994) talk about the need for researchers to make explicit assumptions, both ontological and epistemological, before embarking on any research project. Answering the ontological question, "What is the form and nature of reality? And, therefore, what can be known about it?" (Guba & Lincoln, p. 108) provides the first step in explaining how researchers can approach a research problem. For example, the interpretive researcher's ontological assumption is that social reality is locally and specifically constructed (Guba & Lincoln) "by humans through their action and interaction" (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14). Neuman (1997) affirms that

“social reality is based on people’s definition of it” (p. 69). From the previous assertions, it is apparent that interpretive researchers do not recognise the existence of an objective world. On the contrary, they see the world as strongly bounded by a particular time and a specific context.

Therefore, the epistemological question, “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108) must be answered in a way that is consistent with the ontological view. As such, for example, the interpretive researcher’s epistemological assumption is that “findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba & Lincoln, p. 111). Moreover, they explicitly recognise that “understanding social reality requires understanding how practices and meanings are formed and informed by the language and tacit norms shared by humans working towards some shared goal” (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14).

### **4.3 Research Paradigm and Research Paradigm Adopted by This Study**

A research paradigm refers to a term frequently used in the social sciences, a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanation attempted (Saunders, *et al.*, 2009). Generally, a paradigm is ‘a basic set of beliefs that guides actions’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), a set of propositions or a worldview that defines the nature of the world and explores what constitutes proper techniques for inquiring into that world (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Two fundamentally different and long standing debated paradigms among research philosophers are the positivist and interpretivist paradigm or phenomenology (Collis & Hussey 2003, p. 47). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) further developed and categorized the philosophy into seven types: positivism, realism, objectivism, subjectivism, pragmatism, functionalist and interpretivism/phenomenology.

To differentiate between these two dominant paradigms, the understanding of the terms ontology and epistemology are useful. As mentioned above, ontology concerns the nature of existence; thus, the ontological assumption of the positivist paradigm is that reality is objective, external and singular, thus the researcher is



separated from the research. On the other hand, the epistemological assumptions of the positivist view reality as a separate existence to that of the researcher, and, for that reason, the data collected are far less open to bias and therefore more objective (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

The positivist or deductive paradigm emanates from the natural sciences, which uphold the philosophy that reality can be discovered through experimental reasoning or scientific observation, and tested in terms of cause-effect relationships between identified variables (Creswell, 2003; Collis & Husey, 2003). The basic tenets of positivism are empiricism and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Sekaran, 2000). The application of the positivist paradigm in management and organizational studies is therefore aimed at producing general causal theories that explain various aspects of organizational behaviour, and which are validated through scientific methods. The stance of the inductive paradigm is that the researcher infers the implications of his or her findings for the theory that prompted the whole exercise (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 9-10).

In contrast, the interpretivist or phenomenology paradigm sees reality as subjective and complex, something that is observed and interpreted by human beings through sense-making processes. Interpretivist epistemology assumes the researcher to be part of that being researched, and the researcher interacts with the subject being investigated to understand the world of that being researched from their point of view. This is based on their arguments that rich insights into the complex world would be lost if such complexity is reduced to a series of law-like generalizations. Hence, the interpretivist/phenomenology view regards social phenomena as being created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors, as it focuses on the way in which humans make sense of the world around them (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

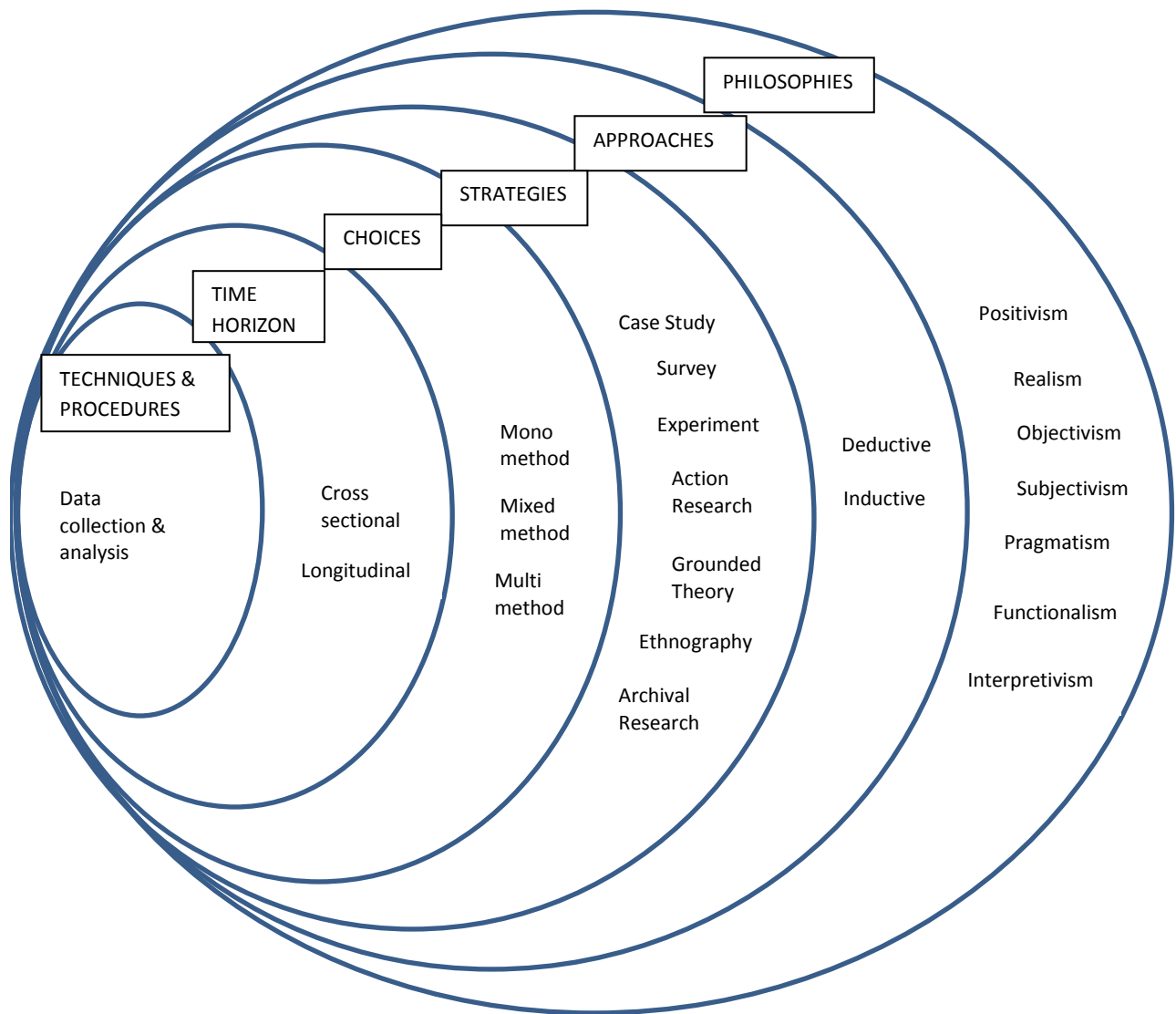
They believe that human beings are dynamic and they continuously construct their own social world. Consequently, efforts to understand social phenomena require an unveiling of the understandings and beliefs of the people who shape such phenomena, which is often undertaken via qualitative or interpretive approaches (Silverman, 2000). Similarly, in management and organizational

studies, new organizational theories and emergent concepts are often derived from the sense-making process among organization members within their environment.

On further developing the interpretive paradigm, Saunders *et al.* (2009) cited Remenyi *et al.*(1998:35) that there is the necessity of studying the details of the situation, in order to understand the reality behind them. This is often associated with the term constructionism, in which the subjective meanings motivating the actions of social actors are explored in order to understand their actions. Subjectivist ethnographies explore how the experience of participants give meaning to interpret and make sense of their lives in multiple ways, and are written from the perspective of a “room with a view” (Cunliffe, 2010).

Social constructionism views reality as being socially constructed. Social actors or human beings may have many different interpretations of the situations in which they find themselves. Therefore, individuals may perceive situations in varying ways as a consequence of their own view of the world, and these different interpretations are likely to affect their actions and the nature of their social interaction with others.

The following diagram depicts the research paradigm, which is referred to as the “research onion” developed by Saunders *et al.* (2007).



**Figure 4.1 Research Paradigm**  
**Source: Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007)**

As illustrated by the first three outer boxes in Figure 4.1, the positivist researcher uses a deductive approach and experimental strategies to test hypotheses. The choice could be a mono-method or mixed method to collect the data and the study could be cross sectional, employing quantitative data analysis procedures. Conversely, phenomenologists normally utilise an inductive approach for their grounded theory research to understand human behaviour. The choice of mono-method or multi method through a longitudinal study with qualitative data analysis procedures might be appropriate. Consistent with this discussion, it is

often assumed that the positivism paradigm utilizes more *quantitative* methods, while the phenomenological paradigm tends to utilize more *qualitative* approaches, however, in reality this is an over-simplification.

This research attempts to make sense of the situation without imposing pre-existing expectations on the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2003). Thus, this research adopts the following paradigm:

<b>Research Paradigm</b>	
Philosophy	Interpretivism
Approach	Inductive
Strategy	Grounded theory and Case study
Choices	Multi-method (in-depth interview and document survey)
Time Horizon	Cross-sectional

By adopting the above paradigm, this study attempts to uncover the meaning behind the construction of leadership and leadership identity in a chosen context. As an inductive study, it attempts to observe the empirical reality that leads to theory development, which means that general inferences are induced from particular instances (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Further, Creswell (1998) explains the varying assumptions of the interpretive paradigms, as shown in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1 Assumption of the Interpretivism Paradigm**

Philosophical assumption	Interpretivism/ phenomenological
Ontological assumption seen by the (the nature of reality)	Reality is subjective and multiple as participants
Epistemological assumption (what constitutes valid knowledge)	Researcher interacts with that being researched

Axiological assumption (the role of the values)	Researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and biases are present
Rhetorical assumption (the language of research)	Researcher writes in an informal style, uses a personal voice, and accepts qualitative terms and limited definitions
Methodological assumption	Process is an inductive study of mutual simultaneous shaping of factors with an emerging design (categories are identified during process) Research is context bound Pattern and/or theories are developed for understanding Findings are accurate and reliable through verification

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With regard to this study, the researcher believes the subject of the study –social construction of the leadership – is subjective in nature. This can be attributed to multiple factors (ontology), how the researcher gains knowledge of what is known (epistemology) through interaction with the subject (leaders) being researched. This study looks more at the social aspects of leadership, which is considered as value-laden (axiology), the researcher shares the input and perception during the data analysis and writing up process (language of the research), it is an inductive study bounded by the context, in which at the end of the study a model will be developed (methodology).

#### **4.3.1 Justification for Adopting the Interpretive Study**

This study is more subjective and humanistic in nature, as it is interested in studying a phenomenon or situation, focusing on human behaviour, process and interpretation. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm will be the most appropriate guiding principle in this research. As outlined in the research questions, this study will deal with organizational processes that involve examining and reflecting on human views, interactions, perceptions, behaviour and judgments, based on their

knowledge and experience in order to gain an understanding of social and human activities. Clearly these characteristics fall under a qualitative paradigm (Bryman & Bell 2003, Collis and Hussey 2003), as this studies phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpreting them in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In accordance with a subjectivist approach, this study attempts to examine the historical, social, and/or linguistic situated experience, a cultural understanding relative to particular contexts, times, places, individuals, and/or groups of people. Consequently, social realities and knowledge are not durable in the sense of being replicable, generalizable, and predictive but instead offer contextualized understandings. This is because, within subjectivism, there is no independent reality to study, researchers explore constructions of social and organizational realities in a particular context and time and/or how the people humanly shape, maintain, and interpret social realities through language, symbols, and text (Cunliffe, 2010).

In this sense, Cunliffe (2010) asserts that the researchers need to ask research participants how they experience time, place, and progress (historicity) because these are human experiences accomplished in practices, interactions, or discourses in a variety of ways (recursive, ruptured, or hegemonic). This broader view of subjectivism challenges absolutism and favours pluralism, embeds knowledge and meaning in particular contexts, and, because people have a reflexive relationship with the world around them (i.e., they both constitute and are constituted by their surroundings), emphasizes situated forms of knowledge and validity.

This research is also subjectively situated relative to the researcher's own and organizational members' embedded experiences, which influence the observations, interpretations, and research accounts. Research accounts are also partial because we do not see all the stories playing out in an organization at any one time (Boje, 1995).

### **4.3.2 Interest in Meanings, Perspectives and Understandings**

Generally, qualitative research seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations and what their perspectives are on particular issues. In this study, the researcher seeks to be familiar with the respondents, looking out at the world through their eyes, empathising with them, appreciating the inconsistencies, ambiguities and contradictions in their behaviour, and tries to explore the nature of their interests and understand their relationships (Woods, 2006).

The researcher endeavours to appreciate the history and culture in order to capture the meanings that permeate the culture as understood by participants, to learn their particular use of language, and to understand their in-group behaviour. The association of these cultures with social structures might then be traced (Wood, 2006). In summary, the meanings that this study is seeking are centred on:

- How understanding is formed
- How meanings are negotiated
- How roles are developed
- How a policy is formulated and implemented
- How leaders articulate their concern and feelings

The advantages of adopting qualitative inquiry in management and organizational research can be seen from various perspectives. As observed by Currall & Towler (2003 p. 515), qualitative data, obtained mainly from less structured interviews, observation and open-ended questionnaires, is rich in detail about interaction among organizational participants. For example, qualitative research will provide the researcher with a closer look at organizational history, the organizational environment, culture and norms, which will serve as an interpretive framework to interpret the behaviours of organizational participants. The same type of investigation goes for factors outside of the organization. Such information is highly important in this study as it aims to see how contextual factors shape and construct leadership and identities.

This also explains why this research will not employ a positivist-quantitative paradigm. It is not the intention of the study, as stated by the problem statements and research questions, to prove or disprove a particular theory via hypothesis testing, which stands as the primary objective of quantitative research. This study seeks to uncover new constructs or meaning from which to view organizational phenomena, rather than to focus on confirmation of theory (Currall & Towler 2003 p. 518). Essentially, it is more a kind of ‘discovery’ rather than ‘justification’ in social research.

#### **4.3.3 Research Strategies and Research Strategies for this Study**

Research strategy refers to the general plan of how a researcher will go about answering the research questions and meeting the research objectives (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003, p.135). A research strategy should be clear about the sources from which data will be collected and the constraints that a researcher might encounter in the course of undertaking the research in terms of accessibility of data, time, location and financial resources. Some writers also use the term ‘research methods’ to explain the ‘means’ that will lead to meeting research objectives. Strategies in qualitative research abound, many with long traditions behind them.

This study does not intend, however, to employ only one strategy from among the strategies outlined above. Rather, it will subscribe to certain major elements from a few of the strategies mentioned. This is very much in line with what Collis & Hussey (2003, p. 76) refer to as mixing techniques. According to them, once a researcher has determined the choice of paradigm they will adopt in their study, it is usual in research, to take a mixture of approaches. What is central is how well the data is pulled together to make sense of the research. Therefore, this study will employ certain elements of case study, archival research and grounded theory.

The researcher has selected one department of MOHE – the Department of Higher Education and higher institutions under the administration of this department –to undertake a detailed contextual analysis, so as to obtain a deep understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon in higher education. The reason for the

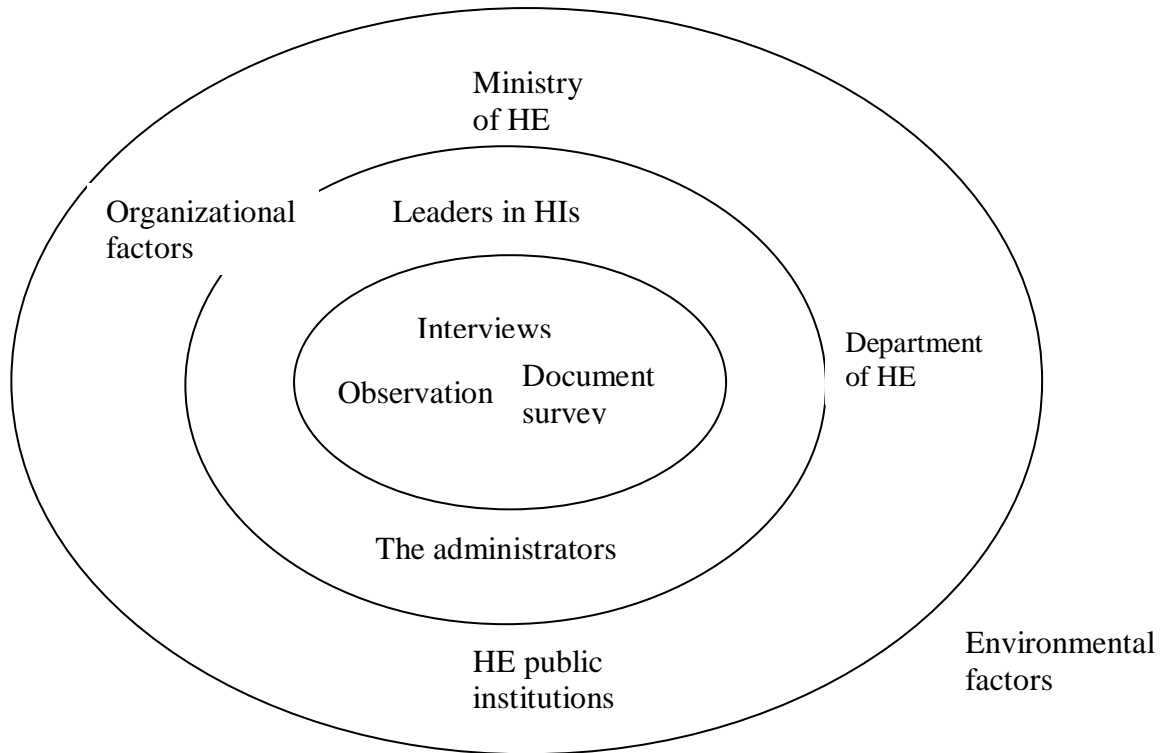


selection is because the researcher previously worked as a senior officer with MOHE for three years and in one institution (polytechnic) under MOHE (previously under the administration of MOE [Ministry of Education]) for 22 years.

This leans more towards a case study method. **It attempts to understand the extent, nature, problems and difficulties experienced by the leaders from the selected department and higher educational institutions in undertaking or performing their leadership roles.** In-depth interviews, participant observation and document survey will be employed as methods to obtain relevant data within this strategy. Historical records as well as current documents from the national and organizational document categories will be examined. This is part of archival research. Finally, based on the findings, this study will propose a suitable framework or model of the construction of the leadership that takes into account the nature of context, culture, and other factors that appear relevant. This, to some extent, represents elements of grounded theory.

#### **4.3.3.1 Case Study**

A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that provides the researcher with a better understanding of a particular topic. For this research it will facilitate insight into leadership through an in-depth and detailed examination of its particular and ordinary activities. The intention is to distinguish the key issues, contexts, and interpretations, through a ‘thick description’ of case material. Figure 4.2 depicts the case study plan for this research.



**Figure 4.2: Plan for Case Study of Leadership in MOHE**

According to Yin (1994), case study research should satisfy the following conditions:

1. It examines the why and how of contemporary events.
2. It examines real-life organizational phenomena.
3. It explores a topic that does not require control over external events.

This study satisfies these conditions. First, it attempts to investigate why and how the construction of identity occurs since there appears to be a lack of empirical research in this area. Therefore it is a critical and contemporary topic. Second, the study seeks to understand how the leadership roles are enacted in practice. It explores how leaders make decisions, play their roles, deal with conflicts and directions, and communicate within the context. Third, leadership cannot be confined to a controlled experimental setting. It is contextual in nature. This situation perfectly fits Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) definition of an appropriate context for qualitative research, in which the researcher studies things in their

natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.3).

#### **4.3.3.2 PESTEL Framework**

The PESTEL framework was utilised as a guide to explore the **environmental factor** that would affect the leadership construction. The researcher used PESTEL (Political, economy, social, technology and legal) (Johnson and Scholes 2002, p. 102) ideas during the interview, however, the PESTEL idea was not the legitimate questions that being asked, instead the interview went freely as the researcher tried to explore by asking further questions based on the respondents answers. Thus, the data collection was inspired by grounded theory approach.

A PESTEL framework provides a summary of the questions to ask about key forces at work in an organisation's macro-environment' (Johnson and Scholes 2002, p. 102) by dividing external influences into six main types. These are: political (e.g. ideological disposition of the governing body -government), economic (e.g. level of prosperity of the people in the country, market demand, etc.), social (e.g. culture, ethnic, etc.), technological (e.g. availability and capability of using the technological equipment), and legal (e.g. statutory powers and responsibilities).

#### **4.3.4 Time Horizons**

The time horizon of this study will be cross sectional, as the data will be collected at one point in time. Cross sectional has been adopted by this study as they take a snapshot of an on-going situation and aim to obtain information in different contexts at different times (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Also, because this is an academic research that have a time constrain. However, it is also of general agreement that time perspectives in research design are independent of whichever paradigms a researcher is deploying (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). There seems to be no hard and fast rule in deciding a particular time horizon. It is

probable that a study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time could adopt cross-sectional time horizons.

#### **4.3.5 Data Collection Methods**

The empirical basis of the study consists of data from interviews, supported by participant observation and documentary analysis undertaken in the Malaysian higher education system; namely, the leaders in the central administration office (the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education) and university leaders.

##### **4.3.5.1 Interviews**

Even though there are arguments concerning the ability of the interview to mirror the reality of the social world, Silverman (2008) advocates that interviews provide not just narratives, but also access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds. He argues that for those who aim to understand and document others' understandings, qualitative interviews could be one of the best choices, because they provide a means for exploring the points of view of the research subjects (Silverman, 2008). Through interviews, the interviewees respond to the interviewer through the use of familiar narrative constructs. Nonetheless, Denzin & Lincoln (2005) note that:

*“The subject is more than can be contained in a text and a text is only a reproduction of what the subject has told us. What the subject tells us is itself something that has been shaped by prior cultural understandings. Most important, language, which is our window into the subject’s world, plays tricks. It displaces the very thing it is supposed to represent, so that what is always given is a trace of other things, not the thing –lived experience – itself”.*

Thus, within a subjectivist ontology and interpretive epistemology, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are used to explore the different meanings, perceptions and interpretations of organizational members.

Interviewing encompasses a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses. The most common form of interviewing involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, conducted with individuals or groups of individuals. It can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Increasingly, qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Interviews are viewed as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by the interviewer and respondents. Interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place without imposing any prior categorization that may limit the field of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study will use an **in-depth interview** as its main data collection method.

Nevertheless, this study also takes into account on the fact that interviews also have certain weaknesses. Data collected by means of interview may suffer the problem of ‘response bias’, which happens when the interviewees do not reveal information about certain issues. In other situations, interviewees may, for the sake of safeguarding their career, be reluctant to ‘speak their minds’ but adopt a ‘play-safe’ approach to the interview. To overcome this problem, this study, as mentioned earlier, will also employ another method (documentary survey) as a means to supplement and verify data collected from interviews.

However, with regard to accessibility to resources, the researcher has not faced bigger problems in accessing the setting as the researcher once has worked with the Ministry of Higher Education for three years prior to carrying out this study. Thus, it was easier with regard to understanding the language and culture of the respondents, as well as to gain trust from the respondents once the researcher introduced herself. Hence, the researcher had an advantage in establishing a rapport with the respondents.

The researcher attempted to conduct the interviews in an informal, conversational style, maintaining a 'friendly' chatty tone, while at the same time trying to focus on the main areas of inquiry. The researcher began by 'breaking the ice' with general questions and gradually moved on to more specific ones while also – as inconspicuously as possible – asking questions intended to explore further the veracity of the respondent's statements. During the interviews, the researcher was highly aware of the need to avoid giving her own opinions that might invoke bias. Occasionally the researcher used specific terms to create 'shared views' to keep the interview alive. For instance, 'we heard that....' or 'now we see the Ministry is...' or 'actually we like to see....'

#### **4.3.5.2 Documentary Survey**

A documentary survey is also become one of the methods in data gathering to supplement primary data obtained from interviews. The main purpose of documentary survey in this research is to explore official discourse and policy content pertaining to higher education, leadership and programmes (Silverman, 2008). Documentary evidence in this research will cover national policy on higher education, strategic planning reports or documentation; department's minutes of meeting, files and records; desk file and work procedure manual; ISO documentation; parliament and state acts/enactments; research and seminar papers; any written views from university leaders that are accessible online; and other relevant documents.

#### **4.4 Reliability and Validity**

According to Silverman, (2008), from a more traditional standpoint, the objectivity or truth of interview responses might be assessed in terms of reliability, the extent to which questioning yields the same answers whenever and wherever it is carried out, and validity, the extent to which inquiry yields the correct answers. When the interview is viewed as a dynamic, meaning making occasion, however, different criteria apply. The focus is on how meaning is constructed, the circumstances of construction, and the meaningful linkages that are assembled for the occasion. While interest in the content of answers persists, it is primarily

in how and what the subject/respondent, in collaboration with an equally active interviewer, produces and conveys about the subject/respondent's experience under the interpretive circumstances at hand (Gibrium & Holstein, 2003). One cannot expect answers on one occasion to replicate those on another because they emerge from different circumstances of production. Similarly, the validity of answers derives not from their correspondence to meanings held within the respondent, but from their ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible (Steven,2010).

Various perspectives have been put forward by a number of writers concerning reliability and validity in qualitative research, resulting in an array of terms and definitions to describe both concepts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The literature does achieve a general consensus that the qualitative inquirer needs to demonstrate that their studies are credible. This review will discuss the concept of reliability and validity in qualitative research and will look at different techniques to increase the level of reliability and validity, as suggested by the literature.

#### **4.4.1 Reliability**

Reliability looks at the credibility and consistency of the research findings. In the context of quantitative research, reliability can be understood as the extent to which measurement procedures are without bias and thus consistently yield the same results on repeated observation (Sekaran, 2000). Reliability is concerned with accuracy in measurement to avoid measurement error – a situation that occurs when the values obtained in a survey or the observed values are not the same as the true value or population values. In a less 'statistical term', reliability could be understood as the extent to which results are consistent over time and give an accurate representation of the total population under study (Golafshani 2003, p. 598).

In an interpretive paradigm, reliability seeks to determine whether a similar observation or interpretation can be made on different occasions and/or by different observers (Collis & Hussy 2003, p. 58).

Along these lines, there are a number of writers who look for alternative criteria for evaluating 'reliable' qualitative research. The criteria include dependability, conformability, 'trustworthiness' and authenticity (Bryman & Bell 2003; Collis & Hussy 2003). All these criteria were created to judge the quality and soundness of qualitative research, which, essentially, represents the notion of the reliability in qualitative research. Dependability suggests that qualitative research should possess certain merit and can be trusted. Conformability concerns ethics and honesty as to whether a researcher has acted in good faith that he or she has not overtly allowed personal values to sway the conduct of the research and deriving from it (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 289). Authenticity is about the ability of research to yield consensus about what is to be considered true. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the research can be audited by developing a case study database (Ibid). All these criteria share the same goal, namely, to ensure reliability in qualitative inquiry within its own right.

#### **4.4.2 Validity**

As in the case of reliability, validity also finds its roots in a positivist tradition. Validity in quantitative research addresses the problem of whether a measure measures what it is supposed to measure (Sekaran, 2000). The main objective of validity is to ensure truthfulness or the ability of research to produce findings that are in agreement with theoretical or conceptual values (Golafshani 2003, p. 599). Validity in interpretive research basically speaks about 'truth' in the research findings. It refers to the extent to which research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation (Collis & Hussy (2009, p. 58). Developing the rationale further, Sekaran (2000), defines validity in qualitative inquiry as 'how accurately the account represents participants' reality of the social phenomena and is credible to them'. An account is valid if it represents accurately those features of the phenomenon that it is intended to describe.

Guba & Lincoln (1994) use the term 'credibility', 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity' to refer to validity. Flaws in validity in qualitative research may be due in part to a problem of response biases, which happens when the interviewees do not reveal all the information on certain issues for various reasons, leading to



the failure of the researcher to obtain a full picture of the phenomenon. Drawing on the work of earlier writers, Sekaran (2000) suggested nine procedures for establishing validity in qualitative inquiry. The procedures include application of triangulation in the research methods; member checking; audit trail; disconfirming evidence; prolonged engagement in the field and peer debriefing.

The validity of qualitative research commonly rests upon three main features:

- Unobtrusive, sustained methods. These are methods that leave the situation undisturbed as far as possible - the emphasis unstructured interviews or conversations, the use of key informants and the study of documents.
- Respondent validation. If our aim is to understand the meanings and perspectives of others, how better to test how faithfully we have represented them than with the people concerned themselves?
- Triangulation. The use of different researchers or methods, at different moments of time, in different places, among different people and so on, strengthens the account. For example, information learned through interviews is reinforced, and perhaps modified by observation and by the study of documents or by more interviews.

With regard to this study, the unstructured interviews or conversations, the use of key informants and the study of documents have been employed to ensure the validity of the research exist.

## **4.5 Sampling Technique**

### **4.5.1 The Concept of Sampling**

A sample is generally referred to as a subset of the target population that represents the characteristics of the whole population. A sample is created by selecting a smaller number of elements from the entire population, which is representative, to enable a researcher to explore some unknown characteristics of the population and draw conclusions or generalizations regarding the whole

population (Collis & Hussey 2003, p. 155). Discussions about sampling techniques cover various sampling methods, grouped basically under two distinct headings, namely, probability and non-probability sampling. The distinction between the two is fundamentally determined by whether or not the elements to be chosen as a sample have a known probability of being selected. The principle of representativeness of a population sample as described above is, however, highly associated with quantitative research, which strongly upholds probability sampling.

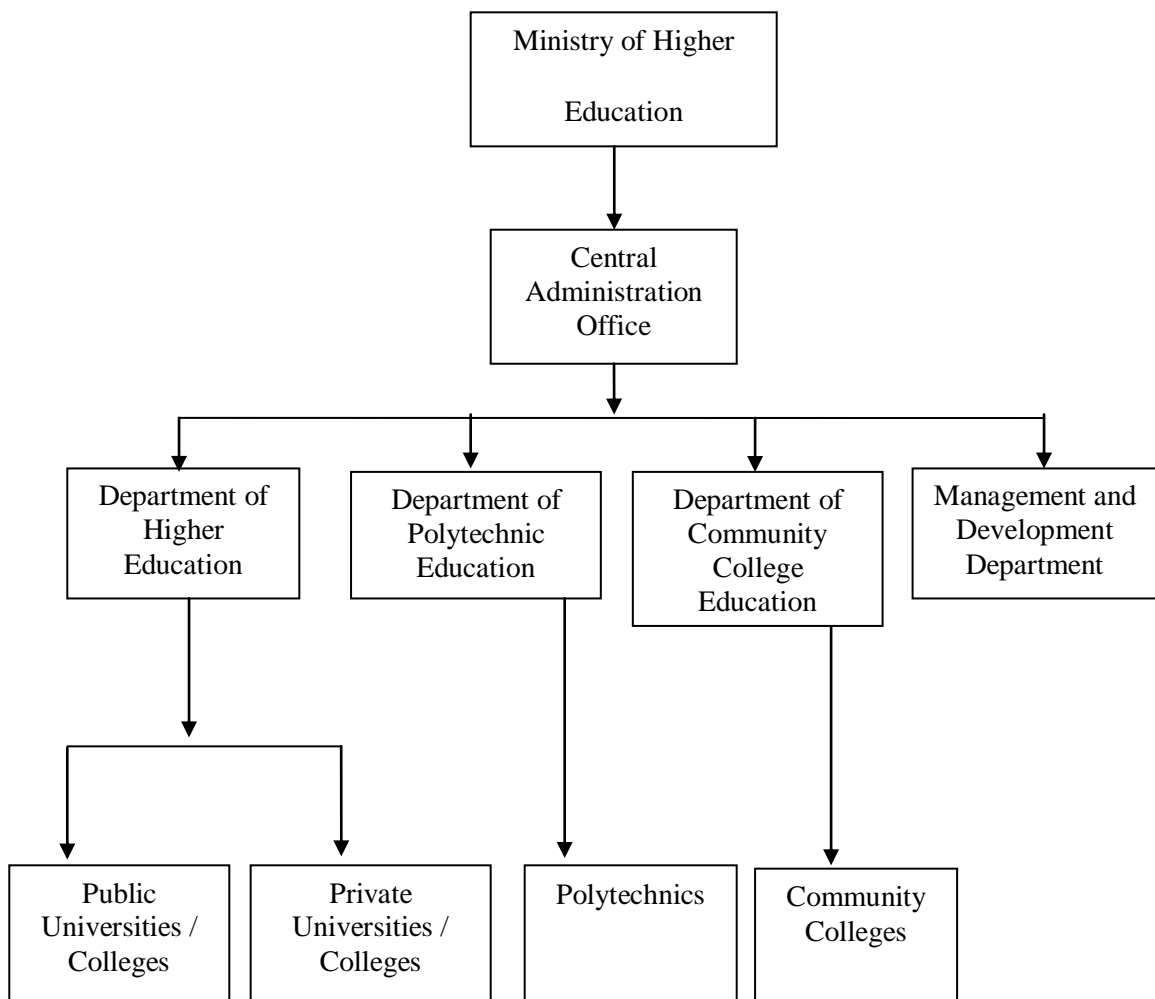
Qualitative research uses non-probability sampling for selecting the population for the study. One of the techniques is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample of people who are most readily available to participate in the study, and who can provide relevant information that answers the research questions and objectives of the study. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study (Sekaran, 2000). Purposeful sampling techniques are non-probability sampling, in which sample units are selected based on the researcher's judgment that they are somehow representative of the population and capable of focusing on some key themes and will engage in in-depth data gathering. The chosen sample is believed to be reliable in revealing the detailed information required in the exploration and understanding of the central themes of the research, including the socio-demographic characteristics that relate to specific experiences and behaviours (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

#### **4.5.2 Sampling for this Study**

A purposeful sampling technique will be used for this research. Purposeful sampling is considered to be most appropriate because this study intends to study a phenomenon in an organization, and the leaders are identifiable. Leaders from the top, middle and lower level were identified and contacted in advance to be interviewed. Further, based on 'snow-ball' sampling recommended by the respondents, more respondents were contacted.

### 4.5.3 Selection of Sample

The population of this study is the staff of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, governs the central administration office and all the higher institutions in Malaysia. The central administration office, which is given the role to manage and administer all the policies, planning, implementation and legislation issues, is located at the Federal Government Administration Complex, Putrajaya, Malaysia. The higher institutions consist of the public universities/colleges, private universities/colleges, Polytechnics and Community Colleges. Figure 4.3 below explains the structure of the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia.



**Figure 4.3 Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia**

**Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia**

The sample in this study comprises the leaders/managers from the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, and from the public universities. This department was chosen because it is a designated division in the MOHE with responsibility for higher education systems and institutions in Malaysia. The leaders who govern and lead the higher institutions are situated under the jurisprudence of this department. Furthermore, the researcher has worked with this department for 18 years. Another reason is because this department is unexplored in terms of leadership research.

#### **4.5.4 Justification for Selection of the Sample**

Leaders, as mentioned in Para 1.5, who are directly involved in leading and managing the department have been selected for this study. They are the ones who are involved in formulating policies and strategies regarding the management, operation, and the future of the department including the human resource issues (at the central administration office). University leaders from various levels are the ones who have been given certain levels of authority to lead and manage the institutions and implement the Ministry's policies and strategies. This selection is expected to be able to give insightful views on how the leaders play their roles, carry out their responsibilities and connect to internal and external stakeholders.

#### **4.6 Analysis of Data**

This study analyses the data obtained from interviews and other methods manually. Full transcriptions of the interviews were first made before the process of coding was undertaken. Coding involves reviewing of transcripts and giving labels to certain parts of the transcript that have salient features that relate to the subject under research (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p. 429). Then the data is interpreted and analysed using the qualitative procedures. As mentioned in Para 4.3.5.1 above, the analysis of the data (the environmental factors) was also based on PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, and Legal) framework.

#### **4.7 Expected Outcomes from the Research**

The findings of the research will add to the knowledge and understanding of the subject of leadership in higher education, Malaysia.

This study would be significant, in the sense that it will:

- a) explore the extent of contextual factors affecting leaders in this setting;
- b) investigate how the people and leaders in this settings value leadership;
- c) identify the concept(s) of leadership that are used in this department;
- d) contribute to the understanding of the interwoven connection between the leaders and environment, which could lead to developing better strategies to nurture and support existing and future leaders; and
- e) support and enrich theories and models of leadership construction in public organizations.

#### **4.8 Summary**

This chapter conclusively described the research methodology undertaken by this study in order to achieve the research objectives. In order to answer the foundational question in phenomenology research –*What is the meaning and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon?*– the researcher tries to gain access to leader’s life-worlds, which is their world of experience by conducting in-depth interviews as the main method. The chosen methodology enables the researcher to search for the commonalities across individual leaders. This methodology also provides a rich description on the leadership process for further exploration.

Hence, the outputs from these methods were utilized to contribute to new developments concerning socially constructed leadership in Malaysian Higher Education. Ideas were developed and shaped through the writing and presentation of academic papers to various conferences including the Northern Leadership Academy, British Academy of Management, International Conference on Human Resource Development and European Academy of Management.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

#### 5.1 Introduction

Following the deliberation and justification for the appropriate methodology in Chapter 5, the present discussion will deal with the actual research design of the study and will give a full account of the actual research process undertaken by the researcher. As argued by Silverman (2005, p. 304), researchers in qualitative study should treat a methodology chapter as a set of cautious answers to questions that might be raised by the audience, which will call for a transparent documentation of what has been done in the actual setting (the `what` questions); how the processes were carried out (the `how` questions) and the rationale behind the research design (the `why` questions). Furthermore, the literature agrees that quality in qualitative research demands methodological rigour, which, as asserted by Denzin (2005), involves a commitment to show to the audience, as much as possible, the procedures and evidence that have led to a particular conclusion.

#### 5.2 Data Collection Process

The data collection process for this study involved four different phases, namely, the preparation of the interview protocol; the initiation of preliminary interview fieldwork; the understanding of a pilot case study; and the commencement of the actual interview sessions.

##### 5.2.1 The Preparation of the Interview Protocol

A 'protocol' is a set of guidelines or rules that help in governing an operation or a task. Yin (1989) recommends the use of a case study protocol as a procedural instrument to be followed by a researcher. Similarly, the literature suggests that the use of an interview protocol is necessary to guide the interviewer during interview sessions and follow-up discussions. The main purpose of an interview protocol is to keep the inquirer on track as data collection proceeds, while, according to Smith *et al.* (2002), the use of a certain protocol or framework is

important in the researcher's effort to plot the developing themes. A properly designed interview protocol is also important to allow a smooth flow of discussion, which will ultimately enable the researcher to solicit the information required from the interviewees.

The preparation of the interview protocol of this research took place in February 2008. The first draft of the interview protocol was completed in early April 2008. The interview protocol was finalized by the end of April, after incorporating additional inputs gathered from the preliminary interviews. As the interview would be an in-depth type, the protocol was prepared with broad and open-ended questions as a guideline during the interview process to allow the 'ice breaking' process at the beginning, and to create a cordial atmosphere for a genuine experience sharing process. The open-ended questions, which were also primary questions, were also aimed at providing the widest scope for interviewees to share their thoughts. This was followed by probing questions emerging from the discussions to obtain detailed information pertaining to particular issues under study. The guidance questions for the interview protocol were prepared based on the literature or findings from other research. The research interview protocol is presented in Appendix 'A'.

### **5.2.2 Preliminary Interviews**

Preliminary interviews were carried out in the Business School, University of Hull, based on the recommendations of the supervisor. Three lecturers voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. The researcher found that these preliminary interviews were very important to serve as an eye-opener, simulation and practice, and for reflection on the breadth and depth of the interview questions. This task was also undertaken to ensure a smooth process of thought sharing with the respondents when the actual interviews took place afterwards. Lessons learnt from the process were invaluable to mentally and emotionally prepare the researcher prior to the actual fieldwork.

The pilot interviews yielded valuable information concerning the scope and objectives of the study. The researcher also got the opportunity to solicit views

from interviewees, which then formed the foundation for the final interview instruments. Their comments gave the researcher the opportunity to further search for relevant materials and literature. Inputs and advice concerning the selection of respondents for the case study sample were also obtained from the discussions.

### **5.2.3 The Fieldwork**

The actual data gathering process took place in Malaysia over a period of two months, from July 2008 until early September 2008. Contact and emails were sent to all respondents starting from March 2008 explaining the purpose and the general outline of the research project. As a result, prior to the fieldwork, about 20 respondents agreed to be interviewed. In securing further cooperation from the targeted respondents, the researcher used supporting (official) letters from Hull Business School. Copies of both supporting letters are provided in Appendix `B` and `C`.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the office of the interviewees, and each of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. From the 20 interviewees, the researcher managed to get further contacts based on their recommendations and suggestions. Finally, 32 interviews were successfully conducted, involving the officers from the Ministry of Higher Education office and universities. Interviews were carried out in a warm atmosphere, hence allowing the thought-sharing process to take place pleasantly.

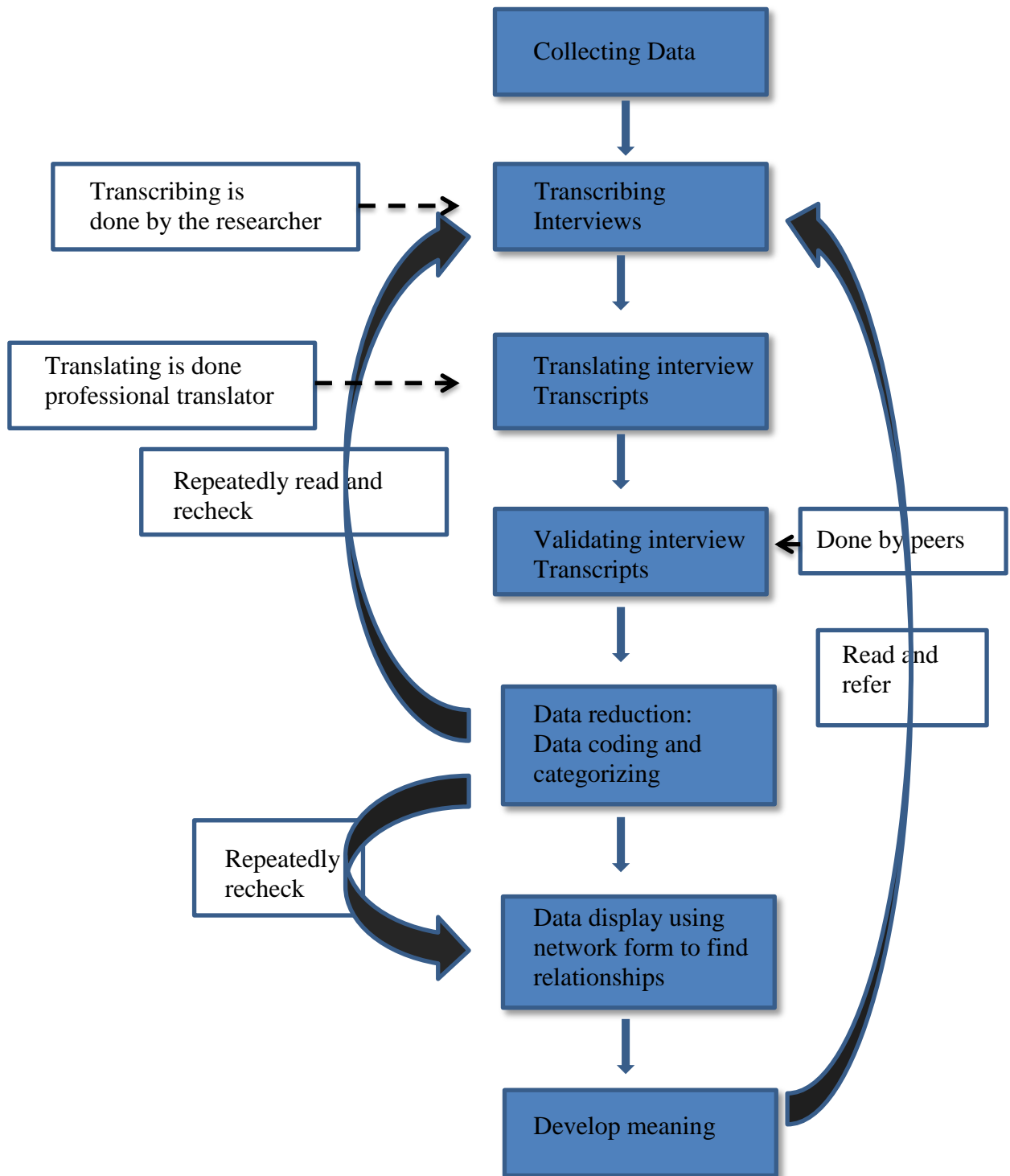
It has been an accepted practice among qualitative researchers to record interviews and field observations. Denzin (2005) insists that tape recording is an indispensable task in qualitative interviews, arguing that tape recorders do not `tune out` of the conversation; they do not change what is said through interpretation; and they allow the interviewer to concentrate on the interview. Accordingly, Yin (2003, p. 92) argues that recording interviews will provide a more accurate interpretation compared to any other method. Hence all interviews undertaken during this research were recorded. Permission was requested from every respondent for the discussion to be taped and when it was explained that the research would only be used for academic purposes, none of the respondents



showed any discomfort with the request. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder.

### **5.3 Data Analysis**

The following diagram describes the process of data analysis that has been executed by the researcher according to the qualitative analysing procedures (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).



**Figure 5.1 The Process of Qualitative Data Analysis**

### **5.3.1 Preparation of Interview Transcripts**

Preparing the interview transcripts was a prerequisite for analysing the qualitative data from the interviews and group discussions. The preceding discussion has highlighted the importance of recording and transcribing the entire interview conversation to ensure that the details and richness of information emerged during the interviews is fully captured in the actual way that questions were answered and in sequence. As recorded conversations can be replayed and listened to repeatedly, this greatly assists the analysis process.

Transcribing recorded interviews is a tedious process that takes a substantial amount of time. The researcher transcribed all the interviews on her own. Some interviews were fully undertaken in English, some in Malay and some were in both Malay and English. In cases where most of the conversations were in Malay or mixed language, translation of the transcripts was done by a professional translator in Malaysia. For this purpose, the translator was given both the original transcripts, as well as the tape recording, for additional verification.

The process of transcribing and checking interview transcripts provided the opportunity for the researcher to grasp important themes and discourses related to the research. The researcher realized that the actual process of data analysis actually began during the preparation and checking of the transcripts. As the process involved close and repeated listening to the recording, it revealed recurring features and key ideas concerning various practices of leadership in the sampled organizations. It took approximately four months to complete the interview transcripts.

### **5.3.2 Validation of the Interview Transcripts**

The literature suggests a number of ways to validate qualitative data sources. Two established validation methods with regard to interview transcripts are respondent validation and peer validation. Respondent validation suggests that the researcher should go back to the respondents with the transcripts or accounts that they have prepared and ask the respondent to verify or modify them, even to the extent of

deleting certain points that had been raised during interviews, the main objective of respondent validation is to seek congruence between the researcher's accounts or impressions and the views or the thinking of the respondents. Peer validation, on the other hand, involves the checking of transcripts by the researcher. The purpose of peer checking is to ensure that researcher's transcripts or accounts were prepared accurately and in accordance with what was actually uttered by the subjects.

A number of writers argue that respondent's validation can pose a risk to the process of validating researcher's accounts, especially when the subjects are given a privileged status in relation to the accounts prepared by the researcher. Fielding and Fielding (1986, p.46, quoted in Silverman 2005, p. 212), argued that there is no reason to assume that members have privileged status as commentators on their actions; hence, such feedback cannot be taken as direct validation, or, to some extent, refutation validation may invite defensive reaction on the part of research participants and even censorship (p.412).

Given that the element of individual bias from an ethical point of view is the fundamental issue concerning respondent validation, in this research, peer validation was used as part of the efforts to provide a certain depth of validity to the accounts. Although it was as a third party, peers stand on a more natural ground. They have no vested interest in interfering or deviating from what is actually spoken in the recorded interviews handed to them. Four people were appointed, on a voluntary basis, to check the transcripts, they were Malaysian PhD students who did research in: 1) Anthropology in the Social Science Department, University of Hull; 2) Political Science in the Social Science department, University of Hull; 3) Education in Education Department, University of Glasgow; and 4) Quantity Surveying students in the University of Salford. All these four peers were doing qualitative research for their PhD. The Malaysian colleagues were chosen because most of the interviews were done using Malay or a mix of Malay and English. Copies of the transcripts along with the tape recordings were given to the volunteers for checking purposes. Two

transcripts each were given to those peers. These procedures were followed rigorously to ensure a reasonable degree of validity existed.

They found that the accuracy of the transcriptions was 99% in accordance with what the respondents had said. Another 1% comprised wording errors due to the fast speed of conversations, which resulted in different vocabulary being heard by the researcher. The researcher then did the rechecking on the transcripts and the audio. They also found that the responses of the respondents were their true experiences as a leader or experiences as a subordinate, which reflect the true scenario in Malaysian universities. Although some respondents tried not to uncover precisely the sensitive areas, which might risk their positions as leaders in public universities, two peers were amazed by two respondents who were brave enough to tell the truth.

### **5.3.3 Analysis of Interview Data**

Analysing qualitative data is basically a process of organizing, categorizing and meaningfully interpreting the information obtained from the interviews. As qualitative data involves a huge amount of written and spoken data, a researcher should look for an appropriate way to begin analysis. While there are no hard and fast rules as to how to commence the data analysis, suggestions by Silverman (2008), who proposed a three-phase qualitative data analysis, namely, data reduction; data display; and conclusion drawing, were useful to the researcher.

As the name implies, data reduction is about organizing and reducing a large volume of data by means of focusing, simplifying, summarizing, and converting the data from the interview transcripts and documents. The major activity in the data reduction phase is data coding and categorization according to different themes and key areas of research. Data display – the second step in data analysis – involves organizing and matching the reduced data into a reasonably understandable shape, to allow the researcher to make inferences and suggestions concerning a particular issue, practice or policy undertaken by the actors in the settings. The final step, namely, conclusion drawing, is also known as the

interpretation phase (Creswell 2007) and entails giving meaning or making sense to the analysed data.

#### **5.3.4 Coding of Data**

Coding of data requires reviewing the transcripts thoroughly and giving labels to key themes or meanings emerging from the data that potentially seems to reveal answers to the research questions. Coding is undertaken to look systematically for indicators of different perceptions, preferences, understanding, behavioural actions or events from the people interviewed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During the coding process, core categories for the emerging themes were established in which a descriptive label was assigned for each theme. Through this process, a number of core categories that provide concepts and constructs were identified through which the answers for the research questions were identified. The coding was identified based on the pre-determined research questions as principal guidelines.

Glaser & Strauss (1967) underlined the data analysis process for the grounded theory approach, in which they describe several steps that need to be considered for the theory-building process. The following is an overview of these steps.

- i) Data gathering, such as interviews, participant observations, fields notes, memos, and archival documents.
- ii) Open coding of the data on a line-by-line, whole sentence, or paragraph-by-paragraph basis, or perusing the entire document.
- iii) The discovery of concepts by conceptualizing the data using comparative analysis to group similar events, happenings, and objects under a common heading or classification.
- iv) Axial coding to fully develop categories and subcategories in terms of their properties and dimensions.
- v) Reaching a level of theoretical saturation, where no new relevant data seems to emerge from category, the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions, and the relationships among categories are well established and validated.

- vi) Linking categories and concepts, grounded in the experience, to create a story or hypothesis to explain or predict the particular phenomenon being studied.

Data from the transcribed interviews and archival documents were first reviewed thoroughly. In the open coding process, multiple readings of the data provided familiarity with 32 transcripts. Each data page was numbered and each interview was assigned a specific code (for instance; respondent 1/administration/male) to provide confidentiality of the respondents. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the coding process.

During the open coding process, the data was broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. The events, objects, actions, and interactions that were found to be conceptually similar in nature were grouped into categories.

**Example of how the themes were derived from transcripts.**

**1) *How do the organizational factors affect the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia?***

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Main ideas</b>	<b>Codings</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Themes</b>
13/institution/ male	I think they are more <i>concerned with managing themselves</i> rather than managing the organisation: they are more concerned about whether their positions will be renewed, because they are on a contractual basis.	concern of managing themselves	Self-interest	organizational factor
	...in terms of the leadership role that they should be playing, many of them try to fit their actions with what the ministry or the higher level wants, so they try to <i>fit into and create the congruence</i> between what they are doing and what the ministry is doing,	fit into and create the congruent	Organisational goals/objectives	organizational factor
12/institution/ male	...but as I mentioned to you earlier, as we are in a feudalistic society, very structured system, in order to become a leader you have to have a so-called 'tree' somewhere. So in order to go up, <i>you have to find someone, to pick you up.</i>	you have to find someone, to pick you up.	Hierarchical structure	Organizational culture

**Figure 5.2 The Coding Process**



Categories are concepts, derived from the data that stand for phenomena that the researcher is recognizing. The categories were then further defined and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions by constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each answer was compared to other answers for similarities and differences and was grouped or placed into a category. The constant comparison of emerging themes allowed the researcher to explore nuances and patterns and identify similarities and differences of meaning at the behavioural and conceptual levels.

The next sequence of action was to code using the *axial coding* process. The purpose of axial coding “is to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They defined axial coding as the grouping of individual ideas and themes that are thematically related. The categories are related to their subcategories to form a more precise and complete explanation about phenomena.

The next step in the coding process was *selective coding* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this phase of grounded theory building, the aim of selective coding is to integrate the categories to form a theory. The researcher has to validate the statements of relationship among the concepts mapped through the axial coding process and fill in any categories in need of further refinement (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Further, they say the findings should be presented as a set of interrelated concepts and not just a list of themes. These interrelated concepts are integrated to form a central category that represents the main themes of the research.

Several techniques can aid in identifying a central category, including writing a storyline, diagramming the data, and reviewing and sorting memos. Diagramming and working with concepts allow the researcher to gain distance from the data and think carefully about the logic of the relationships (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To identify a central category in the data, the process of creating and refining diagrams to visualize the concepts has been used. Amongst the key concepts that have emerged from the study are power and authority, culture, economic factor, organizational factors, organizational culture, relational relationship, Islamic

leadership practices, and others. These key concepts were arranged into several patterns.

The coding was arranged in a circular pattern –one key category in the middle and the coding around it. Then the key categories were analysed to get the relationships. The key categories were compared and contrasted to get the final central categories (themes) that best supported the data.

The coding reached a level of saturation in that the analysis itself appeared to have run its course – all of the incidents were readily classified, categories were saturated, and a sufficient number of regularities emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The following are among the categories that emerged during the coding process:

- a) respondents understanding of the concept of leadership and management;
- b) various political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors that were being considered by the leaders affecting their leadership roles;
- c) respondents understanding with regard to organizational/internal issues; their views on the roles/influences of the issues and the appropriate approaches adopted in dealing with those issues
- d) respondents evaluation of the existing strengths and weakness of the leadership in their organizations, as well as the prevailing culture among the institutional members;
- e) the extent to which the respondents felt themselves to be empowered and in control of their environment; or whether they were instead subjected to influences from different influential factors in the environment;
- f) leaders expressions with regard to values, cultures, traditions, conflicts and dilemmas, and how these constructs were valued as enabling and constraining their pursuit of Malaysian higher education;
- g) respondents' views on the identities of leadership and how they view the construction of the leadership with regard to the external and internal influences;

- h) leaders understanding of the type of good leaders for their organizations;  
and
- i) any particular emotional expressions, dramatic phrases or symbolic words and gestures that framed respondent's thoughts and prescriptions about certain processes, problems or phenomena.

#### **5.4 Summary**

This chapter reported and explained the actual process of data collection undertaken in the actual setting, and, subsequently, discussed the process of analysing field data for the study. The discussion also highlighted the process of analysing qualitative data to derive the key themes of the study, including textual and symbolic phrases as a mode of expressing respondents' views and feelings. This is in line with the interpretive approach to data analysis adopted by this research, which was deliberated in this chapter. The explanation above is based on the real experience gained during the process of data collection and data analysing. Data analysis is a critical part of the whole, as it becomes the route to the insightful phenomena under study. Indeed, this section needed a sacrifice of time, patience, consistency and high perseverance in order to complete the whole process of data analysis.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 argued that environmental factors play an important role in organizational leadership and that leaders need to adapt to the demands and changes of the external environment (Capon, 2001). Bennis *et al.* (2001) draw attention to the importance of leadership as sense-making in an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability. A complex and important task for the leader will be to continuously scan the environment and try to make sense of it (2001, p. 242) in a global context. This research seeks to examine how the context has shaped the construction of the leadership in the Malaysian public higher education. As Marginson & Considine (2000:7) broadly discussed the term “it encompasses the external relationship, internal relationship and the intersection between the both”. This chapter unveils the contextual settings from the perceptions of the interviewees as well as from document surveys. The examinations concern the environmental and organizational factors of the higher education, that is perceived to affect the construction of the leadership. Finally, the findings also reveal perceptions about the identity of leaders that emerge from the context, taking into account of the environmental and organizational factors that affected them.

#### 6.2 The Environmental Factors

##### 6.2.1 The Impact of Political Factors

The political landscape in Malaysia has been in flux and controversy, particularly since the twelfth general election held in March 2008. The most crucial and critical issues associated with this political instability concerned corruption, collusion and nepotism; non-democratic systems of government and weak democratic institutions; inadequate electoral systems; a lack of separation of powers; manipulation and dependency of the judiciary; and the role of civil

society and the media (Gomez, 2007). Precisely, it was about the excessive use of the political power by the ruling political parties (the National Front coalition led by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO)). As Loh & Khoo (2002) argued, presently the political system in Malaysia is perched uneasily between democracy and authoritarian. Nonetheless, Common (2004) noted that any input from the broader civil society is minimal, which suggests that the nature of politics is rigidly authoritarian. Most of the mass media is controlled by either the government or the ruling party. At the time of conducting this research, both the ruling coalition and the opposition alliance face mounting challenges and uncertainties, as there are struggles to reinstall the democratic system in the country.

Consequently, the impact of the long standing hegemonic power of the Malay-based political parties has been widespread, particularly in the government and public sector, in which almost all the policies and initiatives outlined for the government department were being driven by the political executives. The close relationship between the dominant political party and senior officials in public service obscures the governance, management and administration in the public higher education.

In explaining the political intrusion in higher education, the following respondent revealed:

*“Politicians have become the main players in university management, so also the Parliamentary and State Assemblyman, supposed we have to collaborate and build good rapport with them, but sometimes they have their own agendas, sometimes conflict happens.” (Respondent 16/institution/male)*

The above quotation illuminates the overwhelming political intrusion that is likely to determine the management and direction of the universities. They drew the line between what the management, staff and students should and should not do, they imposed the programs or activities to be carried out in accordance with their political aims. It is undeniably good to collaborate with these politicians as it would benefit both to university and the community at large. However, often times, the political aims would supersede the benefit gained by the university.

Thus, the conflict of interest aroused that lead to the increase of tension between attaining the institutional and the political objectives, and the leaders seem to be caught in this dilemma.

Based on the interviews, the following issues were the most responded answers by the respondents.

#### **6.2.1.1 The Appointment of Top University Leaders.**

One of the hotly debated issues that has been preoccupying academics and professionals has been the ‘politically designed’ leadership landscape in public universities. The issue centres on the strong influence from the politicians on the appointment of Vice Chancellors (VCs) for public universities that has disappointed the academic communities. The credibility of the search committees and the candidates that were chosen to become the VCs appeared to be the contested points. Responding cynically, respondent 11 illustrated:

*“We never know who actually determines the VC. I think there is a body, but the body doesn’t have full power, to the extent sometimes the Prime Minister will be involved. There is a structure to run the organization, however, at the same time there are outside forces. Similarly we never know who was actually involved in the appointment of the deans, and deans also don’t have power to make decisions.”(Respondent 11/institution/male)*

This respondent shared his views that besides the prevailing organizational structure, it did not necessarily reflect the decision making structure of the leaders. Instead, the decisions were reserved for those who were in power. As Bresnen (1995) noted, although there is a tendency to follow the formal role structure, it is tempered by the perception that (in this context) leadership and decision making are different, and it does not necessarily depend upon the relative hierarchical position. Nonetheless, Common (2004), in interpreting the Malaysian public administration system, argued that Malaysia appears to be a Prime Minister (PM) led state, that politics and administrative in the country is dominated by the PM. Essentially, the issue of exercising power and control by the authority and the

dilemmatic right to exercise the leadership roles by the lower ranking leaders emerged.

Another respondent shared his own experience and admitted that being close to politicians accounted for his appointment. His quotation revealed:

*“In our country, the appointment of university leaders is done by politicians. For example, my appointment as Deputy VC was made by politicians, so politics in Malaysia play a very important role from that standpoint. In the UK, for example, the appointment is made by a board of directors, and the minister does not bother who is the VC, and there is no need for them to know. However, here, if there are many universities, it means that there are many posts that the minister has to fill...”*  
(Respondent 12/institution/male)

The respondent’s disclosure intimates that, in this context, politics had excessive control over the university environment and leadership, to the extent of determining a/the contender of the position. His personal experience reaffirms the assertion made by the previous respondent.

Although he offered a rather rosy and generalised picture of the Western practice, which might not necessarily indicate the best means to appoint academic leaders, nonetheless it is indicative of the overwhelming feeling of exasperation that came through in these interviews and the desire to look for alternative leadership practices.

Under the *University and University College Act (UUCA) 1971* (amendment 2009) – an Act to provide for the establishment, organization and management of Universities and Public University Colleges in Malaysia and for matters connected therewith– the appointment of the VC is made by the search committees. The committees are appointed by the Minister of Higher Education. Here, it could be argued that the interplay is between the Minister, the search committees and the candidates, in which the Minister appeared to be the most authoritative person in this sense. A few cases during the past few years demonstrated that the VC post has been filled by individuals from the industry or by top civil servants who have close allies with the Minister (Bakri, 2001). Contradictorily, from the interviews, the academic communities prefer the

leaders to be selected from those who have moved up from the ground level and have direct involvement and experience in campus management, based on merit and excellent credentials. Respondent 2 suggested:

*“The appointment of top leaders should be based on merit, talent, having top down and bottom up approach of management. They focus on the pertinence of an integrated approach in teaching and learning, and developing personality and integrity. The leaders also need to highly consider the importance of language, and human values. They must come from the people that have good vision for the nation and the globe, and have capabilities as thinkers, administrators or as people who have good wisdom”. (Respondent 2/institution/male)*

The crucial points raised by this respondent illuminated the socially constructed preference for leaders that *“they must come from the people [the academic communities]”*. He also highlighted the expected qualities and identities of the leaders that they highly valued, which could match the virtuous needs of the local and global higher education demands. Importantly, the quotation indicates the shared views of their leadership preferences and the acceptable leadership identities that would fit into their perceptions. For them, the great leaders clearly define their purpose and values and the best leaders are those who do not notice their existence.

#### **6.2.1.2 Ill-fated Case**

While undertaking this research, there was a case that involved the termination of the contract of one vice chancellor in a public university. According to the dismissed vice-chancellor whose term was terminated unexpectedly, she claimed that during her tenure she had to live with all kinds of “nonsense” pertaining to political interference in the university. She quoted in an hour-long interview with *Malysiakini* –the most popular and visited Malaysian human rights electronic media:

*“For example, things like which speaker can or cannot be brought into the campus to speak to the students also turns out to be their big concern. So, it has become a very sensitive job, but as I was focused on what I wanted to do for the university, I had to swallow all the nonsense, otherwise I will not be able to do what I want to do.”*



Giving another example of one recent case of a politically driven direction, she had to cancel a public talk by Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi from Iran. The university had to withdraw its invitation to Ebadi, an outspoken speaker about human rights, two weeks before she was to deliver a speech on Islam and cultural diversity.

Commenting on the political involvement in the university, she was in “total agreement” that the government should amend the restrictive Universities and University Colleges Act, to give more autonomy to staff and students. According to her, the situation was much better when she was the Dean of the faculty of law back in the late 1980s.

*“Those days when there was more sovereignty, I remember we brought in the then Prime Minister, and we also brought in the opposition leaders in several campus events, many people were quite happy with the situation,” she quoted.*

She alleged that gender bias was the main reason for the termination of her contract. As the first woman to head the oldest public university in this country, she was only informed of the decision 48 hours before the expiry of her term.

In an extremely forthright statement she remarked that “just because I am a woman so I am not good”, She learnt that a female VC would only be given a two-year contract while a male VC is three-years. She questioned, “Doesn’t this show that they are more confident in a man rather than a woman?”

Essentially, the case visibly illustrates the strong command and control style imposed on the university leadership. The construction of the leadership is conditional upon the blessing of the authority. At the same time this case exhibits the marginalisation of women leadership, in which it demonstrates the effort and struggle she has to make. Concisely, the appointment of top university leaders was encircled around the (Bresnen, 1995) conception of leadership that is closely tied in to the exercise of managerial authority and control.

### 6.2.1.3 Leaders Dignity

Another related issue promulgated by the controversial appointment of top leaders centred on the leadership dignity and how the leaders enact their roles in accordance with the acceptable norms and values. Elaborating on this point, respondent 22 revealed:

*“ A leader must be respected for who he is, not because of his colour, not because of his connection; if he gets to be a leader he must work very hard to deserve that particular place, not for any other reason, only then will the leader command the respect for leading others. We have worked under many leaders, so called leaders, but we work under them not with 100% conviction. In fact I do believe that there are some subordinates who are even better than the leaders, a lot of subordinates are actually better than the leaders. But because of factors that are not based on merit, they are not given that particular level of leadership.”*  
(Respondent 22/institution/female)

A good leader, as perceived by this respondent, is someone who has engaged and worked together with his/her followers, is accepted by the followers, and the followers have shared views that the leader is fit to become their leader. Her discourse that, *“then will the leader command the respect for leading others”*, exhibits that the leaders who were socially recognised and accepted by many would gain due respect and command. Hence, leadership is about earning respect rather than demanding it. It is in contrast to the type of leadership that is preoccupied with position and control, that yielding to the power of politics. This kind of leadership would be more about taking action just to impress the authority rather than creating a truly transformational change to serve a higher purpose, because this behaviour is often predicated upon the superficiality of instant fame and the tendency is rather towards immediate gratification or ego-building.

The comparison that she made between the leaders and subordinates, that some subordinates were perceived as being able to become much better leaders than the present ones illuminated her losing confidence in the current leadership dignity. This is truly reflected by her words *“but we work under them not with 100% conviction”*. Also exhibited here that there were better candidates available on the ground that possess better leadership qualities than the incumbent. This was due

to the leaders were appointed and not elected. Those who were with good credentials were not among the favourite choices of the authority. Again, she was emphasising on the merit and credibility to be the most important criterion for leadership appointment.

#### **6.2.1.4 Management Dispute**

Munir, Sarjit & Rozinah (2008) in their writings highlight that although public universities are held accountable for their performance, they quite obviously do not fully determine their own directions. This observation is shared by the members of the MOHE Report (2006). The Malaysian universities, as public agencies, are exposed to the directives, official and unofficial, and demands of many parties. There are several zones of governance where public universities have differential levels of control. There are zones of predetermination (financial Procedures Act, Treasury Regulations, University and University College Act (UUCA) 1972, co-determination (MOHE, Public Service Department, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) and Ministry of Finance (MOF), self-determination (university) and indetermination (investments abroad, public listings).

Despite the politics and administration being officially two separate entities in the Malaysian Government; to a certain extent, the involvement of external forces in the administration obscures the leadership functions at the institutional level. Politicization of the institutional management and leadership appears to be high, with the intervention of external politics seemingly present at various levels and in multiple kinds of issues. For the leaders, the impacts were quite distressing. The following quotation elucidated the example:

*“I give you one example of our university cases; we planned to build a mosque in the middle of the campus. When this plan was presented in the Parliament for budget approval; the Parliamentary man was against the location of the mosque. He said the mosque should be near to the main road, as it should also serve the community. Actually, we did realize that there is already a mosque nearby, which is just beside the road opposite the campus, which was built by the older folks, so that’s why we planned and designed it to be at the centre of the campus. However, this politician argued and demanded the location should be changed, and we*

*were against his idea. So, it became a big issue and delayed the construction of the project... the trouble was he, as a politician, has his own way to fight the issue through the parliament...to the extent of engaging Royal involvement. The problem was still unresolved even though the Royal family became involved, because this politician is very powerful.” (Respondent 18/institution/male)*

This case depicts the complicated managerial and leadership issues that revealed the contradictory, the conflict, the negotiated roles and the powerlessness of the leaders in relation to the authority. The power seems to be constituted through the structures and practices of institutional leadership. Hence, this example represents the other leadership issues in the context that demonstrates the conflict of roles and identity of the leaders between being the person in charge of their institutional management and being subordinated to the higher authority. Finding the balance between the power and powerlessness of their position becomes a daunting job that they need to internalise and a game that they always need to play.

#### **6.2.1.5 Deteriorating Institutions**

Leadership has always been associated with organizational performance (Bass, 1985), and the way the leadership is shaped would somewhat affect the university or institutional performance. On observing this phenomenon, there have been numerous critics and concerns from the academics as well as the public concerning the deteriorating performance of the public universities. Besides the other factors, many believed that the situation is closely related to the seeming powerlessness of the leadership, that they have limited choices to exercise their leadership and drive the organizational pursuit. Respondent 8 advocated that past historical ways conveys that the university’s freedom is likely to become a major contribution towards excellence. For example, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and University of Malaya (UM) were at one time the same university. Then these institutions split when Malaysia separated from Singapore. While NUS performance was gradually increasing, UM continues to slide in

ranking even compared with other universities within the region. Commenting forthrightly, he continued,

*“...this university has been led by a series of low performance leaders since the departure of our first and most prominent VC...”, and the university has become the riding horse for political race” (Respondent 8/institution/male)*

The body language was very noticeable as this respondent continued with the interview. He physically shook with emotion as he made the point that the system should be liberated from political interference, and that a more egalitarian style of management is preferred. Being the ‘riding horse’ of political race connotes the access power of the political party to dominate the campus management, even though the academics unwillingly consent to their oppression. Thus, it appears here that politics does play a much stronger role in public higher education in recent years. Choosing the top leaders seems to be a very obvious and overt way of keeping control in this context compared to the other cultures that perhaps occurs in a more covert and subtle way.

#### **6.2.1.6 Selection of Leaders**

The legitimization of power was not only visible through direct involvement in choosing the top university leaders, but also appeared evident by indirect supervision concerning the appointment for the other higher ranking posts in the universities. Respondent 12 shared his exasperation with the way in which the leadership position in the university was filled. He argued that very often the best person was not being selected for the jobs.

*“There was a case in this university in which we think that the person was not supposed to be appointed to the post based on certain criterion, but because he was close to the VC he was picked. Then what he did was terribly unprofessional, that he tried to keep his ‘people’ and blocked the good people from coming and taking any other leadership posts. The purpose is quite obvious to safeguard his interests. For this person, any good individual will threaten his position and become his potential rival.” (Respondent 12/institution/male)*

The case visibly depicts the favouritism and nepotism issues in higher education leadership, in which according to this respondent the case represented the phenomena in the other universities as well. The preference for the group, as connoted by the word ‘his people’ might seem normative that could also occur elsewhere. However, it could be understood here that the main concern was on the credibility of the leaders, let alone what might be the political agenda underpinning the selection and appointment processes. Having close relationship with top management accounts as the main attribution for the leadership appointment and future career. In this sense, the leadership process did not originate from the shared views of the followers. Hence, this might complicate the prospective mutual undertakings between the leaders and the followers. Nonetheless, the quotation explicates the resistance mood of the ground level to the hegemonic practices that the practices were against their shared norms and values.

#### **6.2.1.7 Inconsistent Policies and Directions**

Policy becomes a tool to regulate a population from top down, and as a mechanism used by the government or organization to solve problems and to affect change. It also refers to guidelines that legitimate and even motivate people behaviour. Policy influences the way people construct themselves, their conduct and their social relation as free individuals, which could be in terms of the language, rhetoric and concepts of political speeches and party manifesto. It might be a written document produced by government and embedded in the institutional mechanism of decision-making and service delivery (Shore & Wright, 2005).

When asked about how the policies affect the leadership, respondent 13, who is currently a VC in one university commented, *‘in general, until present, there were no clear directions that spell out the future direction of higher education.* He continued further:

*“... and then it [the policy] keeps changing, when they [the leaders] see the Ministry is emphasising on certain areas, leaders will follow suit,*

*and then again when the policy and views from the top change, their focus will also change accordingly, to the extent that sometimes they abandon the previous one.” (Respondent 12/ institution/male)*

According to this respondent, the changes in policies are unpredictable, as they are largely determined by the Minister (of higher education) and the central office. In this regard, policy appears to be a legitimizing function, because not only do they outline the course of actions to be taken, they also serve to meet certain goals and objectives ascribed by the Ministry. Because of the ambiguous future direction, the changes of the policies seemingly occur inconsistently and unpredictably, as the power of policy making lies at the central administration office. This scenario was supported by one VC in a public university, in that the universities are undergoing inclusion of too many voices of dissent in academic circles, which further increases the uncertainties of the future of higher education.

On elaborating upon the frequent changes in the policy made by the Ministry or the central administration office, respondent 13 responded worriedly:

*“There is another leadership issue here, when the policy keeps changing it creates a syndrome where everybody [the leaders] will always wonder what the Ministry would announce next. Then everybody will keep talking about it and pass down the idea to down level. Then the down level will totally accept [the directives] and started to implement. It went on like this with one after the other changes from the top. Sometimes when we look at the leaders...it is like as though they want to be seen as the main player, to show that they are a very good subordinate (to the Minister) , and support whatever is thrown by the minister.” (Respondent 13/institution/male)*

It prevails here that the voices in respect of the policy merely reflect the concerns of the Ministry and how the Ministry wants to shape the higher education and the institutions by frequently changing the policy and directions. The frequent changes was reflected by their sense of standby mood "*everybody [the leaders] will always wonder what the Ministry would announce next*". It seems as though that the situation became part of their normal life which was ever ready to hear any new directions from the top. The institutions or the academics appear to be the followers or the silent stakeholders that in any situation they need to follow the instructions, and there were very limited rooms to voice up their concern. The

worst thing was, normally the top leaders delegated the tasks to down level, passing the message and execute the direction without being able to properly discuss and plan in advance. The directives came unpredictably from the top and exerted the higher institutions to implement. The contention that arises from this is that the changes rather contribute to less significant result either to the students or the institutions since the changes in policies or directions were design and conceived hastily.

When the new policy or direction was given, leaders kept talking among themselves in an agreed or disagreed mode with the new rulings, the implications or even the assumptions behind the rulings. Obviously, they were trying to conceive the intrinsic meaning of the policy or direction by sharing their thoughts and emotion together. They were constructing their minds on the intention and appropriateness of the changes and the need to disseminate the policy or direction to their staff. With the background of the culture in the context that were hierarchical and bureaucratic, the down lines were not hesitate to follow the instructions.

The frequent changes of the policies and directions on the one hand depict the flux of the system, the organization and the leaders that rather would complicate the leaders' roles and functions. Their dilemma is to stabilise their institutions, as they have to frequently reconcile and reshape their direction in accordance with the Ministry agenda. On the other hand, it demonstrates the situation where the leaders are suffering from group thinking, in which they have to make sense of their positions and identities in relation to the political calls, which require appropriate behaviour and action.

Nonetheless, the bureaucratic practices have inevitably shaped the way the policies are made and implemented. According to the respondent, while most policies are in a generic form, they entail numerous procedures. The leaders' jobs were considerably tied to ensure the procedures were being followed. In certain circumstances, their roles became highly mechanistic and grounded with the strategic and tactical issues. The following responses revealed:



*“The policies were too broad, however the procedures are there. The emphasis is more on procedures and working procedures. Sometimes these policies create misunderstanding amongst staff, because they are not deliberately stated.”(Respondent 5/administration/male)*

*“The problem now is the tools for management are not there [referring to generic policies and target]. These are the basic tools. So, when the tools are not there, and, with the lack of direction, actions and decisions will be inconsistent. The decisions are always changing and the organization will tumble, at the same time we have to deal with all sorts of problems including the drivers and clerks problems”. (Respondent 12/institution/male)*

He insisted that if the tools were there, then empowerment could take place to release the burden of institutional leadership. The complicated university structures with many faculties and departments reflect a complicated management system. Therefore, he raised his concern for the need of consistent policies and procedures, which is important to generate consistency in decision making and further spawn shared values within institutions. Nonetheless, the quotations revealed that the boundaryless of the leaders’ roles demand numerous and various actions and identities. The ambiguity concerning his roles and tasks leads him to assert that very often his leadership roles are reduced to managerial roles as reflected by their words " *at the same time we have to deal with all sorts of problems including the drivers and clerks problems.*" Respondent 12 noted further that the situation has created some administrative chaos in campus management, in which he realised that the focus turned to be more on other unanticipated issues rather than the core business. However, both respondents admitted that the broad policies could permit some flexibility during implementation, but that the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure appears to remove any such possibility.

#### **6.2.1.8 Academic Autonomy**

Autonomy has always been a controversial discourse in Malaysian Higher Education. During a Higher Education Strategic Plan meeting held in 2006, chaired by the Chief Secretary of Higher Education and attended mostly by top university leaders, the overriding topic of discussion revolved around autonomy of the higher institutions. One of the consensus resolutions derived from the

meeting was to increase the level of autonomy of the public universities. This matter was reemphasised during the Strategic Plan Review meeting three years later (in 2009), in which the researcher was allowed to attend. Even though there seems to be no one-size-fits-all model, as far as interpreting or implementing autonomy is concerned, the autonomy concept seems to have evolved rather differently to meet its own needs, as mentioned by one VC during the meeting. He asserted, generally, the principle of institutional autonomy can be defined as the necessary degree of independence from external interference that the university requires in respect of its internal organisation and governance, the internal distribution of financial resources, the generation of income from non-public sources, the recruitment of its staff, the setting of conditions of study and, finally, the freedom to conduct teaching and research. In other words, the role of autonomy in the new economy cannot be underestimated. It goes together with the recognition that the issue of accountability, as an integral part of autonomy, is equally essential as a basis to rebuild the trust that was once taken for granted. It is only with trust being fully restored that autonomy will be more meaningful to everyone.

Many universities and tertiary education systems are besieged by an array of economic, geo-political and hegemonic cultural issues that are dramatically changing higher education (Dzulkifli, 2011). Dzulkifli cited the shared views by Cary Nelson; Professor Emeritus at University of Illinois, United States, in his book, *No University is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (New York University Press, 2010).

He blamed the erosion of the fundamental principles of higher education, namely, academic freedom, shared governance and tenure to a lengthy list of trends and forces including corporatisation and globalisation. Dzulkifli (2011) insisted that when a university's culture is subjected to intrusive micromanagement at various levels, it can only serve to create fear, which undermines the notion of free inquiry upon which knowledge and innovations blossom, and which is a common phenomenon in the public higher institutions.

As a way out, many academics prefer to "insulate" themselves by being risk-averse and closing their minds to articulating new and bold ideas and concepts that are radical enough to spark a transformation. Thus, a safer stake is to focus on the "me-first" syndrome (as will be elaborated in Paragraph 6.2.2.2) that is devoid of human empathy due to their disengagement from societal needs and wants.

When asked about autonomy in leadership, many respondents suggested that more autonomy and empowerment should be given to institutions. Respondents suggested that they should charter their own institutional directions within the realm of the law. What can be seen within the institutions is *"some people are actually good leaders but they are not given the authority to make decisions"* (respondent 11/institution/male), and, as an academic, they were given training to become a good leader, but there was *"no opportunity given to make decisions"* (Respondent 15/institution/male) and *"leadership and decision making is different"* (Respondent 14/institution/female). One Professor who is a director of a sports centre shared his experience:

*"Three years ago I was asked to be a director of the sports centre at this university. My job was to start a programme – BSc in Sport. When I took over with a new programme, we set up new admission criterion. I wanted the prospective sportsmen/women to not only gain a paper qualification from this programme, but also have the 'thinking', so a pass in higher secondary certificate as an entry level is compulsory but then it was not enough, a person must also have some experience in sport, be it as manager, as coach or as player, and then my team and I will judge accordingly. Then I was blocked and was told by the admission office that sport experience has to be dropped, and academic achievement is sufficient for entry level. The then Ministry supported them. Until the end, they never gave me any reasons why they rejected our idea. There's no common sense at all. So in the end I lost. When did we have authority to perform our duty?"* (Respondent 6/institution/female)

This respondent appeared both confused and exasperated by these non-negotiable roles, she felt that the role is less relevant to a dynamic function of the leadership and structure, and just to maintain the status quo of the authoritative power. The imposed decision rather than consensus resolution has likely provoked resistance and conflicts that might contribute to the unsatisfactory leadership.

Talking about the improvement at university level, respondent 20 cited that leaders are confused and ambiguous about their roles and authorities to implement changes at their institutions or departments. As leaders, they have been given or have been sent on some leadership training programmes in order to be capable to lead and implement changes. However, according to the following respondent, although the leaders might have been exposed to the leadership skills, they were authoritatively incapable of executing any changes or improvement as the final decisions were in the hands of the higher authority.

*“I happened to be one of the organisers of the leadership courses for top university leaders three months ago. For me personally I feel that even though the leaders were given the training to upgrade their management and leadership skills, I think many of them just come ... because they have to attend the courses. When they go back to their institutions, it will be the same story, because I don't think they have the mandate to make changes. When I asked for feedback about the courses, most of them said they have already known the subject or were very aware of but they don't have the chance to fully utilise the skills, because they don't have the authority [to make changes], they were just following the direction to attend [the courses], so it is actually wasting their time, listening to something that will not take effect. Unless there is a directive from the Ministry, then they know sooner they are going to implement and get an end product, but for now they know that they are not going to implement, so the spirit is different.” (Respondent 20/institution/male)*

The quotation exposed the conflicts experienced by the leaders in that they were in a state of dependency and subordination, which, potentially, might displace their true aspirations. For the moment, their ultimate anticipation is to be given the flexible environment of academic culture.

Further, their anticipations were clearly stated in the Bulletin of National Institute of Higher Education Research 12/2008, in which it mentioned that a society that is hierarchical with patronage norms typically works on legitimate or position power to effect change. This is the antithesis to the academic norms of autonomy and freedom to pursue one's interest in the generation, dissemination and use of knowledge. The imposition of accountability and academic capitalism further challenges this fundamental value of academia. The juxtaposition of these two cultures further complicates the effectiveness of leadership performance in higher education. Which culture dominates will determine the overall effectiveness of

the educational system.

#### **6.2.1.9 Minority Groups**

Racial quotas in the student intake and faculty appointments have become a highly politicised issue of ethnic minority in the last few years. To cool down the situation of dissatisfaction, the government announced a reduction of racial quotas, and appeared to be more considerate towards meritocracy, but the implementation is yet to be seen. One of the Chinese respondents interviewed by the researcher shared his story about the minister's plan to review the racial quota:

*“There is just too much drama now, so much that essential aspects of the economy and country are easily lost sight of. The Malaysian education system has been criticized by many people. Whenever a new education minister comes into power, there are changes made to the system. Our education has a lot of flaws and there is no doubt about that – but we can't wash our hands and let the future generation go through something that we think is flawed. Things have to change and people have to be more accepting.” (Respondent 25/institution/male)*

Irritated by the situation, he said that universities are supposed to be the best place to witness racial indifference. Hence, it was not the students that create the trouble, as different races appeared to live harmoniously together thus far. He continued that it was the bureaucracy and policies that often created tension among the students. He confessed that Malaysia continued to impose curbs on university intakes, although the government said it had done away with racial-based quotas, which have favoured the majority Malay ethnic group. He asserted *“Some groups have complained that, in practice, access to universities is still limited, and I feel this is the right time for the government to determine if admission is really on an equal basis”*.

The racial quota explains that whatever decisions need to be made regarding students admission, the majority group need to be of first priority. Although it is a bitter circumstance that the leaders have to deal with, the current policies do not provide any room for leaders to evade the implementation.

Not only does the ethnic minority become the polemic in student admission to public universities, the academic appointments and the leadership upward mobility exhibit similar phenomena. When asked about the selection and appointment of academic staff in public higher institutions and the future of leadership career, one Chinese respondent depicted:

*“Well, you can see how many Chinese and Indians are being selected as lecturers in our public universities; I think it is only about 5-10 percent. The same thing can be seen in the government sector, non-Malays cannot go up because there is a glass ceiling. For me I think I will never get to the top, unless God intervenes, as I am a Christian, so I always see things from that perspective. For example, unless suddenly there is such a policy change...let’s say those who have been an associate professor for ten years will now become a professor, then I will get. Or unless there is a mega rocking of the boat, that somebody dares to really rock the boat”.*(Respondent 24/institution/male)

His disclosure demonstrates the uncertainty of the future leadership opportunities for the minority groups. He also mentioned that the minority issues were long-standing political and social problems, as is the case in other countries. In this case, the higher political intervention in the public higher institutions was deemed to complicate the situation more.

## **6.2.2 The Impact of Social Factors**

### **6.2.2.1 Forgoing Openness**

Through observation, the majority of the government staff and academics in public higher institutions are Malays; thus, inevitably the Malay culture has dominated the workplace environment. Consequently, the leadership and organisational culture have been overshadowed by this cultural value, and the value is deeply rooted in the government environment. One example is that staff will passively follow the leader’s words or directives. As Malaysia is high in power distance culture (Hofstede, 1991), it is observed that in many situations, followers are in passive obedience to superiors, and have strong reverence to senior leaders. It seems uncommon for anybody to go against the leaders, particularly in a direct way, and even with polite manners. To disagree means putting one’s own name on the ‘black list’, which will further affect career

promotion, opportunities for attending any training programmes, or being transferred to other places without consultation. This is the likely reason why people keep silent when they disagree with any leader's ideas, and then they just reveal the grudges behind the scene. Lower level leaders prefer to 'play safe'. 'Playing safe' refers to the leader's unwillingness to take any feedback from followers to higher levels, or being selective about what feedback to communicate. Only when the leaders feel their positions are not threatened will they raise such matters. Any dissatisfaction and resentment is currently voiced amongst themselves or within their small groups. Respondent 22 highlighted:

*"In (my) department, they release their tension among themselves, and sometimes it creates the tendency for gossip. (Respondent 22/institution/female)*

The existence of small groups was evident either among the peers, or research teams or subject groups. This was where they turned to release their exasperation and seek further views or advice, as they have limited opportunities to voice their concerns direct to the top management.

Preserving face and indirect ways of communication have always been the values that the leaders need to conform to. An experience from respondent 14 described:

*"I had been invited to be involved in a MOSTI (Ministry of Science, Technology and Industry) project, which is a quite big national level project, the Secretary General was there. There was something that seemed not right, so I voiced it during the discussion. Then, immediately after the meeting, one officer told me that I should not bring up the matter, it was improper for me to voice it upfront. Truly so, I was no longer called for another meeting after the incident, it was completely silent and they left me out of the picture. They launched the ceremony but I was not informed. They invited me back for another related seminar; again I found that they had given the wrong facts. When they opened up the Q&A session, I tried to correct them. Then one person calmed me down and advised me not to proceed, because things will become worse. She said if I was really unsatisfied, I can correct them by informing the person in-charge outside of the event, which I think it will just be wasting my time, so just forgot about it..."(Respondent 14/institution/female)*

While it could be construed that this respondent may simply have been operating in a particularly insensitive way, she was adamant that she did this in a polite way.

Even so, it was clear that any contradictions or personal opinions were not welcome.

Leaders may forego openness in the interest of maintaining social harmony (Mansor & Kennedy, 2000). The respondent's discourse depicted the characteristic of the high-context communication that involves emotion and close relationships (Hall, 1998). The phrase ... *'then one person calmed me down and advised me not to proceed'* implies the indirect way of expressing views as an attempt to secure a relationship with the other party. While doing so, emotion plays a key role in ensuring that the face value for both sides is preserved and respect for elders and higher ranking leaders take precedence.

Nonetheless, the insensitive remarks made by this respondent might reflect the leaning of the contemporary Malay young generation, as a result of global mobilization. It connotes the changing phenomenon, that the modern Malays have adopted a new culture, as they travel to other countries and pick up new ways of seeing and doing things and incorporate them into their value system (Salleh,2005). Even so, amidst the new trend, the traditional cultural values are still intact and practiced by the people at large.

#### **6.2.2.2 Status Gap**

There is a significant status and power gap between the top, the middle and the lower level leaders as well as the followers, which has created a vacuum in the vertical communications and relationships. For example, there is a huge salary gap between the top leaders and the lower ranking staff, which indirectly indicates and recognizes individual status. The great distances in terms of position and compensation have shaped the subservient environment, which is likely to shape the followers inferior minds and feelings. This might lead to the low motivational level that is visibly explicated by the tendency of the followers to remain passive and wait for direction from the top. In this sense, higher leaders are perceived as possessing higher status and more power, and that they have certain privileges in shaping the future of the followers. Respondent 14 reflected:



*“Those who are at the top, they are really on the top and those who are at the lower level, they are there, and there is a big gap. Therefore, there is a significant communication gap”. (Respondent 14/institution/female)*

One important aspect that cannot be neglected by the leaders is to understand the correct use of titles, protocol and rank in the society. In certain circumstances, failure to address the correct title of a leader might indicate that the person does not understand the social ranking in the society, and he/she would be negatively impressed. Since status is significantly recognized, the top or authoritative leaders sometimes tend to have too much over power, and, consequently, dominate the organization. Respondent 13 elaborated:

*“We are still a feudalistic society. That’s why we have titles, such as Dato’, Tan Sri, and so forth. Let’s say there is a same person like me sitting here, and he is just an ordinary professor (without any title), not many people will listen to him, the impact is not there.”(Respondent 12/institution/male)*

Malaysia has an elaborate system of titles and honorific which delineate the levels of authority and social status, even though Islam does not permit such inequality. The social status indicated by some titles, as mentioned above (the titles were given by the royals to those who are perceived to have given some contribution to the society), seems to be the influential factor for hegemonic practices in Malaysian organizations. The words *‘the impact is not there’* refers to the authority or privilege that is hypothetically possessed by those who have been conferred with certain titles given by royalty. Those who have the ‘title’, gain high respect and command, and there is low likelihood of them being opposed by the followers.

Stratification in Malaysian society was closely link to the colonial heritage. It began with the segregation in educational system which became one of the cornerstones of British colonial policy. The educational system during the colonial era divided the society into a few different classes: (a) elite class who were Malay royalty and aristocrat, (b) medium class who were the commoners that worked in administrative office and schools, and (c) the lower class who worked in agricultural sector. Therefore, colonial educational policy directly

contributed to the creation of status gap in the society from independent era until present. The underlying point is that, Malaysia, even though it was given independence in 1957, its political, economic and social institutions were still retaining the colonial framework that manned by the secular-nationalist elites of the three major communal groups (UMNO-MCA-MIC political parties) . The consequent impact finally became the acceptable culture in the society that framed the people into a kind of subservient and inferior mindset which is rather inappropriate to the new millennium era.

### **6.2.2.3 Malaysian Culture and the Leadership Quality**

As mentioned earlier, Malaysia is multiracial society, with the Malays and indigenous peoples making up around 60 percent, while the Chinese comprise 31 percent and Indians around 8 percent. Therefore, this implies that there is more than one culture in Malaysian leadership. However, these ethnic groups share some common beliefs and values, besides their own cultural and religious heritage (Poon, 1998).

### **6.2.2.4 Malay Culture**

As partly mentioned in section 6.2.2.1 above, some leadership practices imply that Malaysian cultural values are ‘face saving’ attitude, the encouraging of indirect ways of communication and giving feedback, passive obedience to superiors, strong reverence for elders and traditional leaders, and the importance of a close relationship with higher levels in the workplace (Mansor & Kennedy, 2000). Although there are no doubt that these cultural values have been widely accepted by Malaysian people, in certain instances, the underpinning values have otherwise developed the authoritarian kinds of leadership amongst Malays.

*“Ok let’s talk about Malay culture. I might not be an expert on Malay culture but this is from my observation that a lot has to do with relationships that you know and because of that it creeps into the working condition. You have to foster good relationships with who you know, things are not direct, and everything takes place in an indirect way. Saving face is extremely important. In the meeting nobody says things directly, because of culture again. So these are the things that*

*work against true leadership (...) if you are the leader in an organisation, and because of your culture you are expected to do many things [according to the directions from the top even though the purposes were not clear]". (Respondent 24/institution/male)*

The above quotation exhibits another cultural type in the context, that is high in humane orientation. The concern for group harmony and maintain good relationship particularly with upper management level indeed is very important for future career survival. Leaders are encouraged to maintain a degree of distance and formally displaying their credentials and positions. Thus, this indicates that the people was rather dependant and would be very difficult to change. The people were likely to remain in their comfort zone, fear that any new things would disturb the harmonious environment. Similarly, the leaders would find difficulties to make changes in the organization unless there was a direction from the top. Preserving harmonious relationship was also extended to the sense of compassion for individuals even tough in the case of non-performing leaders. There were very rare cases in Malaysian public service where non-performing leaders were dismissed from their jobs or being demoted from their current positions, only because of to save their 'face'. Hence, the circumstance elicited that achievements and tasks could be overshadowed by concerns for the welfare and the feelings of individuals.

Respondent 4 advocated and extended his explanation as follow:

*"Through my experience as Head of Department, we cannot get rid of the appointment of staff based on cronyism, which involves sympathy and empathy during the selection process, particularly when the candidate is related to the top people, even though he/she is not fully qualified. Similarly, during the promotion exercise for our staff, sometimes, due to seniority, the person is sympathetically being considered to be promoted even though he has not demonstrated good performance". (Respondent 4/administration/male)*

Thus, Mansor & Kennedy (2000) argue that despite the fact that Malays have strong humane values and practices, for instance, accommodating, forgiving, and peace loving attitude; these strong values tend to be misused, particularly in the selection and recruitment process, promotion and disciplinary circumstances,

which can result in leaders overlooking incidents of incompetence, low productivity and low performance.

#### **6.2.2.5 Islamic Values**

Malaysian culture is intrinsically associated with Islam (Mansor & Kennedy, 2000). Islamic values fundamentally underpin the practice of Malay leaders particularly in the government sector, and while some of these values are deemed acceptable by other ethnic or religious groups, such as trust, honesty, and fairness, in the modern and increasingly borderless world, the embracing and practice of the Islamic teachings seem to be slowly fading away. Respondent 4 advocated:

*“Those days’ people held strongly to the Islamic teachings and practice, and their practices were visibly manifested in the older generation’s life, however, we would be very delighted if the present generation holds onto the Islamic principles as well. Although we know that the Western lifestyle has dominated the world, and the challenges are so great. Previously external influences were less significant; therefore, it was much easier to govern our organization and country. The global impact and external influences are quite remarkable and the current generation is not sufficiently prepared to face those challenges. However, the religious values are undeniably very important to make good leaders. These principles teach us to be the true leaders that serve their subordinates generously in the faith of God”. (Respondent 4/administration/male)*

Even though Malaysian culture was always being associated with Islam, but Islam was doubtfully being in practice by the Malays, particularly amongst the young generations. Two quotations given above and below exhibited that respondent 15 completely agreed with respondent 4 and asserted that if everybody holds on to Islamic principles, then the nation will be safe. He gave some examples of the weakening of Islamic practices, for instance, Islam promotes any development initiatives, but many tend to follow destruction, Islam promotes unity, but many try to destroy the unity, and, as a matter of fact, some felt very proud doing the opposite. He emphasised, *“Actually this is very dangerous because the younger people might pick up the wrong things”*. Therefore, these transformations in the society have sent wrong signals to the younger generation, in that it might occur

either through direct or indirect ways. Deeply concerned and worried about what he saw as a devastating trend, he elaborated further:

*“Our older people have more patience and self-control. But the present generation don't. They can get angry and rebellious very quickly. It seems as though people like to deal with an enemy rather than friends, so these are all negative teachings for the youngsters. I feel very sad with our current political situation, it is very shameful! It looks like a drama, for example, today they are friends to each other, but tomorrow they become enemies. Why are they transmitting that information to the children? Why are they being so inconsistent, that simply twisting the values? Where are those good values? Can we just forget about other people's wrongdoings? In fact, surprisingly, they are so proud of what they have done. This is extremely dangerous for the children. The children might think that they can just simply shout at or disobey their parents whenever they like without feeling guilty or regret. So what are the underlying principles? If this situation happens in an organisation, definitely we can expect the worse. So it is very unfortunate; the leaders or politicians are only thinking about their personal advantage in our society! (Respondent 15/institution/male*

The above quotation illuminates the current trend in the society, that consciously and unconsciously detach from the right Islamic teaching. His lament insight on the lower degree of decency amongst the politicians as leaders in the country, seems to have close connection with the distressing phenomena. He admitted that this phenomenon tends to be the likely reason for the existing messy and muddled life in the society. *“People are getting confused about of who is the hero and who is the devil”*, he grumbled.

No doubt, this phenomenon was closely attributed to the colonialization effort. As a matter of fact, Akhtarul & Farhatullah (2004) confess that western colonialism has been entrenched in the psyche of concerned Muslim throughout the world as a baneful and distressing episode, Islam in its comprehensive sense as religion and State became a common victim because not only was Islam separated from governmental affairs, but even in its minimal scope as faith and ritual obligations, its practice was circumscribed. Islam perceptively fail to generate 'a political nationalism' capable of attracting mass support, or initiate 'widespread social and political protest'. Islam has been gradually strayed away from its original principles.

Looking back on the historical tracks, prior to the independence, the country was led by the English-educated bureaucrats trained by the British colonial, the leadership of the Malay community was formed by default, through a tacit collusion with the British authorities, who embarked on a witch-hunt of the Malay nationalists of Leftist and Islamic persuasions. Such tacit collaboration led to the birth of the Federal Constitution of 1957, through which the peripheral role of Islam in the post-independence nation-building of Malaysia was crystallized (Shamsul, 2001).

There was no consensus obtained by those who framed the Federal Constitution to visualised Islam to be the core defining characteristic of the newly independent nation-state. The Malayan delegation that negotiated for independence with the British government in 1956 comprised representatives of State rulers and ministers of the three political parties alliance, which had won an overwhelming victory in the 1995 general elections. A Commonwealth Commission chaired by Lord Reid was duly appointed by the Queen and the Conference of Rulers to draft the Federation of Malaya's Constitution. Ironically, no Malayan citizen, who would presumably be sensitive to local conditions, was included in the Commission ( Akhtarul & Farhatullah, 2004).

He exerted further, the constitutional provision was rather treating Islam as a tool to achieve certain racial nationalistic aims, in which such provision violates the Islamic principle of universalism, which does not recognise racial dichotomy as the basis of any social system. The State rulers initially opposed any declaration installing Islam as the established religion of the country, for they feared such an enactment would transfer any authority they wielded as heads of Islam in their own states to the proposed Head of Federation. The Sultans proposed that the purpose of making Islam the official religion was 'primarily for ceremonial purposes, for instance to enable prayers to be offered in the Islamic way on official public occasions such as the installation of the *Yang diPertuan Agong*, Independence Day and similar occasion'. Obviously, the Federal Constitution effectively reduced the role of religion in nation-building to the private sphere.

Despite intermittent calls for Islam to be accorded a more than peripheral role in administering the new nation-state, such solitary voices were overshadowed by the prevailing need to maintain political pursuit of the existing ruling parties (Akhtarul & Farhatullah, 2004).

Hence, until there is a revise for the Federal Constitution or changes in those who lead the government, Islam would not be a religion as way of life, instead it would remain in such a way the culture would overshadow the Islamic teaching. There is a secular concept - separation between religion and State, The secularisation of the administration ran deep in the society, as well as in legal system. Hence, it could be anticipated that Islam was marginalised in leadership practice, remain only in the form of faith and ritual practice of those who are still strong in their Islamic believe and worldview. Those who were able to manage and lead in Islamic ways were from their own initiatives and efforts, and the environment support system was rather unfavourable for the institutionalisation of Islamic leadership.

#### **6.2.2.6 Chinese Culture**

Chinese culture has its own unique culture that is distinct from the overarching Malaysian culture. In China, from a young age, the children are taught the principles that hard work is equal to success. Chinese parents always emphasise that if they work hard they will be successful and could become a good leader. Chinese place high regards for ethical behaviour, and they are expected to behave in highly ethical way. They also use the word 'face' to refer to this ethical facet.

Face is collective, not individual for Chinese. Children are taught not to lose the family face when they are very young. The family 'face' would be awesomely loss in any occasion when their children have failed their expectations or done something wrong (Cheng, 1995). Likewise, an employee's error or misconduct may cause the company to lose face. Correspondingly, an individual's achievement is not just considered an honour for him/herself, but more so for the family, the community that he or she belongs to.

'Face' is a notion of reputation for Chinese. It is one of the powerful concepts that influences their behaviours and conducts in performing their jobs or undertakings. Corollary to face is the inseparable concept of '*guanxi*' or "relations", and that face and *guanxi* work hand-in-hand. Ho (1976) shows the complexity of the Chinese concept of face: "the respectability and/or deference that a person can claim for him/herself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in the social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in the position as well as acceptably in his social conduct". Therefore, it is essentially important that many Chinese see themselves as seamlessly integrated with a wide range of other people, including their schoolmates, co-workers, and extended family, as well as their social, professional, and friendship networks. Consequently, Chinese will enthusiastically work hard together as a family or as an organization as their tradition and to avoid the loss of their 'face'.

However, in the Malaysian public sector there is a career limit for non-Malays. Perhaps, this is a likely reason for Malay incumbents in many top public sector posts. In Malaysia, the majority of Chinese work in the private sector (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003). "*Therefore, with the hard work principle, high ethical attitude, and good management skills, the Chinese could be better leaders*", asserts respondent 24. *They give greater emphasis to leadership qualities and performance rather than who is more powerful and authoritative*", she quoted.

Explaining further about the leaders in government departments and public universities, which comprises more Malays than any other ethnicity, respondent 22 cynically articulated:

*"I wish a few bosses should be out (from the government department). Why should they be there if they are not performing? If we look at foreign universities, relatively nobody (the leaders) sits on the low rail. So what is the standard of our leaders?" (Respondent 22/institution/female)*

Her wishes reveal the other side of the facts that some incompetent leaders were at the top because these leaders are chosen less for their competence and policy contributions but more on their sycophancy to the incumbent authority, known



for their high praises for the incumbent government rather than for their innovative and managerial initiatives, and that there has been a lot of 'fleeing' from the past. Her comparison that she made with foreign universities was to express her views that, had the country been run by capable leaders, the higher education would be much better.

The quotas in recruitment and promotion and overt dominant race in civil service including the higher education, which favour only Malays would unnecessarily narrowing its talent pool (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003). This is prevalent when many, not only among non-Malays but also increasingly among Malays overseas graduation found that the public service is not of the pleasant and challenging working conditions.

#### **6.2.2.7 Quality of Public University Education**

When asked about the quality of the present graduates, respondent 12 gave an unexpected answer. Coming from someone who has devoted almost all of his life towards greater education for Malaysians, he said:

*"I think I am not interested to teach anymore, you see, our students these days are not of the same quality as in the past. Their quality is way below par." (Respondent 12/institution/male)*

He added frustratingly,

*"Even top scoring students in our school appear to have no idea of what they are learning, because most of them just memorize instead of understand the subjects. So the examination result is just a matter of statistics, such as how many passes and failures, the average scores, and so on. Moreover, that (the statistics) does not tell everything about students' performance."*

After almost 40 years teaching in one public university, respondent 12 was not reluctant to share his feelings and intuition concerning the current student achievement. To him, there is a larger issue that needs to be addressed, rather than just who and how many students from which ethnic group should qualify to enter the public universities. His insightful remarks obviously pointed out on the

systemic predicament that need comprehensive analysis and engaged various relevant stakeholders and professionals. His compassion drawn from the long academic and life experiences in educational profession witnessed various evolution and revolution in higher education locally and internationally. For this reason, when this point was asked, he responded to the question with disheartened facial expression. The descending trends of the higher education quality really stroke his endurance and passionate in his profession, that indeed reflects his frustration and dissatisfaction. He then continued,

*"The question is, are we producing quality students? For example, if our graduates are not capable to compete at international level or feel inferior to go further, let's not talk about meritocracy or promoting our higher education to other people. We should look for what needs to be done to improve the current system."*

He gave a remarkable reflection on the primacy of measures that the MOHE should currently embark on, that is too improve and expedite the internal problems rather than expanding the higher education market or introducing another new concept to the current system [the meritocracy concept]. He believed that better quality would automatically attract and self-promote the prevailing higher education to foreigners.

Another respondent discontentedly advocated:

*"Huuh! (Long sigh while putting her glass of water on the table). I think they (the student) shouldn't be there in the first place, but because they are already being selected...That's why, if we look at our graduates, they find it so difficult to find jobs. In the past, there was a standard (qualification) in order to be admitted to the university. But now with so many universities, I doubt the standard is being followed". (Respondent 25/institution/male)*

When asked further about his disappointment, he answered:

*"From the curriculum to the teaching staff, these are all questionable! Big question mark!"*

Respondent 6 made a comparison with the neighbouring countries suggesting that the performance of Malaysian institutions is far below these countries.

*“In terms of physical development, we are far behind Singapore, but we are slightly ahead of Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. However, in terms of educational development, we are definitely far behind Singapore; we are somewhat behind Indonesia, where I think their educational system is relatively more autonomous. I think Thailand and Vietnam are about overtaking us now. So, we need to learn the advances from these institutions. We don't need to go very far, let's look at what Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia are doing. For example, Vijaramus College in Thailand was set up at the same time as our Malay College. Now they have left us far behind, for instance, they are hiring somebody of higher academic reputation to lead the College. We should keep in mind that if our educational standard is behind these countries, then in a few years' time, Malaysian development will be behind these countries as well.” (Respondent 6/institution/female).*

Her deliberate comments illuminated her evaluative mood and expectation for a rather efficient and admirable management of higher education. Her responses disclosed the long overdue of a properly strategies plans and works in higher education system that indeed should become the pertinent move in order to be on the 'racing track' with the neighbouring countries.

### **6.2.3 Technological Impact**

There is a strong agreement from all respondents that the advancement in technology is spreading rapidly, and that the access to vast information around the world (Beechler & Javidan, 2007) has empowered individuals to increase their personal and working abilities. Directly and indirectly, technology plays an important role in helping leaders to perform their duties and speeding communication with other people. In this respect, respondent 13 said:

*“If a leader doesn't make use of the technology, how is he going to make a real impact? IT culture is free for all, which means you will be evaluated and observed by other people. Technology has seeped into our working life, that's why our leaders have to realise this (situation), and if we look at the general political scenario in our country, such as in the last general election, the trend of political support has changed due to the information that has been spread through the Internet, and this has shaped people's minds.” (Respondent 18/institution/male)*

Explicitly, respondent 13 gave the example of how the information technology empowered the changes and shaped the mind-set of the people. Hence, the

impact of technology is pervasive including the workplace environment, particularly concerning the aspects of communication and networking. Organizational members, including the leaders, play an important role in the creation and interpretation of technology. The interpretation of technology determines how it is used, what it can do, and, ultimately, its contribution to organizational performance. Respondent 3 advocated:

*“Technology is very important nowadays, I still remember when I read a book titled ‘The world is flat’, it said that many times we need instant results, data, and information particularly for leaders to make on-time decisions. Technology can help the leaders to be a good and effective leader, to create a vision and agendas and then getting support from their staff. Technology helps to communicate the vision and mission, for example video conferencing can replace a meeting.” (Respondent 3/administration/male)*

The majority of the respondents agree that technology should be the mechanism to enhance leadership efficiency within and outside of the organisation. Here, Avolio & Kahai (2003) elucidate that technology has become an integral component for improving organizational effectiveness as well as survival in a global e-based economy. No doubt, technology helps in closing the communication gap between the leaders and the followers, as well as amongst the peers. More importantly, it provides opportunities for the leaders to learn from the best experts around the world. As organizations become increasingly global, this capability becomes increasingly relevant (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). Organizational members are perceived as being more knowledgeable, as they could access the vast array of knowledge and information on the Internet. One example is on cross-cultural understanding, by which understanding other cultural values would increase the awareness to respect and appreciate others’ views, sensitivities and capabilities.

### **6.2.3.1 Technological Effect on Leadership**

The effect of technology on leadership could be viewed from how the technology helps the leaders in response to change, and how the leaders effectively use the technology to effect change. Avolio, Kahai & Dodge (2000) illuminate that the

effect will, in part, depend on the technology's structural features and spirit, the group's internal systems, and the organization's internal culture. They assert that a leadership system may be enabled, undermined, or completely disabled by the introduction of technology. They give one extreme possibility of how technology can impact a closed and autocratic organizational system, in which in this type of organization, the leaders are rarely challenged. The researcher quotes the following explanation by Avolio, Kahai & Dodge (2000), as this was perceived as being very relevant to the current undergoing phenomenon experienced by the leaders and their staff in this context of study.

*“Leaders may have an implicit model of followers as passive, dependent, and non-confrontational under the autocratic type. With the introduction of technology, access to a broader array of information can challenge pre-existing beliefs of what constitutes a full range of appropriate leadership and followership behaviour. New technology helps develop the relationships within and between networks where ‘spontaneous’ collaboration could emerge. Access to new information and development of knowledge can transform what was once considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviours by leaders and followers, resulting in a rethinking of how each should work together to accomplish their own and organizational goals. Indeed, a leadership system may co-evolve with the insertion of new technology, morphing into a new or perhaps more adaptive social-cultural system. Alternatively, inserting new technology can also destroy a social system leaving a leadership vacuum that must be addressed.”*

#### **6.2.4 Economic Impact**

One of the leader's responsibilities is to strengthen the performance of the organisation. This could be achieved through strong financial and economic resources. Leaders need to be creative in order to be able to generate funds for organisational growth. The economic factors have impacted many sectors in our life in many ways. In general, public higher institutions are unexceptional, even though they are government-funded bodies. A dean of one faculty *discloses* “since we are very dependent on the Government, if there is a problem in our economy, we are impacted directly”. Thus, every leader should be well aware of any financial and economic deficiency and their consequences to the management and administration, curriculum delivery, and the people in the institution as a whole. Respondent 7 explained:

*“The economic factor is very important, because we need to have money to move, in the event of economy down turn, of course leaders need to do some adjustment and get the people to understand the situation that they need to do the job in different ways”. (Respondent 7/administration/male)*

Another respondent drew attention to other ways that economic issues affect higher education. He pointed out the importance of strengthening collaboration between higher institutions and industry as a way to gain the economic strength. Closer ties between the industries and higher institutions might open up many economic opportunities and advantages for both parties. In this regard, leaders play crucial roles in initiating the collaboration.

*“In any system we cannot be on our own anymore, we have to collaborate from the initiation of the programme, curriculum development, and the delivery of the programme, we have to do the teaching and learning together with them, we could get their input, and our students could be based with them for a certain period of time, and the assessment can be done by them. There is a potential that the students could be employed upon the completion of their studies. So it is a sustainable programme, which is the important part for the leaders. We need to have a system or mechanism to support industrial collaboration since people are expecting this. Some industries have shown their high commitment towards our programmes”. (Respondent 17/institution/male)*

In the past, as public institutions were financially funded by the Government, leaders may see themselves as not being critically affected by economic factors. However, since the corporatization of the universities in 2002, the Government only provides 70% of university funds; the other 30% is to be generated by the universities. Respondent 17 added:

*“That is why our jobs have changed; our jobs are becoming more challenging, to generate more funds for the university. So we have to be like an entrepreneur. We have to know many people; we have to make many connections and network, so our responsibilities have increased.”*

### **6.2.5 Legal Impact**

When asked about how the legal aspect affects the role as a leader, respondent 16 spontaneously and eagerly replied,

*“Huuuh! Fantastic! There’s a big stone in front of us...not only the leaders, but the students were also voiceless!”*

Another respondent revealed the same notion:

*“Well, from my past lengthy experience in the public university, I would say it’s full of myth, the same goes for the media freedom and freedom of speech.” (Respondent 15/institution/male)*

Nonetheless, respondent 21 exhibited that the existence of the Universities and University Colleges Act, 1971 (UCA) has continuously played a significant role in controlling any dissent views, or disagreement or dispute by academics and students. He asserted that lecturers and students were constantly being reminded of this law by higher management.

*“It is so frustrating, because we don’t have much choice as the system is already in place to scrutinize any potential ‘troublemaker’ he added.*

*“What worries us is that there is a weakening of intellectual discourse and lack of critical argument and assessment made by the academicians. In fact, we can see now our universities are far behind international ranking, so for me this is one of the indications of this sad situation.”* replied respondent 14.

One example, under Section 15 of the UUCA 1971 –university students are not allowed to form an alliance, support, empathise with or oppose any political party, labour union or any organization or group without prior permission from the university Vice-Chancellor. Under the new amendment of the Act made in 2009, the new sections 4a and 4b of this Act, it says “For the purpose of selecting a fit and proper person for the post of Vice-Chancellor or to any position, the Minister has the power to appoint under this Act, and the Minister shall, from time to time, appoint a committee to advise on the appointment”. The insertion of this section was prejudicial as seen by the academics, as it conveys explicitly the message and intention of those in power to control the higher institutions. The academics came to this conclusion by reflecting back on the previous situation; where without the stated version of this practice in the Act, the Minister had already implemented the practice by ensuring that the top post of the university was filled by those of the same political inclination. Respondent 11 asserted:

*“Honestly, we could not understand why the top post was filled by those who don’t deserve the place, just because he is so close to the Minister or what? We feel so disappointed because there was no thorough and convincing way being conducted to appoint the most credible candidate to lead our university. It is very shameful that some top leaders’ resumes don’t suit the post...(giggle with cynical smile)”. (Respondent 11/institution/male)*

Clearly, from the respondents’ views, the legal factor has created quite a shocking dilemma that leads to the intense state of affairs in academic freedom.

### **6.3 Organizational Factors**

Previous research has found that there is no universally agreed set of components that comprise the context for leadership roles and conduct in an organizational setting. It is likely to depend on the nature and setting of the organisation, task and followers. However, an examination of several relevant sources in the literature (Porter & Mclaughlin, 2006: Hackman & Wageman, 2005: Osborn et al., 2002: Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Shamir & Howell, 1999: Mowday & Sutton, 1993 and Pawar & Eastman, 1997) suggest a fair degree of consensus that the following components are important and deserve study in their own right –culture, goals, people, processes, state/condition, structure and organisation life cycle.

Therefore, based on the above suggestions, participants have been asked about how they perceived the interplay of those factors with leadership. In addition to these, many also suggested other factors in their workplace environment.

#### **6.3.1 Nature of the Working Environment**

In its essence as a public organization, MHE and its higher institutions are managed by a centralised and highly structured administration, which reinforces top-down interaction, centralized decision-making, controlled communication, formalization, and executive determined goals.

This administration is believed to be inherited from the colonial system even though Malaysia gained independence in 1957 (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008).



When asked about the nature of the working environment, respondent 22, who is a senior lecturer in a higher education institution, immediately responded:

*“Oh! It is all about hierarchy and bureaucracy, the bureaucratic and hierarchy divides the line so much. For example a top person will not come down to the small cubicle of a clerk. I haven’t seen it actually, I have been there for one year, I might be wrong. But in a Japanese firm even the boss goes out for a drink with the very low staff, the technical staff. But do you see that happen in a government department? Do you see the top man going out with the driver for a drink? This one I cannot accept. This hierarchy, and boundary is artificial, I feel it should be removed. Leadership is more than the boundary, it doesn’t mean you only sit in a cosy room and mingle with other people of the same level.”*  
(Respondent 22/institution/female)

Talking in a similar vein, respondent 4 who has been working for 26 years in various departments and positions in Malaysian Higher Education in the central administration office answered:

*“...now the situation is so hierarchical, so many layers, I wish it was flatter, which is good, then the line of authority will be short, and the top will only do the supervisory functions, let the institutions run the business.”* (Respondent 4/administration/male)

Advocating the idea, another respondent shared:

*“I think the people in the Ministry want to control many things, for instance, even to the extent of what form that we need to have ..., I mean why should they do that, let the university handle, sometimes when I look at the officer, mercy on him to get that kind of nonsense job.”*(Respondent 14/institution/female)

Reflecting on his current position as Director of Enforcement in Private Higher Education, respondent 14 above expressed her dissatisfaction with the mindless conformance to the rules and regulations imposed by government agencies and looks forward to the implementation of any change. Working within ‘calculable rules’ (Weber, 1947), she felt that her job is so constrained and her opportunity to give more contribution according to her skills and capability seems impossible. With some frustration reflected on his face, respondent 4 made a link with another effect that bothered him and his staff; the unnecessary workload due to redundant work and administrative red tape:

*“..so these are the things that a leader of an organization is not functioning well, a lot of unnecessary work and bureaucracy, we are supposed to do certain things but other things keep bothering us, and he may not want to do, but as a leader he has to.” (Respondent 4/administration/male)*

Supporting the idea, other respondents tried to make logical reasoning that the effect of bureaucracy would lead to inefficiency of work, slow decision making process and unproductive services, particularly in the central administration office. For example, their concern was more on the time-consuming process of getting approval for applying research grants, overseas travelling for conference presentations or getting approval to conduct research or doing consultancy, and so forth. These are the handicaps surrounding their working environment, which deem to demoralize their initiatives. Advocating further, respondent 17 described:

*“That’s why when we talk about the roles of university leaders; they should not be burdened with loads of managerial and administrative works because they are going to lead. When the leaders are being burdened with such responsibilities, their time will be spending more on the managerial and administrative jobs, and thus reduce their leading roles.” (Respondent 17/institution/male)*

He continued further:

*“A leader’s job is to give a sort of energy to the organisation, whereas management is dealing with the routine and complexity of work processes, administration on the other hand is dealing with procedures and rules. So leadership is about synergy, vision and change. So a leader cannot hold on to mundane jobs, he must be creative.”*

Thinking about the future, there were also some concerns that this predicament might hamper the higher institutions’ vision and mission that the Ministry’s target is to see a few of the public universities will be listed on the regional or international ranking, respondent 12 shared his experience:

*“I had a chance meeting with our former Minister, and I told him that many of my overseas friends laughed at me when I mentioned that I need approval from the central administration office one month in advance before travel. One of my friends said ‘I just need permission from my wife to travel (laughing). So, it means that we are very hierarchical, but in order to survive we have to live with this thing, because this is the structure unless it changes.” (Respondent 12/institution/male)*

It can be observed that from these responses there were feelings of exasperation with the current situation, and changes are fully welcomed. The underlying reason is because bureaucratic knowledge is all about schematization and bureaucratic procedures ignore all the subtleties of real social existence and reduce everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae. Whether it is a matter of forms, rules, statistics, or questionnaires, it is always a matter of simplification. It is a matter of applying very simple pre-existing templates to complex and often ambiguous situations. The result often leaves those forced to deal with bureaucratic administration with the impression that they are dealing with people who have for some arbitrary reason decided to put on a set of glasses that only allows them to see only 2% of what is in front of them (Graeber, 2006).

On another occasion, a few years ago, the Ministry put forth its long-term strategic plan, which spells out the aim to bring higher institutions to a lofty level and as a centre of excellence. However, as explained by one of the local university Vice Chancellors in his weekly column on the university's web page, the achievement of this objective depends on the operating processes, either the processes are still at status quo or undergoing some transformation process. He asserted, "is our university a bulwark of bureaucracy and conservatism in defiance of the rapidly changing world?" Enforcing his concern, he quoted the speech of the former Director General of Education, during his public lecture at the Ministry of Higher Education on 16 Sept 2008:

*"The many notable changes to our education system did not address the bureaucratic and examination orientated culture, we are frozen in the way we think, we are overly bureaucratic."*

Although the physical establishment of higher institutions continues to accommodate the ever-expanding need for tertiary education, somehow, it does not exploit to the fullest the potential of university and higher education resources. The following responses from respondent 22 and respondent 18 explicitly portrayed the consequences:

*"If I am in the Ministry, and I am at the top level, and I have power to speak, I will speak out because I know on that occasion my words will be heard. Honestly, it depends highly on how senior you are and what is*

*your position. If you have the power to command change then you can speak out, but if you don't, my advice is don't be bothered..."*  
(Respondent 22/institution/female)

*"...we are perpetual, that's why we have been the same over so many years, no changes, and unluckily the leadership and managerial process are alike"* (Respondent 18/institution/male)

The quotation "*the leadership and managerial process are alike*" implies that the role as a leader has been undermined to the extent that their role is merely carrying out the existing operation, and that they are rarely able to implement changes as they would wish, unless they receive consent from the top hierarchy.

### **6.3.2 Authority vs. Contribution**

Throughout the interviews, hierarchy and bureaucracy were frequently referred to as a trait of a feudalistic system. This is because Malaysia has been colonised by many countries such as Portugal, Holland, Britain and Japan (Black & Bell, 2011). As feudalism symbolizes social rank and status, the prevailing structures within the higher education organizations seems to echo this heritage. Social rank and status are embedded in the administrative and managerial structure, salary and imbursement scheme, working culture, social interaction, as well as spoken and written communications within the organization. To some extent, rank and status supersede leaders' credentials. It emphasises authority more than contribution, as respondent 12 mentioned:

*"This kind of structure exists because of our feudalistic system, and this is very important for feudalistic people. They do not care about the doings; they only care about how to control people. Feudalistic people do not learn engineering or mathematics, they learn about how to rule the country. So, they learn about politics, economy, history, and emphasise the ruling and organisational part of the country. Similarly, if we emphasise the governing part more than anything else, we are actually supporting and strengthening the feudal system. I am also part of the feudal society, but I do not agree with this kind of leadership in academic institutions because it will jeopardise the academic world."*(Respondent 12/institution/male)

This is why another respondent (respondent 15) asserted that there were overwhelming perceptions amongst followers that leaders are perceived as very

important and powerful and that the followers are just accept and follow whatever is being suggested and directed by the leaders. Decision making is likely to rely heavily on leaders' verdicts, thus, meetings were always dominated by the superior or top leader. From researcher's own experience of working in one of the departments of the Ministry of Higher Education, it can be observed that staffs are rather obedient, and the leadership is likely to be more forceful. Any change or initiation normally comes from or is recommended by the top. Respondent 12 explained that the social gap is quite visible between the leaders and the followers; that humbleness and 'serving for the people' amongst the leaders is not commonplace. Supporting the idea, respondent 16 noted *'those who are at the top, they are really on the top and those who are at the lower level, they are there, and there is a big gap'*. What seems important here is, when the authority is perceived belonging to the top person in the organisation, it subdues the sense and spirit to contribute, and the contribution is always conditional. In other words, leaders will not enjoy their jobs as there is always 'something at the back of their mind' and a conflict of interest might counteract their initial endeavour.

Becoming a leader is seen as a privilege in this context as the leaders possess extra power, authority and command. Consequently, disputing or challenging leaders' ideas are seen as risky behaviour. Therefore, the culture is not the one that fosters ideas even though the academic structure (based on collegial basis) is not as rigid as those in non-academic organizations.

Although the development of a critical mind is essential for higher education, the practice appears to experience some dilemma. Quoting an example from her experience as head of department, respondent 6 illustrated:

*"Inside the meeting, I found that sometimes if you are against the idea (of the leader), it is as if you are against the person who is putting up the idea in the first place. And in certain instances, if the relationship (with the leader) is not good, no matter how good the idea given by that person, it will just be shot down. I don't know... but I saw this happen in front of me, this is very discouraging." (Respondent 6/administration/female)"*

Even though this situation might be common in other places as well, it appears more prevalent in this context. Asked further whether the situation could inhibit the nurturing process of leadership, she gave the following reply:

*“What I am saying is, we have a very low tolerance, that our system does not consciously take the opposite view, I don’t think we consciously reward somebody who foreseeing sees the other side of the coin. I think this is important, because by taking the different view you will get a sort of fully approved plan, but what really happens is we are not deliberately discussing the points, maybe we think that we have to make a fast decision, or wasting time doing the discussion. Sometimes some of us said ‘why should we deliberate so much, we already know the answers, why do we need to discuss further? Come on, let’s get down to work’. So this is how we think. So those who by nature prefer to find other alternative views will end up with being frustrated. Later on, these people will also be the same as the rest...(laughing), gradually adopting the culture, nobody will give contradict ideas. If you try to discuss further, you will realise that every time only you are the one who dares to speak out, that you will feel like as if you are the only devil. It will go on to the extent that people might feel “funny” for coming out with ideas and suggestions. By right for the organisation to move, varying ideas should be welcomed.”*

When she became a head of department in one university, she used to discuss matters in detail, but then people kept on complaining and saying that the discussion will bring a headache. This perception begins to lead to a view that if the leader seeks ideas from others, he or she will be perceived as incapable and a non-visionary leader. Hence the perception of the leadership is that the leader should have the right answers and should make decisions, as expected in a high power distance culture.

On deliberating the situation, Ford (2010) confesses that the dissonance between performing the roles and identities that were expected of them and their preference for other identity performances brought numerous tensions and conflicts into existence, which leaders appeared to be struggling with. It was interesting to note from the discussions and observations of leaders that each level of management in the hierarchy appeared to hold the next highest level responsible for the problems in their work. For example, the middle management team members blamed the top management for the centrality of decision making

and leadership failures, and senior managers blamed the executive management team for failing to involve them in important decisions.

### **6.3.3 Organizational Leadership vs. Academic Leadership**

Closely related to the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure is organizational or executive leadership. Perhaps this is another mechanism in centralised management, which places higher emphasis on institutions to conduct their affairs in accordance with government requirements. Top and middle university leaders are expected to perform multitasking jobs; the academic and managerial roles. However, from the interview responses and observation, the managerial and administrative roles are overtaking the academic roles. Even though there is no clear line for such divisional functions, to some extent, as indicated by respondents 12, 13 and 17, the portion is 70 per cent managerial and administrative work, and 30 per cent academic work. Leaders are expected to manage and administer their faculties or departments effectively within the anticipated and unanticipated jobs, and simultaneously, they are also being scrutinized on the faculties or department's academic performance. They are struggling within these ambiguous and conflicting roles, coming from the directions of the central office. Respondent 12 shared his experience:

*“...in academia, people don't place high respect because of your position. In academia, the highest respect will be for the people who contribute the most, and this is easy to identify by looking at their CVs. So when people talk about academic culture, it means less emphasis on administrative roles. Sadly, we are emphasising so much on the non-academic functions, such as the quality standard, the ranking and rating, the key performance indicators, generating funds and other bits.”*  
(Respondent 12/institution/male)

In fact he is looking forward to observe the serious implementation of the new career pathways to be implemented by the Ministry, so much so that this new career pathway hopefully could crystallise the problem between these two competing and contradictory roles and anticipation. Removing some of these unwelcome burdens of leadership might resolve some of the leadership problems in higher education.

Talking in a similar vein, respondent 13 who is also the VC explained:

*“Sometimes we are emphasise organisational performance more than academic performance. Yesterday I gave a welcoming speech at one university’s event to celebrate those who have been given excellent awards for their works. I told them the winner does not only mean winning a medal in any competition, but the winner must also be very successful as an academic. Sometimes the organisation is very successful, but from an academic point of view we are not that competitive, we do not generate knowledge. So for me when we talk about academic leadership, 70% of the work must be academic work, and the other 30% should be the administrative work, not vice versa.”*  
(Respondent 13/institution/male)

Elaborating on the nature of his work as a Dean of a Faculty of Education, respondent 17 felt that even though many people were unfavourable towards the current leadership structure, this does not mean that the leaders are hesitant about performing their jobs. Rather, they confess that the existing system and future direction of higher education looks like being fairly unsettled and vaguely strategized. Referring to the professors’ jobs in his university, he pointed out that their roles are largely involved in managerial and administrative works. Senior professors and lecturers realise that at this stage of their career they should be focusing more on utilising their expertise and undertaking core responsibilities, such as research and publications, mentoring young lecturers, and developing their university’s niche area. However, the conflicting roles leave them at a crossroads.

*“ ...that’s why it is very difficult for us to meet our academic objectives and compete in university rankings, because none of the professors are really being utilised in their respective area of expertise. I give you one example last few months we invited a university rector from Germany to give a motivational talk to our lecturers. He is a senior professor. He did not talk about how to manage the university or student enrolment or administering student activities; he talked about his research, his academic engagement and expertise locally and internationally. This is the rector, so you can imagine his young lecturers’ involvement. Obviously, I think they are doing more in building up their expertise. Unfortunately, here, the longer you serve the more expert you are in administration.”* (Respondent 17/institution/male)

The quotation implies that the respondent is consciously aware that the higher level leaders should provide motivation, guidance, direction, and support to lower



levels and that the administrative parts can be delegated and self-operated, on condition that a good governing system is in place. Further, he commented that the academic and organisational subcultures [focusing more on managerial and administrative work] have created tensions, which are critical in leading changes in higher institutions. The tensions emanating from these conflicting roles may lead to unproductive and ineffective leadership.

#### **6.3.4 Personal Pursuit**

When asked about how such an internal environment shapes leadership, respondent 13 raised two questions that carry a certain meaning; one, 'what is leadership' and two, 'what kind of leadership is appropriate for higher education'. He said that if our leadership fulfils the criteria of these two concepts, then higher education is experiencing excellent leadership. However, from his observation, what makes the disjunction is the focus of the prevailing leaders tends to be looking more at their own self-fulfilment rather than organisational pursuits. Bearing in mind the contractual base of leadership position in higher institutions he argued:

*“First, let’s take the higher level leaders. I think they are more concerned with managing themselves rather than managing the organisation; they are more concerned about whether their positions will be renewed, as they are on a contractual basis. With regard to this point, the concern is on their undertakings; many of them try to fit their actions with the Ministry or the higher level demand, so they try to fit into and create congruency between their doings and the those of the Ministry, they seem to be just sitting and waiting for instructions, that’s why there is less initiative. It is quite obvious in the sense that they are worried, that they are doing something which may be against the thinking of the leaders at the higher level. Then the Ministry keeps on changing focus. And when they see the Ministry’s emphasis is on certain areas; then those leaders will also change their focus accordingly, even though this may abandon the previous undertaking, so for me this is called managing themselves more than managing the organisation.”*  
(Respondent 13/institution/male)

He argued that putting personal pursuit at the forefront of the leaders’ aim would gradually eradicate the people’s spirit to uphold organisational excellence.

Despite the collective culture described by Hofstede (1991) and Abdullah (1992), the self-interest in this sense does not carry the same meaning as an ‘individualistic’ culture. It rather explicates the situation by which leaders tend to seek opportunities of pursuing their personal quest intertwining with accomplishing organizational objectives, and from the researcher’s observation, in many instances personal desires superseded the organizational quest. This is also in line with Bryman’s (2001) assertion that much of the behaviour of leaders may be oriented to more self-interested goals rather than those associated with the organization as such. The leaders deem to seek career satisfaction through implicit ways to get out of the exasperation of the autocratic and legitimised structure. They were acting superficially to please the upper management and demonstrate their conforming behaviour.

Closely related to achieving the personal pursuit concept is the ‘middle road leader’. It is not surprising, that, sometimes, due to the devastating bureaucratic impediment, leaders tend to choose the safest or most modest way of leading or performing their duties. As described further by respondent 13:

*“...yes, it is not surprising, leaders are performing at the middle road, in strategic management this is what we call following the middle road, which means that the leaders are not here and not there. So the leadership is following the middle road, they are so scared to be at any end because, their people will say this particular leader is too extreme, contradict and controversial with top management or top policy level, and, at the same time, they are also not going to the other end, for fear that it might create issues with organisational staff, and this is proven in management study, so they will maintain the middle road, thus there will be a gap that might create future problems.”*

Reflecting on the leaders’ target and the way they perform their duties, the unavoidable outcome would be the imbalance between the leaders and organisational performance. There are two issues that need to be addressed concurrently; first, ‘leaders manage their own careers’ and second, ‘leaders manage the organisation’. *“Although it looks similar, in many cases they are emphasizing more on managing their own careers”* (Respondent 13). Feeling frustrated, he emphasised that in private organisations, and these two things are synonymous, which means that if the leader is performing well, then the

organisation will also perform at the same time. They have to ensure their organisations are successful; and, as a result, the leader will simultaneously be perceived as high performing. Highlighting the anomaly in the system, he explained that some organisations are lagging behind even though their leaders are excellent; therefore, the leaders can supersede organisational achievement.

*“The leaders’ performances are far ahead and leave their organisational performances behind. This situation is filtered through from top to down level. So, it is very scary in the sense that each individual performance doesn’t contribute to organisational performance.”*

As such, achieving organisational excellence is arguably not the absolute target of the leader’s long-term endeavour. In this regard, leadership succession agendas could be ruined. Advocating the notion, respondent 18 argued that due to this circumstance, every now and then the successor of the leader might resolve the same problem(s) repeatedly, as each individual leader is trying to achieve their own personal agenda through organisational pursuit. He asserted “... *in terms of the organisational progress, sadly we are not moving anywhere or even worse*”. The internal challenges and issues remain at a status quo, and the effect could be obvious in terms of the knowledge transfer.

Furthermore, respondent 6 raised a very relevant issue in nurturing the altruistic leadership. She quoted:

*“I would say that changing people’s way of thinking, faith, and paradigm is a very important process. Because I think by the time people come in as new workers, they already have their own set of beliefs, attitude and priorities, especially attitude towards work. Even some people dare to say ‘I do what I have to do and I am already a good worker’. But as a leader, we want people who are passionate about their work, not only people who lend a hand, but people who can give their hearts and minds to the organisation.” (Respondent 6/administration/female)*

### **6.3.5 Emphasising on the Outcome More Than the Process**

Apparently, from the above discussions, management and leadership tend to focus more on the output of the leaders rather than the leadership process itself. So,

individual leaders and organisational learning is unlikely to occur. Respondent 25 exerted:

*“...the leaders are emphasising more on the products and not the process”*  
(Respondent 25/institution/male)

Citing the current situation where university rankings and star ratings are in the limelight, respondent 25 advocated that the system becomes very mechanistic, and that there are many short cut processes in management and leadership undertakings. He was concerned that, to some extent, the system might fail to understand the leadership processes, and that the focus of the leaders should be more on managing the process rather than conceptualising the end product.

#### **6.4 Summary**

The findings demonstrate most of the responses given by the respondents during the interviews. Many respondents agree that the environmental factors have greater influence on leadership construction, which it plays an important role in determining and moderating leadership processes. Among the factors are political, economic, social, technology and legal factors, which generated many critical discussions among the respondents. Respondents perceive that these factors were quite overwhelming and the impacts were manifested widely across the policy, strategies, and operation of higher education.

On the other hand, besides the others, organisational factors that stand as a sub-unit of the context permeate values in the shaping process of the leadership and identity construction through structural and cultural constructs as the main factors. The bureaucratic structure that was frequently articulated by the respondents as a barrier to academic accomplishment reflects the struggle between rationality and the irrational social forces that compromise the goals. Hence, the findings from the impact of both environmental and organisational factors convey the emergent complexity and relation of the reality from the context of the study. These findings will be explored and discussed further in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **A DISCUSSION OF LEADERSHIP CONSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This study has identified the factors that affect and shape the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia. The findings will illuminate the research questions in line with the research objectives proposed in Chapter 1. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the major themes that emerged in the study: the external, the internal and the organizational factors that shape and construct the leadership and its identity. Central to the analysis are the challenges to the leadership roles, functions, authority and autonomy in the setting of agendas of the Malaysian public higher education, and, subsequently, the production of knowledge. The study attempts to analyse the phenomena and discourses to which leaders understand themselves and interpret their meaning making. The leaders with particular roles or status in the web of relationships make up parts of the community of public higher education. Hence, the insights and meanings of the findings will be thoroughly discussed and elaborated upon through the lenses of the chosen methodology and supporting literature.

As elaborated by Chapter 3, Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country with three main ethnic groups – Malay, Chinese and Indian –and numerous other ethnic minorities, with 67.4% is Malays and other indigenous groups), 24.6% Chinese, 7.3% Indians and 0.7% are other ethnic minorities. Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3 %. Historically, Malaysia was being colonised by Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Japanese and granted independence in August 1957. As an independent country, Malaysia practises Parliamentary Democracy with a constitutional monarch, and the government system is centralised. Malaysian culture was characterised by high power distance, low uncertainly avoidance, high humane orientation, high collectivism, low assertiveness, and a high future orientation. Further, Malaysians value humane orientation and gender egalitarianism (House, 2004).

## **ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTION 1:**

**How do the environmental factors affect the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia?**

### **7.2 The Environmental Factors**

As discussed in Chapter 6, environmental factors raise a number of important issues in leadership construction in Malaysian higher education. The findings demonstrated that power becomes the dominant factor that has shaped the leadership besides the cultural [social] factor. Nevertheless, the global environment does affect the leadership in terms of the consequences of neo-liberalism in the global market. However, the study reveals that the effect of environmental factors is substantially stronger than the organizational factors in shaping the leadership. This situation was being emphasised many times by the respondents during the interviews. It was found, that the influence and power seem to be strongly vested in the hands of the top leaders and external forces.

### **7.3 Power**

As explained in Chapter 3, Foucault's notion of power/knowledge and power relation has been adopted in this discussion to understand the leadership phenomenon and its relationship to the context. As Foucault says, power is always productive and never merely repressive, thus the concept of power relations emerged. Power relations explain the connection between the visible and the sayable through the primacy of discourse (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Thus, Foucault's account of power is not as an attribute (and ask 'What is it?') but as an exercise (and ask 'How does it work?'), in which this concept would serve the purpose of this study.

With regard to this study, it reveals that power is a substance and emerges as repressive and possessed by a certain authoritative group. Hence, the power has some force that is always related to the capacity for resistance (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). However, for Foucault, resistance to power is part of the

exercise of power (part of how it works). Thus, the analysis described the way in which resistance or responses to power operate, not to seek to promote or oppose it.

The findings also demonstrate that power has dominated the context and has played a major role in shaping the leadership. The term “power” is coined from the investigation of contextual affects in various aspects in higher education, which relate closely to the process of command and control, power and authority, and superior and follower. Thus, the researcher believes that power is the best concept to explain the phenomena.

Why power? Why is it so important in this study? And what are the consequences of power to this study? According to behaviourists, power is the ability to produce causal effect or bring about something, and social power is the power over another person. This notion seems rather repressive and thus too restrictive, as one can only understand the effect of power as observable changes in circumstances or behaviour (Detel, 2005). On the other hand, as described above, Foucault looks at power from a wider and dynamic perspective, and analyses power through three different levels. First, the forms of structure that certain power relation takes on in certain historical situations. In other words this level looks at the point from where the power is exercised. Second, the dynamics of local forms of power looks into the historical shift or progression of power. Third, it looks on into the complex strategic situation of power in a particular society. The central and most illuminating feature of Foucault’s conception of power focuses on a detailed differentiation of the forms of power and their complex dynamics (Detel, 2005). Moving on from this point, power is visibly evident, and is illuminated in the following discussions.

### **7.3.1 The Political Power**

This study reveals that power has become a substantial subject in the political context of Malaysia, there are three dimensional political interventions in higher institutions: the policies, the appointment of higher ranking leaders, and the

institutional management or operating process. These interventions connote the strong effort by the government to impose power and authority over the higher education institutions that directly and indirectly affect the leadership roles. Rose (1999), in explaining political power, refers to the deliberate practices of government to shape conduct in certain ways in relation to certain objectives. With regard to this study, the practices are analysed through the lenses of the ‘governmentality’ approach by adopting Dean’s (1999) way of analysing regimes of government –the repressive kind of power in the context of study (Loh & Khoo, 2002). The repression kind of power, as perceived from the definition of behaviourists (causal effect paradigm) has emerged from the study and is best to be analysed using the governmentality approach, as the approach concerns looking at how the power is being exercised through a network of institutions, practices, procedures and techniques which act to regulate social conduct (Joseph, 2010) (causal effect technique). The analyses are presented in Figure 7.1.

### 7.3.1.1 Governmentality Processes

How is leadership shaped by environmental factors? To answer this question, Dean proposed the concept of 'Governmentality Process', which focuses more on proposing the ‘how’ question to investigate the process through the identification and examination of specific situations in which the activity of governing becomes the problem (Dean, 1999). Dean calls the analysis the identification of problematization, which deals with the question of how the authority shape or direct people’s conduct by looking into the particular techniques used by the authority.

Analysis of governmentality process	The Phenomena	Indication from the context (extract from respondent interviews)
The identification of problematization	The power and authority of the those in power was implicitly and explicitly demonstrated in the selection and appointment process of the top and higher ranking leaders in higher institutions	<i>“In our country, the appointment of university leaders is done by politicians...”</i> <i>Chapter 6</i> <i>(6.1.1)“...when the VC post has been politicized, those who are not</i>



		<p><i>supposed to be there will be appointed. Once this person is appointed he has sort of power to make decisions.”</i> Chapter 6 (6.1.1)</p>
	<p>Some policies that regulate the institutions were regularly changed.</p>	<p><i>“... and then it [the policy] keeps changing, when they [the leaders] see the ministry’s focus is on certain areas of KPI, leaders will follow suit, and then when the view from the top[ministry] changes again, their focus will also will be change accordingly, to the extent they sometimes abandon the previous one.”</i> Chapter 6 (6.3.1.2)</p>
	<p>Political thought seems to be manifested in the choice of action undertaken by leaders in performing their managerial and administrative role (operational tasks)</p>	<p><i>“Because the strategic mind has been shaped by the policy principally done by the politician and not by the knowledge...”</i> Chapter 6 (6.3.1.2)</p>
	<p>There were minimal authority possessed by the leaders over their institutional activities</p>	<p><i>“Things like which speaker can or cannot be brought onto the campus to speak to the students also turns out to become their [the politicians] big issue. So, it has become a very sensitive job to carry out but as I was focused on what I wanted to do for the university, I had to swallow this nonsense...”</i> Chapter 6 (6.1.2)</p>

	Some decision making is made in response to the external political pressure.	<i>“However, this politician argued and demanded the location should be changed, and we were against his idea. So, it became a big issue and delayed the construction of the project” Chapter 6 (6.1.4)</i>
	The controversial law and regulations of HEIs that effect students and staff.	<i>The University and College University Act 1971(amended several times and the latest was in 2008)</i>
	The adverse implication of the centralization of MOHE governance.	<i>It looks like it is more invasive in university affairs, prone to greater centralization and preferring standardization (Bakri, 2003, p.236). MOHE has “enjoyed” wide power over the universities, which allowed it to both “steer and row” Shuib, et.al. (2008, p.25)</i>

**Figure 7.1: Identification of Problematization**

The above analysis indicates that political power is being exercised and embedded in the practices through various means, such as formulation of policies, recruitment of the leaders, governance, code of conduct, laws and legislation and insofar that it is seeping into the leadership’s mind and thoughts. Figure 7.1 reveals that the seemingly legitimate power takes place from controlling ‘who’ is the decision-maker at higher institution [the higher ranking leaders], to encircling their roles with particular policies, to monitoring their conduct and to reframing their thinking.

Nonetheless, the higher education leadership might become overly paternalistic, rigid and disempowering (Dean, 1999). The consequences are illuminated in the leadership construction, in conjunction with the perceptions of the respondents, that the leadership tend to be of politically driven, ceremonial and task-based, and managerialist (Olssen & Peter, 2005).

### **7.3.1.2 The Government System**

The Doctrine of the Separation of Power in the Constitution of Malaysia illuminates indirectly the power of the government. The Doctrine states that the executive and legislative power is different; however, it could be the same in this context (Loh & Khoo, 2002). The following definition describes:

In the Federal Constitution Chapter 3 Article 39, the Executive power reads:

*“The executive power of the Federation shall be vested in the King and subject to the provisions of any federal law and the provisions of the Second Schedule, the powers may be exercised by him or by any Minister authorized by the Cabinet, but Parliament may by law give the government tasks to others.”*

The meaning of the Executive body from The Walker's Oxford Companion to Law [Page 449] says:

*“Executive is one branch of the government of a country that is responsible for ensuring implementation of policies and principles and the supremacy of law in cases of conflict with the legislative body that functions to create and determine the policy and legislation and judiciary functions in resolving disputes about the meaning and application of the law.”*

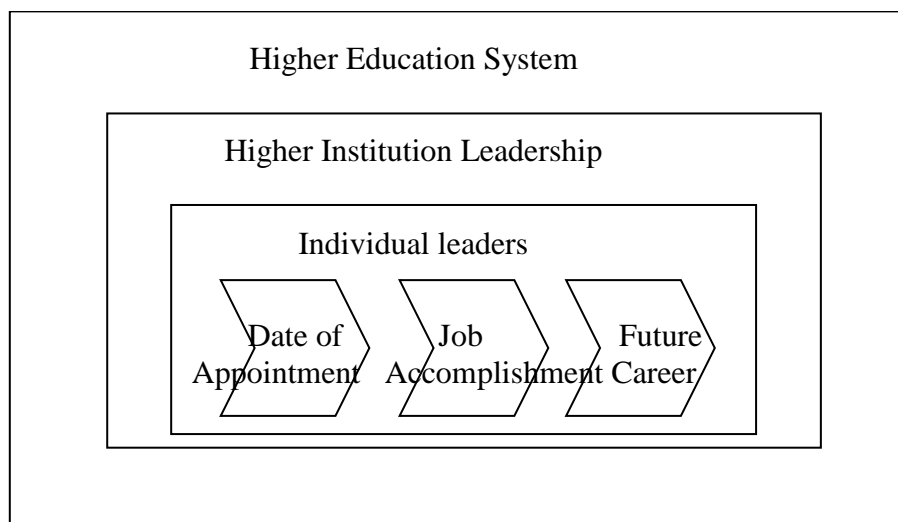
Chapter 4 of the Federal Constitution, in Article 44 provides the meaning of the legal or legislative body and its powers:

*“Federal legislative Power shall be vested in Parliament comprises of the King and the two Councils namely the Senate and the House of Commons”*

Thus, in Malaysia, it can be said that all members of the Executive [cabinet] are also the members of the Legislature be it in the House of Representatives or the

Senate. Obviously, from here, there is no separation of power as the lawmaker and the implementer is the same person. Therefore, it is easy for the Government, which controls the policies and legislation to enact the laws, through which, sometimes, such power might provide room for personal and collective interests, particularly when the Executive (House of Representative or Senate members) gains the majority support of more than two-thirds [2/3] in the general election. This political trend towards authoritarian rule, as described by Loh & Khoo (2002, p.4) or 'quasi democracy' by Zakaria (1989, p.347) or 'modified democracy' by Crouch (1996), features the 'repressive-responsive' regime (Crouch, 1996) that mixture the democratic procedures and coercive practices (Loh & Khoo, 2002, p.4). As higher education educates and trains the future generation for the country, the Ministry is believed to enhance its prerogative by ensuring the next generation "gives their assent to the ruling political parties".

Therefore, through the governmental process and the effect of executive dominance (Loh & Khoo, 2002), it could be argued here that the political containment has preoccupied the leadership in higher education from three dimensions; namely, the higher education system, the organizational and the individual facets. The prevailing legitimate power and control over the systemic nature of the governance [the government and the constitution], and the mechanism of the governance (the policies, the selection process of the leaders, and institutional operating process) will obviously ratify the leadership identity in Malaysian higher education. The political pre-eminence is also evident in shaping the individual leaders, which begins from the date of the tenure, alongside the job performance of the leaders and their enduring future careers. The process can be described as per Figure 7.2 below:



**Figure 7.2 : Three level of analysis of the political effects on the leadership of higher institutions**

**Source: From primary interview's data**

Figure 7.2 demonstrates the three levels of analysis of the political effects on the leadership of higher institutions. The first level is the effect on the whole of the higher education system. This is reflected in the formulation of policies, strategies and programmes that are largely undertaken by the MOHE and then articulated and directed to be implemented by the higher institutions. The second level occurs at institutional level, in which the leadership has little choice except to follow the instructions from the top. At this juncture, unconsciously the leadership mind is being shaped by those policies and strategies. The third level is during the career development of each individual staff including the leaders. Obviously, from the beginning of the appointment as an academician in a public university, or as public service staff, they have to adhere to the government rules and regulations (as mentioned in Para 6.2.5). Correspondingly, the shaping of the mind and identity gradually takes place along their career. Their enduring job performance as well as their future career enhancement is likely to be subjected to the steadfast adherence to the government. This pervasive process is perceived to be able to shape the identity of the system, the organization and the leadership inclusively and exclusively. Thus, the leadership identity can be seen as a by-

product of the political milieu; to some extent to act as political actors, because they are required to work with apolitical group member and to live up to the expectations of the prevailing political will regardless of the ranking of their position in the institution.

### **7.3.2 The Cultural Power**

The word culture carries different meanings. Some scholars, for example, Schweder & Levine (1984), see culture from a cognitive perspective as a shared meaning system, while Hofstede (1980) describes culture as collective mental programming that controls the responses of individuals in a given context. Members of a culture will share certain mind-sets that cause them to interpret situations and events in generally similar ways, while persons from other cultures and mind-sets are likely to interpret them differently (Erez & Early, 1993). Culture, in this sense, is a powerful force that shapes and influences the cognition of the people. In terms of the cultural self-representation theory, it forms a shared knowledge structure capable of reducing the variability of individual responses (Erez & Early, 1993). In this way culture contributes to a cognitive framework and behavioural repertoire that members of the culture will use to both interpret and respond to situations. As Adler (1991) notes, the subconscious influence of these internalized norms and expectations may be the source of cross-cultural misinterpretations.

The cognitive approach is embedded in many definitions of culture (Erez & Earley, 1993). For example, Kluckhohn (1954) represents the anthropological approach, defining culture as patterned ways of thinking. The cognitive model of information processing explain how information from external environment is selectively recognized, evaluated, and interpreted in terms of its meaning for the individual, and how it affects behaviour (Erez and Earley, 1993).

Culture shapes the society's core values and norms, which are shared and transmitted from one generation to another through social learning processes of

modelling and observation, as well as through the effect of one's own actions (Bandura, 1986). It can be defined on different levels of analysis, ranging from group level to organizational level or national level. Schein (1990) in his book illustrates how culture operates as what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its internal integration. Once a group has learned to hold common assumptions about adaptation to the environment, its members respond in similar patterns of perception, thought, emotion, and behaviour to external stimuli. Thus, the cultural power has an immediate impact on organizational structures and processes and on employees' behaviour (in this study – leadership).

The study reveals that five cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1991) shed light on leadership in Malaysian higher education, namely: power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and masculinity. However, only three will be deliberately discussed –power distance, collectivism and uncertainty avoidance –as the study reveals that the effect of these three cultural norms sheds significant light on the leadership behaviour and identity.

### **7.3.2.1 Power Distance**

#### **7.3.2.1.1 Power Distance (PD) and Its Effect on Leadership**

Power Distance basically deals with human inequality. Inequality can occur in areas such as prestige, wealth, and power. Hofstede (2001) defines PD as the degree of inequality in power between a less powerful individual and a more powerful other, in which both belong to the same social system. Inside an organization, inequality in power is inevitable and functional. This inequality is usually formalized in leader-subordinate relationships. However, inequalities of power in organizations are essential for control and temporarily as the law of entropy, which states that disorder will increase (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (1991) describes Malaysian culture as relatively high in collectivism and very high in power distance, which is supported by Abdullah (1992a, 1992b, 1996).

Correspondingly, this study reveals the truth of Hofstede findings, in which the following analyses will explicate the phenomena in the leadership life in higher education sector. While anticipating that the impact of PD on the leadership will be reflected in their identity, the quotations from the accompanying interviews will validate the phenomena.

#### **7.3.2.1.2 Analysis of High Power Distance Culture in the Context**

The GLOBE findings indicate that the acceptance of *power distance* in Malaysia is not as extreme as suggested by Hofstede's original work. While the rating is one of the highest within the Malaysian sample, it is virtually on the median when compared to the other countries in the GLOBE sample.

Feudal structures were prevalent in pre-colonial Malay society, and the culture places considerable importance on clear recognition of status differences (Kennedy, 2002). The analyses are made using some of the distinctive Hofstede (2001) norms of high PD society:

(a) Hierarchy means existential inequality. The distribution of power is formalized in hierarchies, built through the relationship of the leader and follower.

*“...now the situation is so hierarchical, so many layers...”*  
(Respondent 4/administrator/male)

Members of high PD cultures are more likely to be accepting of, and comfortable with structured authority relationships that involve the element of extensive exercising of power from a vertical dimension.

(b) Subordinates consider superiors as being of a different kind. Subordinates behave submissively and are not willing to disagree with supervisors since subordinates are afraid to express disagreement with their leaders.

*“There was something that seemed not right, so I voiced it during the discussion. Then immediately after the meeting, one officer told me that I should not bring up the matter, it was improper for me to voice it*



*upfront. Truly so, I was no longer called for another meeting after the incident, it was completely silent and they left me out of the picture.” (Respondent 14/institution/female).*

In a highly stratified society where all powers are concentrated in the hands of the superior, the subordinate learns that it can be dangerous to question a decision of the superior. The phenomenon reflects the subdued interaction within which one perceives the self as part of a group while being accepting of power/status inequalities within the group (Schermerhorn & Bond, 1997).

(c) Superiors consider subordinates as being of a different kind. Subordinates are a group of people in an organization perceived as an accessory to the exercise of power.

*“There is just too much drama now, so much that essential aspects of the economy and country are easily lost from sight. The Malaysian education system has been criticized by many people. Whenever a new minister comes into power, there are changes in policy being made. Our education has a lot of flaws and there is no doubt about that.” (Respondent 25/institution/male)*

The superior seems to enjoy his power and authority, which is reflected in the frequent policy changes. The leaders at higher institutions are being forced to implement as reflected in Chapter 6, Para 6.2.1.7.

(d) Power holders are entitled to privileges.

*“One VC had a favourite lecturer who applied for professorship. Despite the person being under qualified, such as low credential of academic achievement, less experience in publications and had not successfully supervised even one postgraduate student, this person managed to get a professorship because the top management gave full support and tried to find justification for him/her. (Respondent 11/institution/male)*

In this case, power is presumed as a gateway for leaders to make any possible decision of their favours.

- (e) Power is a basic fact of society that antedates good, bad or evil; its legitimacy is irrelevant. The use of power is not legitimate and is not subjected to the judgment between good and evil.

*“...when the politicians indulge very much, for example, in the appointment of VC and DVC, which, in our case, is believed to not be based on merit, good experience and talent; it is merely because of connection with somebody”. (Respondent 16/institution/male)*

It could be argued here that through relationships, illegitimate power was exercised, even though it was sometimes against the rationality (in this case the merit, the good experience and talent is preferable in any leadership appointment, and not the connection).

- (f) Stress on coercive and referent power (power based on personal charisma of the powerful and identification with him or her by the less powerful)

*“We never know who actually determines the VC. I think there is a body, but the body doesn't have full power, to the extent sometimes the Prime Minister will be involved. There is a structure to run the organization, however, at the same time there are outside forces. Similarly we never know who was actually involved in the appointment of the deans, and deans also don't have power to make decisions.”(Respondent 11/institution/male)*

The coercive power is clarified by one of the respondents from his personal experience:

*“In our country, the appointment of university leaders is done by politicians. For example, my appointment as Deputy VC was made by politicians, so politics in Malaysia plays a very important role from that standpoint.” (Respondent 12/institution/male)*

- (g) Older people are respected and feared

*“The leaders will try to fit their actions with the Ministry's programmes, often times, they are just waiting for the instructions, ...it is quite obvious the fear is there, that they don't want to do something which might be against the thinking of the higher level.” (Respondent 13/institution/male)*

### **7.3.2.1.3 Power Distance (PD) Manifestation on Leadership**

As Hofstede (1991) described, PD refers to how society deals with and views inequalities in power distribution among the members of society. Inequalities in society can occur in terms of social status, prestige, power, and rights.

To analyse the manifestation of high PD on leadership, the metaphor ‘two sides of the same coin’ apply here. On the one hand, when the leaders are as a leader, particularly at the top of the realm, they would act as a superior who wants to be recognised by their position in the organisation, and pay particular attention to their prestige and status. On the other hand, when the leaders are subordinate to higher-ranking leaders, they are rather submissive, conforming and reserved (Shermerhorn, 1997).

### **7.3.2.1.4 Power Distance and Islamic Perspective**

Tayeb (1997), citing Latifi (1997) in a study of traditional and modern Islamic texts, discloses some Islamic teaching principles that both compare and contrast with power distance conception. Islam emphasises:

- equality before God
- that people in positions of power should treat subordinates kindly, as if their subordinates are their brothers or sisters
- encouragement of consultation at all levels of decision making, from family to the wider community, and to the country as a whole

Incongruent with the concept of power distance, the emphasis is on the egalitarian and consultative concept of relationships. Therefore, in the workplace, consultative decision making and a fairly diffused power structure is a priority. Instead, as a leader who will lead the followers on the path of virtuousness, the leaders need to uphold the major Islamic values, such as self-discipline, trustfulness, honesty, resolve, loyalty, and abstinence, and are encouraged to give trust to their subordinates’ judgement and integrity. In other words, Islam prefers

a participative style of management. Furthermore, Rice, (1999) asserts that Islam condemns the evils of greed, unscrupulousness and disregard for the rights and needs of others, and emphasises the goodness of the society at large rather than the individual or group interest. Thus, the emphasis is on the human being rather than on state power. There is tension between Islamic values (based on equality) and the traditional Malay hierarchical social structure (Kennedy, 2002).

Hence, it could be argued here that Islam is rather against the concept of power distance. Also, it could be deduced that the cultural values are rather strong in shaping the leadership as compared to Islamic practices. With regard to power distance norms, it is obvious that cultural values take precedence and Islamic leadership practices are being marginalised. Above all, power distance seems to become the overriding norm of practice that predominantly shapes the leadership in Malaysian higher education and the society at large.

### **7.3.2.2 Collectivism**

#### **7.3.2.2.1 Collectivism and Its Effects on Leadership**

According to Hofstede (2001) collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Erez & Early (1993) highlight the general distinction between individualistic and collectivistic culture with an emphasis on self-interest in individualistic and on group interests in collectivist cultures. In specific reference to management and leadership dynamics, individualists can be expected to emphasise individual action and self-interest, while collectivists act and view themselves more as group members (Singelis *et al.*, 1995). Triandis *et al.* (1988) associate collectivism with hierarchy, in which its members act with respect for authority in supervisor-subordinate relationships.

Hofstede (2001) assumes more 'moral' involvement with the organization in which collectivist values prevail and "calculative" involvement. Hofstede asserts that collectivism and high power distance go together in most, but not all,

societies. Schermerhorn & Bond (1997) further deliberate the effect of collectivism norms on the nature of the relationship between a person and the organisation to which he or she belongs. They state that members of collectivist cultures tend to respect authority and age, and conform to the wishes of a paternalistic leader, in which the resulting group dynamic may take certain directions. The work group tends to respond with public deference, conformity, and politeness, and no disagreement is publically expressed.

#### **7.3.2.2.2 Analysis of Collectivism in the Context**

A number of researches on Malaysian culture (for example, The GLOBE study) have identified Malaysia as a collectivist society. Therefore, the following analysis elucidates the phenomenon, using some of the collectivism norms by Hofstede (2001).

##### **(a) High-context communication**

Hofstede (2001) confesses that high-context communication fits the collectivist society. While Hall (1998) explains that in high-context communication, little has to be said or written because most of the information is implicit. Similarly, the way of communication must be indirect and saving face is very important.

*“There was something that seemed not right, so I voiced it during the discussion. Then immediately after the meeting, one officer told me that I should not bring up the matter, upfront. Truly so, I was no longer called for another meeting after the incident, it was completely silent and they left me out of the picture”. (Respondent 14/institution/female)*

The above quotation is an appropriate example of the high-context communication of the collectivism society. It reflects the characteristic of the collectivism norm, which implies that foregoing openness is important in maintaining social harmony and that the indirect way of expressing views is an attempt to secure relationships, and that respect for elders and higher ranking leaders take precedence.

- (b) Knowing the right people is important for career (personal relationships is important for upward career mobility)

*“You have to foster good relationships with whom you know...”  
(Respondent 24/institution/male)*

And then advocated by the following quotation;

*“but as I mentioned to you earlier, as we are in a feudalistic society, very structured system, in order to become a leader you have to have a so-called ‘tree’ somewhere”. (Respondent 11/institution/male)*

This norm is a consequence of ‘particularist’ thinking, in which Hofstede (2001) describes that in a collectivist society a relationship of trust should be established between two parties before any dealings. This is because in a collectivist society, the “faith in people” or interpersonal trust is low. Further, as opposed to an individualist society where the norm is universal –treat everybody alike – in a collectivist society the norm is particularist where preferential treatment is ethical and acceptable. Therefore, for the leaders in a collectivist context, creating a close relationship with higher management is important, particularly with regards to career advancement. Additionally, this situation is highly likely to become the ground for cronyism and nepotism to predominate the leadership in the context, as was discussed in Chapter 6.

- (c) Collective Orientation

*“So the leadership is following the middle road, they are so scared to be at one end because it will look as though this particular leader is too extreme, contradicting to or creating some controversy with top management or top policy level, and they are not going to be at the other end for fear that it might create issues with their organisational staff.”  
(Respondent 12/institution/male)*

This quotation implies that the leaders are placing high standing in what the in-group might think about their [the leaders] doings, which indicates a sense of ‘we’

consciousness, and that their actions are predetermined by the in-group (Hosftede, 2001), which, to some extent, will suppress the individual freedom and right. The emphasis is on teamwork and collaboration.

#### **7.3.2.2.3 The Manifestation of Collectivism on Leadership**

Because of the high correlation between Power Distance (PD) and collectivism, Hosftede, (2001), from a practical perspective, posited that the two dimensions could be assumed to have a common effect. Triandis (1993) stated that collectivist societies value hierarchy, and collective goals and interdependency, thus, in high power-distance/collectivist societies; leaders are more autocratic, directive, and inaccessible. In a collectivist society, leadership is inseparable from the context (Hosftede, 2001) in which the leaders activities are dictated by others and context, and which will lead to ‘others-directed’ behaviour. Development and change are subjected to top management and in-group thinking. Personal relationships prevail over the task and over the organisation; preference for harmony is priority even sometimes to the extent of depersonalised self-ideas, philosophy and ethics. Hence, there is a question of forfeiting the leadership dignity as an individual who possesses their own right to determine their way. The leaders would appear to be more likely of the cooperative type, self-sacrificing, conformity and dependent.

#### **7.3.2.2.4 Collectivism and Islamic Perspective**

Collectivism refers to the extent that individual goals are more aligned with those of the collective. As such, collectivism is an ideology that trumps the supremacy of a group over an individual –the repression of individual autonomy. This might possibly lead to the infringement of individual human rights.

Islam emphasizes unity and collective vision and works, and highly praises harmonious relationships and living. More importantly, it provides an underlying moral *principle* that is often claimed to be divine-justification for collective action. Above all, Islam firmly grounds the locus of morality *for individual and community conduct* (Ali, 2005).

Based on the conception of collectivism, Islam disapproves of any kind of suppression of individual rights. As a matter of fact, Islam came to uplift the rights of the individual (Ali, 2005). Collectivism in Islam sees individual responsibility as to be within a framework of co-operation with others, and at the same time recognize personal choices and freedom. Discrimination, cronyism and nepotism are practices that indicate greediness, which is forbidden in Islam, as such behaviour is considered as a threat to social and economic justice.

In Islam, cooperation is virtue. As such, the collective concept refers to the 'togetherness' process in reaching any decision-making. This concept is called 'Syura' (mutual consultation) (Ali, 2005) wherein everybody is encouraged to offer their best ideas, and, subsequently, arrive at consensus.

Thus, two level of analysis are involved here. Firstly, on the general conception of collectivism, which implies togetherness and harmonious living; obviously it concurs and assimilates well with the Islamic notion. Secondly, the cost of miscalculating personal freedom is visibly rejected by the Muslim. From this point, and on the general outlook of the leadership identity, it is difficult to differentiate the anthropological nature of the norms as the cultural and religious values are intertwined. However, it could be argued here that the leaders are predominantly being influenced by the cultural norm (collectivism) more than the Islamic way of behaving themselves. Furthermore, looking at the way the interrelationship occurs through the vertical and horizontal connection of the leadership, the cultural value seems to be the predominant influence on the phenomena.

### **7.3.2.3 Uncertainty Avoidance**

#### **7.3.2.3.1 Uncertainty Avoidance and Its Effect on Leadership**

Hofstede (2001) defines uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. A country with a high uncertainty avoidance score will have a low tolerance towards uncertainty and ambiguity. As a result, it is usually a very rule-orientated society



and follows well defined and established laws, regulations and controls. High uncertainty avoidance scoring nations try to avoid ambiguous situations whenever possible. People in such cultures tend to look for structure in organizations, institutions, and relationships, which makes events clearly interpretable and predictable.

Malaysia is reasonably high in uncertainty avoidance. The culture is relatively unwilling to take risks and deal with change. On a macro level this can be seen in an unpredictable revision of laws and government structures to mediate any unforeseen related circumstances and effects. On a micro level, conflict or disagreement in the workplace, even with superiors, is considered unhealthy.

#### **7.3.2.3.2 Analysis of Uncertainty Avoidance in the Context**

Using Hofstede (2001) uncertainty avoidance norms, the following analysis takes into account:

##### **(a) Fairly resistant to change (Conservative, and emphasis on law and order)**

In a high uncertainty avoidance society, the people are more conservative and have a stronger desire for law and order as they always seek clarity, structure and purity. They are very slow in responding to changes, particularly on changing their status-quo.

*“Being a civil or public institution, as a public institution we feel secure. Similarly, the leaders are not willing to make any constructive changes, because in their minds they always say ‘why should we rock the boat’ and ‘changes are always for the worst’ and ‘why should we put ourselves in difficulty...’”. (Respondent 4/administration/male)*

*“...we are perpetual, that’s why we have been the same over many years, and the leadership and managerial process are alike” (Respondent 18/institution/male)*

##### **(b) Need for clarity and structure**

In terms of seeking clarity and structure, leaders usually expect precise laws and regulation, and expect a highly formalized conception of management, in which is reflected by intolerance for ambiguity in structures and procedures.

*“The problem now is the tools for management are not always there (referring to policies and targets). These are the basic tools. So, when the tools are not there and with the lack of direction, inconsistency of action and decision will take place. The decisions are always changing and the organization will tumble.” (Respondent 12/institution/male).*

High uncertainty avoidance always goes with a high power distance and collective culture (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, other norms of uncertainty avoidance, such as older people are respected and feared as opposed to younger people are respected, feeling powerless towards external forces (submissive), hierarchical and transactional role of leaders are also indicated in high power distance and collectivism norms.

#### **7.3.2.3.3 Effect of High Uncertainty Avoidance on Leadership**

In a high uncertainty avoidance society, leaders tend to be non-assertive, structured in thinking and action, tend to set many preconditions for new changes and in achieving success, and reserved in personality. Nevertheless, this situation could lead to developing very successful transactional leaders with high performance on tasking based or prescribed jobs. This is in tandem with the issue that has been raised by a large number of respondents, that they are involved in a large amount of procedural and administrative work. Such practice is to ensure that no failure and or unforeseen risks occur in the system.

#### **7.3.2.3.4 High Uncertainty Avoidance and Islamic Perspective**

Islam places high emphasis on nobility, patience and endurance, courage and determination, and highly praises those who think and do good to self and others, which demonstrates huge divergence from uncertainty avoidance. Such Islamic values would develop a distinctive leadership identity; for instance, patience and endurance would stimulate the internal strength for leaders to face any unexpected circumstances, and the stamina to bring about improvement to the society.

Courage and determination emanate from strong faith and belief and the complete satisfaction that one's righteousness will lead to the achievement of impossible tasks and challenges (Ali, 2005). Nevertheless, complacency must be avoided and replaced with the zeal of continuous struggle. Islam values hard work and totally discourages any inaction, passivity, stagnation in any sphere of human life (Ali, 2005). It declares that every individual has to strive for better results in his or her life. Hence, based on the contradictory values between Islam and cultural norms (uncertainty avoidance), in which it appears that cultural norm has embedded strongly in higher education leadership, it could be deduced here again that culture plays an important role in shaping the leadership identity.

### **7.3.3 The Power of Neo-liberalism and Globalization**

There is no doubt that neo-liberalism and globalization has taken shape in Malaysia's higher education, and is manifested in its policies, long-term strategic plan and action plan. The significant effect of neo-liberalism is seen through the political impact on higher education leadership, as well as through the equally important economic and technological affects. As such, the concept of neo-liberalism and its effect on higher education will be explained prior to the discussion of the consequences of neo-liberalism on leadership in the context of the study.

According to Olssen & Peters (2005), neo-liberalism refers to a politically imposed discourse, which constitutes the hegemonic discourse that originated from Western nation states. They note that within higher education; neo-liberals have introduced a new mode of regulation or form of governmentality, in which it came to represent a positive conception of the state's role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. The purpose is to develop an individual to become an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur. Lynch (2006) however, argued that neo-liberalism has inherited the core values of liberalism in both its humanistic and economic forms.

Nonetheless, Olssen and Peters further remark on the effect of neo-liberalism on higher education, such as shifting from collegial or democratic governance to hierarchical models based on dictated management specification of job performance, restructuring of managerial works and course content towards market and state demands, eroding of the traditional conception of professional autonomy, and requiring additional funds from external sources.

Indeed, higher education institutions have been transformed increasingly into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, whose public interest values have been seriously challenged (Lynch, 2006). This involves, among others, the massification of higher education, global league tables for universities, prioritizing research in terms of quantity and not the quality of scholarship, changing nature of the role of universities from centres of learning to a business organisation with productivity targets, and transforming from academic to operational focus. Critically, Marginson (1999), on focusing on the effect of neo-liberalism on leadership, notes that a new kind of leadership in universities has emerged. In this view, the VC is a 'strategic director and change agent' who will run the universities as corporations with 'formulae, incentives, targets and plans'. With that perspective, she exerts that the appointment of VCs has become an important issue, that the 'outsiders' who are not organically linked to the institution are preferred. While the top is being externally appointed, the DVCs, PVCs, deans are internally selected, with focal emphasis on loyalty to the centre rather than to the disciplines or faculties. Correlatively, these neo-liberalism criteria and effects have been reflected in this study, as has been highlighted by respondents and discussed inside the findings chapter.

### **7.3.3.1 Analysis of Neo-liberalism in the Context**

Looking from the Isomorphism theory instigated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the encroachment of neo-liberalism in Malaysian higher education does indicate the isomorphic process (imitative) of the other higher education systems from the rest of the world. There is extensive literature that presents lengthy analysis and arguments concerning the prevailing and entailing culture of the new universal theme and trend in the world higher education. For example, to name a few, Shore

& Wright (1999); Marginson & Considine (2000); Olssen (2002); Olssen & Peters (2002); Lynch (2005); Peters (2001); Simkins (2000); Angus (2004); Bok (2003); Bonal (2003); Brewer, Gates & Goldman (2002); Giroux (2002); Henkel (1997); and many more. Those studies and literature that encompass the investigations of the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and European higher education reveal the consequences of neo-liberalism in developing and shaping university's culture.

Acknowledging these effects on Western universities and in other developed countries, Malaysian higher education has been unexceptional from the overwhelming world scenario. The imitative image of neo-liberalism has impinged Malaysian higher education, particularly when the centralised governing system took place under the authority of the Ministry of Higher Education in 2002. For example, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2020, which was prepared in 2005, illuminates the strong blend of neo-liberalism aspirations entangling the vision, mission, objectives and strategies of Malaysian higher education for the period until 2020. Those strategies are then complemented by the Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010, outlines the tactical measures on how to achieve such strategic objectives. These two major means of regulating the higher institutions have undoubtedly encoded the strategic minds of the leadership in running their institutions. Each institution has to adopt and adapt the ministerial strategies inside their institutional strategic plans and actions. The following excerpt, which was taken from the speech of the Minister of Higher Education during the Ministry monthly assembly on 20 July 2010, connotes the overwhelming neo-liberalism hegemony that substantially dictate the activities of the Ministry and higher institutions.

*“In addition, we have set the KRAs (Key Result Areas) and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for the Ministry, outside of the KRAs and KPIs that have been developed for each of CAP (Critical Agenda of National Higher Education Strategic Plan) earlier. In early 2009, the Ministry (MHE) has set up four Main Key Result Areas (MKRA) to measure the performance of MHE, there are; access and equity, graduates marketability, internationalization, and research and development. To strengthen the initial MKRA, the Ministry on the other hand, has set up a second version of MKRA. The second version will focus on three*

*objectives; firstly to strengthen the quality of higher learning, secondly to contribute to the country's economy and finance, and thirdly to contribute to the country's socio-economic development. For this purpose, a total of 18 KPIs have been determined, which among others include the recognition of Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), the number of international academic staff in higher institutions, the number of foreign universities branches in the country, the percentage of academic staff with PhD qualification, fund generation by the institutions, research and development fund (R & D), commercialization of R & D products, and the national income from foreign students."*

The monthly assembly is one of the mechanisms to deliver its vision, policy, strategies, and plan of action to its community. From the above excerpt, it clearly indicates the emphasis on performance and accountability assessment, the massification of higher education, the privatization and the external funded research, inasmuch as they emulate the image of neo-liberalism. These messages were being transmitted to higher education leaders and staff to be implemented accordingly, as disclosed by the following respondent:

*"There should be realignment to some extent [with the Ministry's policy], particularly now when the MHE has set up the Strategic Plan for MHE. The question is how do we [university leaders] translate that strategic plan into the university point of view? For example, now everybody [universities leaders] is talking about student employability, so we have been shaped by the policy and not by the knowledge proper, the study or whatsoever...". (Respondent 14/institution/female)*

The discourse, *we have been shaped by the policy and not by the knowledge proper*, indicates the conflict between the neo-liberal managerial and professional cultures (Olssen & Peters, 2005). The discourse also unveils the changes to make university courses and programmes more relevant to the world of work because of the market demands. While this may seem like merely a change in form rather than substance, the danger with this advancing marketised individualism (Lynch, 2005) is that the leadership's focus inevitably needs to be diverged from safeguarding the public interest values to promoting the commercially oriented graduates.

Nonetheless, Lynch (2006), in highlighting such affect, discloses further that there is a relatively silent colonisation of the hearts and minds of academics and students happening in universities. She confesses that such colonisation is made possible by the seemingly apolitical nature of the neoliberal agenda, which depoliticises debates about education by hiding its ideological underpinnings in a language of economic efficiency. This study noted that the significant changes have occurred not only in terms of how the Ministry and higher institutions refocuses the governance, research and teaching efforts, but also in terms of how those policies [the strategic plan and action plan] change the cultural life of the university. Within this newly emerging culture, everything the leaders do must be measured and counted and only the measurable matters (Lynch, 2006), as explicated by one respondent (Chapter 6, Para 6.3.5).

Lynch confesses that trust in professional integrity and peer regulation has been replaced with performance indicators, and that there is a deep alienation in the leadership practices. She argues further that this will lead to the feeling of personal inauthenticity and a culture of compliance, as externally controlled performance indicators become the constant point of reference. As a result, Lynch & Giroux (2002) denote that the measurable performance basis will inevitably lead to a situation where personal career interests will entirely govern the academic life. Therefore, this is the underpinning reason of why many leaders seem to be *managing themselves more rather than managing the organisation* (Chapter 6, Para 6.3.4) and the emerging situation is visibly ensued across the institutions, as depicted by the following quotation.

*“However the landscape now is slightly changing, it looks like they are emphasizing more on managing their own careers. Some organisations are lagging behind even though their leaders perform so well, so the leader can supersede the organisation. This situation is filtered through, no matter whether they are at the top or middle level.” (Respondent 18/institution/male).*

Olssen & Peter (2005) generalised the situation as a cultural shift that professionalism has been distrusted and that it generates the conditions for opportunism and self-interested individuals. Such value is becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education in many parts of the world, and Malaysian higher

education is not excluded. Noting that the value has sharply forfeited the purpose of higher education, Giroux (2002) confesses that neo-liberalism has tainted the civic-inspired notion of educational leadership as market fundamentalism has untrammelled the pursuit of self-interest.

### **7.3.3.2 Neo-liberalism and its Effect on Leadership**

Due to the changes in the system, the leadership in Malaysian higher education relentlessly is being transformed to model the corporate figure. Giroux (2005) in citing Jay Mathews in its widely read article “It’s lonely at the Top: What Became of the Great College Presidents”, argues that it has become increasingly difficult to find models of academic leadership in higher education that emulate the great college presidents of the past, in which many played an esteemed and pronounced role in the drama of intellectual and political life. Many are the academic managers rather than the academic leaders, as highlighted by respondent 15 (Chapter 6, Para 6.3.3).

Leadership has taken a different turn under the new managerialism. Deem (2001) defines new managerialism as the application of techniques, values and practices derived from the commercial sector to publicly funded institutions. The practice is commonplace in the private sector, particularly with the imposition of a powerful management body that overrides professional skills and knowledge. She confesses that the performance is under tight control and is driven by efficiency, external accountability and monitoring, and an emphasis on standards. In the context of the study, respondent 19 depicted the phenomena,

*“And then the academicians like professors are really involved in administration, I think we are really burdened and pressured, so their focus is not on expertise but more on management and administration, so we feel that the existing responsibilities are overburdening” (Respondent 19/institution/male)*

Under the managerialism conception, Giroux (2005) asserts that the leaders are known less for their intellectual leadership. Their roles are more “as fundraisers and ribbon cutters and coat holders, filling a slot rather than changing the world”. The leaders do not have to display intellectual reach and civic courage. Instead,



they are expected to bridge the world of academia and business. They are characterized less by their ability to take risks, think critically, engage important progressive social issues, and provoke national debates than they are for raising money, producing money and figures for their jobs, and so forth.

*“So a large number of top management did perform a managerial function, rather than leadership function, as the leadership function has decreased, there they are doing more on management function. And I think this is also a reason why lately it is so difficult to find prominent figures in our society for example in social science, linguistics, history and economics.” (Respondent 16/institution/male)*

Hence, in perceiving the leadership roles in this context, using the metaphor “two sides of the same coin”, on the one hand, the leadership is portrayed as the managers and administrators, and, on the other hand, the leadership carry the image as ‘academic entrepreneur’; promoting the commercialization of the institution into the real market demand.

## **ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

**How do the organizational factors affect the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia?**

### **7.4 Organizational Factors**

Two organizational factors notably underscore many discourses of the respondents –the organizational structure and culture. Thus, the following discussion will focus on the influences of these two factors on leadership. However, this does not mean that the other factors (as highlighted in the literature chapter) are not important, because those respective factors have own attributive impact on the leadership under study.

#### **7.4.1 Organizational Structure**

##### **7.4.1.1 Type of Structure and its Implication on Leadership**

With regards to the context of the study, as explained in Chapter 3, Malaysian higher education is more of a mechanistic type of organization. Its hierarchical

and bureaucratic structure of organization under centralised administration tends to be strictly controlled, highly formalized, and standardized. Furthermore, Heike & Frank (2007) acknowledge that such a structure limits the leader's ability to act in novel ways, and provide sufficient cues to guide their behaviour. The following quotation clearly spells out the situation:

*“We have limitations; we have certain barriers, which we cannot voice publicly at any level, for example, we can voice this out in seminar at university level, but not to the upper level, as they might freeze or certain inappropriate action on us.” (Respondent 19/institution/male)*

The quotation implies the respondent understanding of the boundary limit and acceptable norm in articulating his concerns and ideas. Also he was aware that leaders are subjected to rules, constraints, and have limited opportunities to undertake and that a legitimate setting conveys the meaning that doing the adverse is unsecure and risk taking. However, Heike & Frank (2007) note that in certain circumstances, leaders may enjoy some discretion in translating upper management decisions into operational plans, but their context is typically characterized by lower autonomy and task complexity, as depicted in Chapter 6, Para 6.3.1.

It appears in this context that the bureaucratic structure defines the leaders' choices and functions. As Shamir & Howell (1999) argue, the mechanistic organization is “stronger” and underlines the psychological situation for leaders and members in that they have fewer opportunities to exercise discretion and thus underrate their freedom of choice.

Within the realm of authoritative and bureaucratic nature, structurally, the top leaders (the VCs) have a sense of power and authority to shape their organization and make high-impact decisions. However, they are still under considerable control externally (the MOHE), and have less authority to initiate large-scale changes. As for the middle and lower level leaders, they are constrained by organizational regulations with mundane activities through pre-defined job processes, in which, often times they involuntarily have to do the job. Obviously, they have a more limited span of discretion and are more likely to adapt their

behaviour to the expectations of their superiors (Shamir and Howell, 1999). Subsuming the cultural aspect, Hofstede (2001) states that organizations of high Power Distance (PD) cultures tended to be more centralized and relied on more hierarchical levels than the organizations in low PD cultures, thus the leaders are more autocratic and directive.

#### **7.4.1.2 The Space or Distance**

It is also evident in the study that the space or distance factor becomes the regular discourse when the respondents talked about the structure. Antonakis & Atwater (2002) note that hierarchical level creates 'distance' that may moderate the type of leadership behaviour. Such distance would be in the form of psychological, structural, and functional separation, disparity, or discord between a supervisor and a subordinate (Napier & Ferris, 1993).

In a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure with regard to the context of the study, space is visually evident, in terms of the distance and large span of control of the leaders. Antonakis & Atwater (2002) categorise the distance as social or psychological distance. They define the social distance in the leadership domain as the perceived differences in status, rank, authority, social standing, and power, which affect the degree of intimacy and social contact that develop between the leaders and the followers. The situation has been described in Chapter 6, Para 6.3.1.

The situation visibly connotes the social distance of the leaders (Shamir, 1995), in which the status emerges as the main factor for leaders to be aloof from their subordinates, and behave formally in a less egalitarian way. Also the discourse, *a top person will not come down to a small cubicle of a clerk*, demonstrates the leaders' tendency not to "deliver an individually tailored confidence-building communication" (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Thus, in general, leaders seem to be less approachable, that Antonakis and Atwater assert that socially (and physically) distant leaders could have more impact more to at the group-level than individual-level, since the leaders would tend to behave homogeneously with followers. The perceived identity is congruent with the collective cultural norm.

However, Shamir (1995) posits that socially distant leadership is prevalent in high-level leadership, that they are physically distant and have infrequent and indirect contact with the followers.

#### **7.4.2 Organizational Culture**

As has been highlighted by respondents and elaborated upon in the findings chapter, under the bureaucratic mode, the leadership focus seems to be on efficiency, and accentuates organizing and administering activities to achieve higher or more reliable outputs. The emphasis is more on order, clear goals, and measured outputs. The nature of work is perpetual and is specified in a contract between the leaders and followers, and there is a high reliance on members performing their prescribed obligations for clear rewards and inducements, and, to some extent, self-interest is assumed to be their main motivational force (Shamir & Howell, 1999).

The bureaucratic mode of governance leads everyone to construe the situation in the same way, induce uniform expectations regarding appropriate response patterns (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). As one VC mentioned “*in a situation where the bosses know all, many innovative ideas die prematurely*”. The work can be reduced to mechanical steps and participants can follow objective, computational procedures to solve problems, such as instructions and manuals, or reliance on standard technical knowledge. The situation was reflected in this discourse:

*“We are emphasising more on manual and work procedures...that’s why sometimes I feel that the leadership task has been passed down to the lowest level of the organisation, even, to some extent, a very important leadership job has been passed down...”(Respondent 13/institution/male)*

Shamir and Howell classify such a cultural setting as non-adaptive, which stresses order and efficiency, and is averse to change, innovation, and risk. Therefore, they assert that, typically, the transactional kind of leadership will emerge and the charismatic and transformational type of leadership will not prevail.

## ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTION 3

### How are the emerging leadership Identities constructed within the Context?

#### 7.5 The Construction of the Leadership

The social construction perspective posits that individuals create and interpret reality as they interact with their environments (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Based on the premise that social order is a human product, Berger & Luckmann (1966) suggest that individuals are socialized to construct reality around institutionalized norms for thinking, feeling, and behaving. While Chen & Meindl (1991) argue that the construction of self is much about the way we understand organization and the way we construct meaning regarding events. These constructions are based on the implicit theories we hold and social interactions we have with others who affect the availability, salience, vividness, and value of the information we received. Thus, the basic assumption is that much of organizational life is predicated on trying to create meaning for others and interpret the meaning of the actions of others.

Meindl (1995) denotes the salience of followers in understanding the leader's personality, behaviour and effectiveness. Within his conception of social constructionist perspective, leadership is literally understood 'through the eyes of the followers', in which the leadership role is not seen through formal lenses, but rather their enacted roles. The leadership construction is perceived from the *social processes* and situational factors rather than objective leader behaviour.

Using metaphor, Murell (1997) conceptualizes that, 'Leadership is a social act, a construction of a ship as a collective vehicle to help take us where we as a group, organization or society desire to go'. Further, Dachler & Hosking (1995), Bresnen (1995) and Hosking (1998) see leadership in a more complex view as social reality, emergent and inseparable from the context. Precisely, the social construction of leadership is interested in understanding how leadership deals with the complex and often ambiguous and contradictory experiences of work or organization. The focus is not on the leadership as a sole entity, but on how all

members can co-create a future that maximizes the group's effectiveness. Hence, leadership is a relational property within a group, for example, leaders exist because of followers, and followers exist because of leaders.

A constructionist perspective highlights that both leaders and followers act in ways that they believe will be interpreted in a certain way by others. As for leaders, they not only lead groups of people, *but are also themselves members of these groups* (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Thus, they act and react through the shared meaning that uses the same schemes of interpretation. It is through these shared meanings and mutual acts of interpretation – actions and reactions within a particular social discourse – that a view of the world is constructed, which is often called “reality” (Khurana, 2003). Further, Gergen (1999) asserts that all claims to ‘the real’ are traced to processes of relationships, in which meanings are born of co-ordinations among persons – agreements, negotiations and affirmations. Thus, leadership is a social process defined through interaction, and how leaders and followers shared meanings through sense making to form the ‘reality’ (Smircich & Morgan, 1982), and leadership is not simply a matter of leaders, or even of leaders and followers. Rather it has to do with the *relationship between leaders and followers within a social group* (Haslam, 2001: van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003b).

Referring to a sociological notion of identities, Hogg (2001) critically analyses that if leadership is indeed a structural feature of in-groups, then leaders and followers' interdependent roles are embedded within a social system bounded by membership of a common group or category. Such on-going processes of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives (Jenkins, 1996) will construct their identities. Watson (2008) denotes this process as the analytical distinction between people's '*internal*' self-identities and the '*external*' social-identities to which they relate. Nonetheless, Hogg (2001) asserts that leaders may emerge, maintain their position, be effective, and so forth, as a result of basic social cognitive processes that (Gergen & Davis, 1985) derive from repeated interactions with others. To shift among interaction is to shift among the definition of the self (Weick, 1995). Thus, the forming of

social identity is socially constructed and is a process of ‘becoming’, which is achieved through performance (Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2007).

## **7.6 The Construction of Leadership Identity within the Context**

The context, which explains the system, structures, space, values and beliefs, is central to identity within this perspective. As Taylor (1989: 28), cited by Henkel (2005), said, ‘To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad . . . what has meaning and importance to you and what is trivial and secondary’.

In the previous sections of this chapter, it has been illuminated that the strong and legitimate political power, the cultural norms, the neo-liberal encroachment as well as the organizational context have ‘uniquely’ shaped and constructed the leadership. The word ‘unique’ refers to the entwining and complementary nature of those factors that might strategically construct the leadership thinking, behaviour, characteristics and identity. For example, the strong political power that has rooted uncontested in the government system could be closely attributed to the cultural characteristic of the people – the manifestation of power distance and collectivism. The neo-liberal agendas could easily be implemented because of the ‘absolute’ power that the authority has and the preconceived perception that the leaders are culturally obedient. Further, the hierarchical, bureaucratic and non-autonomous organizational structures and culture becomes the ‘iron cage’ to shape the leadership in public higher education. Thus, the social construction of the leadership in this context occurs within those interweaving factors that further serve to be the attribution factors for the leadership identities.

### **7.6.1 The Salient Leadership Identity**

The notion of the leadership in the context of the study perceived leader as an entity at the top of the hierarchy, and as a discrete unit, which is unlikely to be able to account for the inherent connection between all members (Baker, 2001), and is more concerned with differences in status. As highlighted by many respondents, the importance of being obedient and not making waves is highly visible. As a matter of fact, it appears in this context that the more successful

leaders are those who are more 'passive' (Carsten *et al.*, 2010) in performing roles, non-confrontational, and not a risk taker, whereas the less successful leaders are assertive individuals, who have the courage to question the authority or actively disagree with the status quo. Observations during the interview demonstrate that the leaders were very careful in phrasing their words, insofar as they are less willing to speak out on any untoward issues, and seemingly attempt to show their loyalty and support to the authority. This is indicated by putting a pause in their conversations, followed by a little laugh or giggle, or using the cynical and meaningless words "...I don't know..." Thus, being non-confrontational or non-assertive would be well accepted and become more adaptable to the group.

Within the organizational context, the socializing process among leaders and followers occurs within the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, which indicates status inequalities, power differentials and non-autonomous. Indeed, research on the social construction of leadership has demonstrated that individuals maintain a romanticized notion of leadership where the word leader tends to activate a schema of heroism, notoriety, and success (Carsten *et al.*, 2010).

The image that leaders are conforming, accountable, and loyal is reinforced by a top-down approach, which is grounded in hierarchical notions that status, power, influence, and prestige are reserved for those at the upper echelon, in which is very much attributed to the historical tradition (feudalistic system) and culture of the context. They construct their frames of reference to the restricted purview to the action of those in superior organizational positions (Bresnen, 1995), and as Uhl-Bien & Pillai (2007) noted it is possible that the leaders [middle and lower rank] create and maintain an identity that is defined by obedience, deference, silence, and powerlessness.

In hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, the notion of leadership is perceived within the power of one or a few individuals, through their formal roles (Bresnen, 1995), which inherit the traditional Western heroic leadership. This form of identity could be said to reflect the position of individuals who see themselves as undertaking the same roles as others, which involves interaction between the individual and the structures that they encounter, such as a job description or



functional location. Thus, identity becomes ‘not an essence but a positioning’ (Whitchurch, 2008). It could be argued here that structures influence individual identity, modify, change or recreate identity. Therefore, it relates the identity to an individual’s positioning at any point in time, allowing for the possibility that this may change according to circumstances, so that the individual is positioned (Giddens, 1991).

### **7.6.2 Multiple Roles and Identities**

Besides being bounded by structures, it appears from this study that the leaders perform multiple roles that could lead to multiple identities (Brickson, 2000), since the context [of the roles] mandates with specific salient identities. Multiple roles and identities have become the norm within individuals (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). For instance in this study, one leader might bring together the roles of dean, professor, lecturer, colleague, team player in collaborative research with the industries, and a subordinate to upper management. Different roles have different groups and thus different identities, which might be permanent or temporary in nature. In a real sense, the leaders are not only developing a lateral relationship, but also a complex and dynamic kind of relationship – interpersonal, intra-group, and intergroup, across functional and organizational boundaries to create new professional spaces, knowledge and relationships (Whitchurch, 2008).

Hence, they are actively questioning and altering their conceptions and identities (Scott & Lane, 2000), negotiating image, managing the relationship with various identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). A leader may have as many social identities as he or she has group memberships. Multiple roles can conflict and overlap with one another and so does the identity. Watson (2008) asserts that identities are caught up in contradictions and struggles, tension, fragmentation and discord. Therefore, the leadership identity is constructed through participation and negotiation, as their roles often come in the form of a relational basis. Chapter 6, Para 6.3.3 depicts the intersecting roles of the leaders, between the manager’s and the academic roles, or between organizational leaders and academic leaders.

The example demonstrates the shift in academia towards corporatism and managerialism as a result of the neo-liberal effect, which witnesses the competing and conflicting roles of the leaders, which were advocated and deliberated further by another respondent. At the same time they see that their primary and expected role is to lead the followers and bring about some changes to the institution.

These emerging tensions draw upon their purpose to serve both for the discipline and institution as well (McAlpine, *et al.*, 2008). Not only have they got to perform (McAlpine, *et al.*, 2008) the managerial roles (the tasks that are associated with the perceived erosion of academic autonomy as institutions respond to competitive markets and government accountability requirements) and administrative roles (the tasks that are associated with unwanted bureaucracy), but also they are accountable to the market orientated functions. The intersecting and overlapping roles depict the complexity of their identities in that such identities are always in transition and temporary in nature (Ashforth, 2001).

With regard to the leadership roles being in accord with policy changes; obviously they were defining themselves in relation to the Ministry's directions, and, at the same time, they were comparing, identifying and matching their 'self' with others due to those changes. In this sense, this is the possible reason for "*when they [the leaders] see the Ministry's focus is on certain areas of KPI, leaders will follow suit, and then when the view from the top [Ministry] changes again, their focus will also change accordingly, to the extent that they sometimes abandon the previous one*", because it is visible, here, the leaders role marks the point where leaders' own presentation of self meets that perception of how others desire that self to be constructed (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Their plurality thinking and behaviour was visibly illuminated, insofar as it depersonalized their 'self' leadership pursuit to carry out the prescribed organizational commitments. Simpson and Carroll explain the phenomena as the performative reiteration of roles where 'suppressing' the existence of other roles allows for the engagement into the required identity. Not only are the leaders negotiating the roles with others perceptions, but they also 'get into', 'back into' and 'come in and out' of the roles. Thus, they are entering the complex interpersonal, organizational and

structural relationships with the ability to achieve both the difference and compliance in their identity negotiations (Simpson & Carroll, 2008).

### **7.6.3 Recruitment Process.**

In identifying themselves, leaders are always defining and redefining their 'self' against the 'external' social identity. Thus, the basis of perception of self and others is circumscribed by 'who they are' and 'who the others are'. In the case of leadership appointment in Malaysian higher education, the acceptance and rejection of the leaders being appointed can be explained through the lens of that identification. The dilemma rose by the respondent in Chapter 6, Para 6.2.1.1 demonstrates the struggle in identifying who is the new VC and the others.

The illustration also implies the ambiguous and confusing role of the authority that is supposed to be responsible for appointing the VC and other higher posts in the higher institutions. Further, there seems to be conflicting roles between the deans (which might reflect the other positions as well) and the 'external' others in the recruitment process. From their verbal and emotional expressions, it appears that the rejection of the leadership appointment is due to the identification and self-categorization process, in which the academics in higher institutions are sensitive to 'their' and 'others' identity, particularly when the appointed VC is not from the academics or from the industry, and was imposed by powerful political forces beyond their control. Thus, they act and react and respond to even very subtle differences in 'who' the new leader would be (Hogg, 2001). They perceived the appointed VC, as an outsider, who is unlikely to be able to embody the essence of the academics (Hogg, 1993), and, further, become an effective leader. However, due to the position of powerlessness they have in relation to the authority, they have to negotiate their categorization and unwillingly accept the appointed leader, even though it is contradicts existing practices, and, to their perception, of 'what a good' leader means. Perhaps, the academics are likely to very much internalize with the longstanding organizational identity that the top leaders are socially constructed from top down, and that they are more likely to cling to existing organizational identities for the sake of future organizational enhancement and effectiveness.

The above phenomena could also be attributed to the neo-liberal effect. The Ministry tends to fill the top post with outsiders who seem to have an identity "fit" with the position from their perception, even though the leader's identity has been constructed in different contexts. Hogg & Terry (2000) argue that if the organization somehow manages to escape the social identification effects and continues to hire a leader whose self-image is in congruent with external requirements, rather than with the existing organizational identity, and if the powerful authority supports the new leader to align organizational identity with his or her self-identity, then the organization is likely to succeed. However, they confess that this method is unlikely to succeed, particularly in developing a wise organization; it rather promulgates punctuated change (Scott & Lane, 2000).

Regarding the favouritism in the leaders' selection and appointment processes, social identity theorists argue that since group membership is an important constituent of the self-concept, they tend to evaluate their in-groups more favourably than they evaluate other groups (Jost & Elsbach, 2001). This phenomenon is referred to as 'in-group bias' or 'in-group favouritism' (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). The display of intergroup bias has been regarded largely as a strategy for maintaining or enhancing one's individual and collective self-esteem (Jost & Elsbach, 2001), irrespective or not of whether they exhibited de facto leadership qualities (Bresnen, 1995). Group members will only accept out-group in the situation of status relevant dimensions, and when the status and power differences are perceived as highly legitimate (Ellemers, Wilke & van Knippenberg, 1993).

#### **7.6.4 Resentment**

As has been expressed during the interview process, resentment and grievance; for example, concerning the political influence in various parts of the management and leadership process in higher institutions, concerning the overburden of the workload, the low authority and autonomy, and less academic freedom are visibly demonstrated. These emotional elements, which might be attempted to be controlled by the external or organizational factors, have met with resistance (Coupland, 2008). They were 'acting out' in a different identity as

opposed to the status quo (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993); their emotion is a symbolic act of resistance against what they perceived to be an unreasonable, uncaring and unresponsive regime. Their resistance reveals the phenomena that the relationship between the authority and the academics has not been built to create the shared objectives and meanings. Their concerns have been neglected by the authority. However, their emotional displays are consistent amongst many respondents, which demonstrate their feelings of authenticity towards their profession, and their anxiety towards the worsening of the social processes that underpin the work performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

However, they were expressing their depression and frustration from a distance and in an indirect way to the top management, as they were more emotionally involved due to their positions and responsibilities. As explained by Coupland (2008), they do not express their emotion explicitly because the accounts of emotional experience are influenced by the local systems of rights, obligations and what is deemed to be appropriate behaviour (the collective cultural norms).

#### **7.6.5 Autonomy**

The most highly debated discourse amongst academics as highlighted in Chapter 6, Para 6.2.1.8, concerns academic autonomy. Neave (1998), cited in Henkel (2000), defines academic autonomy as the right of staff in higher education to determine the nature of their work within the community of scholars. Working from this definition, leadership autonomy is the reflection of the right of the leadership in higher education to determine the nature of what their institutions would be.

In the case of academic autonomy within this context, it is about changing the rules of the game that have long curtailed the spirit of intellectuals ranging from dampening it through a number of bureaucratic processes, legal or otherwise. The more tedious the process, the more intense is the struggle is. However, autonomy is essential for universities and higher education to surge forward (VC University Science of Malaysia in his weekly column in New Strait Times- –local newspaper –4/7/2010). Clearly, from this study, the leaders are rather incapable of shaping

their institutions due to the disempowered or ‘powerless’ position that they have, which are subjected to the externally defined rules and evaluative criteria.

The study yielded some examples of the restrictions and pressures of the leaders, particularly in making decisions that need some degree of consent from the authority as well as the politicians. The examples (in Chapter 6, Para 6.2.1.8) reveal the complexity and heterogeneity of working relationships, which seems considerably mechanistic. The tension between the self-efficacy of leaders and the bureaucratic rules offer them a very limited choice that could possibly impede the future development of institutions. The contradictory goals and conflicting roles construct the dilemmatic identity. Their roles are construed within the dynamic of power and control (Simpson & Carroll, 2008), which have to negotiate between the political and institutional pressures. This illustrates the situation that they have to suppress their own views in order to be seen as congruent with the authority or the higher management, which (Simpson & Carroll, 2008) charts the complex patterns of power and powerlessness. Relationally, the authority or higher management are at the end of the power spectrum, which have power over and lack of power with respect to others (Simpson & Carroll, 2008); thus, it could be understood here that the nuances and pattern of leadership roles and identities lie between where the power is claimed and denied.

#### **7.6.6 Women and Ethnic Minority Issues**

When we talk about women in leadership, it has long been understood as being closely related to minority groups in organizations, be it in Western or Eastern cultures. However, the concept of “feminism” in leadership refers to the caring, nurturing and affection kinds of leadership, in contrast to the authoritative and command and control types of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Hence, Morgan (1997) notes that organizations framed through a masculine lens tend to reflect the dominant influence of the male, which is rooted and reflected in the hierarchical relations. Organizations functioning within this paradigm tend to foster “rational, analytic, and instrumental characteristics associated with the Western stereotype of maleness, while downplaying abilities traditionally viewed as ‘female,’ such as intuition, nurturing, and empathic support” (Morgan, 1997, p.

226). In many ways the feminist values evoke “romantic images of human bonding and shared struggles”. As such, it serves as a critical mechanism for constructing a sense of belongingness, leading to a sense of what it means to be “us.”

With regard to Malaysian leadership, in general, and higher education, in particular, it has long been dominated by male and has pervasively been male tradition and norms. Historically, the role of women in Malaysia today is the outcome of a complex amalgam of traditional Malay custom, Muslim law, and more recent social, political, and legal developments (Kennedy, 2002). Talking about gender egalitarianism, Kennedy noted that talented Malaysian women will continue to experience difficulty moving into senior positions and will face the risk of having their contributions undervalued.

In such a normative environment with a masculine type of culture, only a small number of women manage to get the attention to be selected as a leader, for example, in May 2006 the first female VC was appointed for the public university, University of Malaya, for two years and her contract was not renewed. In August 2006, the second female VC was appointed for the National University of Malaysia for three years and her contract was renewed recently for another two years. And, in May 2008, another female VC was appointed for the Sultan Idris Education University for three years. In other words, presently, there are two female VCs for public universities compared to 18 who are males.

In a centralized, hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, women participation and leadership is being downplayed (Briskin, 2006), and those who manage to be appointed are those who seemingly have a close relation with the authority. In the event of selecting and recruiting leaders, and, particularly, top leaders, the committee will endorse a male more strongly and easily than a female candidate. This is likely because female leaders do not match the prevailing construction of leadership, (Sjostrand, Sandberg & Tyrstrup, 2001) and leaders who can match their identity with the male oriented identity (e.g., of speech, dress, attitudes, interaction style and management style) would have a higher possibility of being

endorsed as leaders (Hogg & Terry, 2000). It could also be due to the Ministry wanting to find somebody whose identity ‘fits’ the ‘managerialism’ functions.

Nonetheless, the issue of power and gender could be highlighted here in exploring women in leadership in this context. As women are often perceived as having either little power or being powerless, and managing in ‘feminine styles’ Eagly & Carli (2003) suggest that women need to ease the ‘dilemma of role incongruity’ when they take up the roles of leadership, which are often attributed to dominant, aggressive, assertive and powerful.

Women encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people’s self-worth, get others excited about their work, and prefer deliberate discussion. Easing this dilemma of role incongruity requires that female leaders behave extremely competently, while at the same time reassuring others that they conform to expectations concerning appropriate female behaviour (Briskin, 2006).

This scenario is reflected in the way one female respondent answered the question about leadership roles and challenges, as depicted in Chapter 6, Para 6.3.4.

From the answer, it demonstrates that she was very clear of her roles that go beyond touching people on a personal level encompassing the people’s emotional needs. She was also fully aware that the task is not easy, particularly to compete with her male counterparts. Her feminine yet transformational style is obvious when she demonstrated her concern with helping people grow, particularly in terms of the contributions those people can make to the organization. Despite struggling with her subordinates, she also tried to match her performance with her colleagues.

On the ‘glass ceiling effect’ of the women and ethnic minority (Chinese and Indian in particular) in the public service sector, these groups may find it hard to lead the dominant group norms (the Malay), and, adversely, the minority group will be perceived as “incongruent”. Social minorities (women and ethnic minority) find that although they can attain middle management positions, they



hit an invisible ceiling that excludes them from top leadership positions, as depicted by the following interview excerpt:

*“In the government sector non-Malays cannot go up because there is a glass ceiling where they cannot go up. For me I think I will never get to the top, unless, I am a Christian, so I always say that unless God intervenes. Unless suddenly there is such a policy change, for example, those who have been associate professor for ten years will now become a professor, then I will get. Or unless there is a mega rocking of the boat, that somebody dares to really rock the boat”.*(Respondent 22/institution/female).

It can be inferred from this quotation that top leadership positions are associated with conditions of the dominant ethnic group, because the dominant ethnic group has greater leader-norm congruence than the minorities. Although this quotation highlighted that the glass ceiling exists, particularly for ethnic minorities, it does also apply for women leaders. From the social identity context, generally, women and other minorities do not fit the characteristics of leadership that is shared among members of the organization, particularly when high-level or very powerful roles are considered. However, there is also evidence for (Eagly, 2003) a “glass escalator” effect in which ethnic minorities still succeed in the Malay-dominated organizations.

The barriers of prejudice and discrimination might become the reason to exclude women and ethnic minorities from higher-level leadership positions. There has been considerable public discussion on the idea of a ‘glass ceiling’ of discriminatory barriers that prevent women and minorities from ascending past a certain level in organization. This metaphor caught on the issue of prejudice as described by the Role Congruity Theory (Eagly, 2003). Eagly proposes that prejudice arises from the relations that people perceive between the characteristics of members of a social group and the requirements of the social roles that group members occupy or aspire to occupy. Thus, the potential of prejudice against female and ethnic minorities comes from the dissimilarity to the expectations that people typically have about the leaders. Therefore, ordinary women and minorities are vulnerable to role incongruity prejudice in relation to leadership.

### 7.6.7 The Construction of Islamic Leadership and Identity

Islam promotes seemingly consistent qualities in its teachings, asserting individuality and collective conformity simultaneously (Ali, 2005). In other words, it emphasises both personal and group strength. A group consists of individuals, thus the strength of the group is dependent on the strong character of individuals and vice versa. The sense of belonging to the group based on faith and goodness becomes the main binding element for the group's inherent cohesiveness.

Unlike the Western world, the private and the social life of an individual in Islam is indivisible. An individual feels he/she is part of a wider social organization called *Ummah* or community. The self "exists as the sum of its interactions with others" (Ali, 2009). The fundamental concept is that the relationship and interaction are primarily personal; inclusive of span and race consideration; and are expected to be flexible and broader in their application (Ali, 2010), based on the guiding principle, as stated in the Quran:

*"The noblest of you in the sight of God is the best of you in conduct"*  
(49:13)

From this point, the self-identity of leaders forms as part of and is integral to the social identity. The identification and categorization of their self occur within the Islamic meaning and sense making. The construction of the self and its worldview is primarily based on the underlying moral bases succinctly addressed in the Quran (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Ali 2005), as has been described in Para 2.5.3.2.

With those stages (Para 2.5.3.2), the constructing of 'internal self' is taking shape as an individual. When they reach those stages they become completely in tune with all the values outlined (Ali, 2010). They are content and show no doubt in knowing the zone of righteousness and wrongfulness, and possess the most genuine feeling in serving self and others. They resist wrongdoings and promote goodness. They exhibit an ideal situation where there is a state of harmony between entitlement and responsibility, self and others, nature and material wealth

(Ali, 2005). Ethical, social and humanistic values are their guide in conducting their personal and social affairs (Ali, 2009). With the strong ‘internal self’, they assess and categorise their self with the ‘external self’ and seek the most appropriate and harmonious way to be the group members.

Having such an understanding, leaders would develop a high sense of self in the context of dynamic social relations with a specific and clear set of values and accepted societal norms. The accentuation of personal relationships allows followers to relate to the leader both on the basis of personal character and the nature of the advocated vision. Their input and approval are important to sustaining leadership position (Ali, 2009).

From the above points, the complex and dynamic role of the leaders is constructed as a shared influence process. Ali (2005) asserts that, in Islam, leaders are not expected to lead or maintain their role without the agreement of those who are led, and, at the same time, decisions made by these leaders are expected to be influenced by the input from their followers. One example could be observed from the inauguration speech of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph or leader to lead the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (Ali, 2005). He told his audiences:

*“I have been given authority over you, though I am not the best among you. Help me if I am right; correct me if I am wrong. The weak among you shall be strong until I have attained for him his due...and the strong among you will be weak until I have made him give what he owes... Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His prophet; if I do not obey them, you owe me no obedience”* (Ali, 2005).

In this historically remarkable statement, Abu Bakr declared a social contract with his followers. He laid down the basis and limits of his authority as well as the duties of his followers. Abu Bakr’s acceptance of the position with notable humility was explicated in the phrase *“I have been chosen to rule over you, though I am not the best among you”*, which portrays the strong personal character and identity that he possessed. By having such quality, his followers have had a shared recognition that he was the best amongst the companions of the Prophet, to become a leader. However, for him, being selected as their leader

did not make him a better Muslim or a better person, but it confers a heavy responsibility. He defined his role as being relational, in which he sought to (Ulh Bien, 2006) build rich connections and interdependencies between him and his followers. Nevertheless, the interconnectedness between the leader and the followers occurs from mutual and participative involvement, and is conditional upon the leader's pious conduct. The discourse "*Help me if I am right; correct me if I am wrong*" demonstrates that Abu Bakr was thinking as part of the group, and that the leader and the follower are socially and mutually constructing the leadership. Thus, the overarching demand on the leader's identity is constructed and shared collectively (Kreiner, Hollenshe & Sheep, 2006).

The discourse "*Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His prophet; if I do not obey them, you owe me no obedience*" notably exhibits that the source of the roles and identity of the leaders comes from God, and that the social construction of the leadership should occur from the same lens. Hence, the roles are construed within the guiding framework of the teachings of Islam and are dynamic depending on the complexity of the society. The framework informs and guides their shared values, and prescribes the expected and acceptable behaviour in a given social context. The discourse might also reflect the firm but egalitarian kind of interrelationship, and ambiguous boundary roles of the leaders and the followers in constructing each other. As Ali (2005) mentioned, in Islam, social and personal relations are interwoven within the web of complex relationships, but interaction occurs in the ease and warmth of communication.

Taking into account the leadership process in Islam, and despite the clear statement in the constitution of Malaysia that Islam is the official religion for the country, the construction of Islamic leadership and identity in this context is somewhat 'blurred' and the external and internal contexts (as discussed in Chapter 6 and in previous sections) are not facilitating the way the Islamic leadership should be constructed. The commitment to Islamic values and ethics has been entwined with political, cultural and historical factors. The meaning and application of power has not progressed in line with the original Islamic thinking as exhibited by Prophet Muhammad.

The findings reveal that the leadership is facing challenges from the social and political barriers. The power, structure and culture seem to be contradictory to the Islamic leadership in certain circumstances. The quotation from the interview discloses this phenomenon.

*“We have problems to practice Islamic teaching in university, because there is a prejudice at the authority level that talking and behaving in an Islamic way is always linked to the opposition (party). So if the leader has a tendency to implement Islam in his department, he can do so at the personal level, but not to the extent to manage in an Islamic way”* (Respondent 20/ institution/male).

Another example concerns the legitimacy of power and authority that has illuminated by the study. The Quran clearly condemns oppression, dictatorship, and coercive methods. Those in power and authority should have wisdom and sound judgement, and should not be selected based on wealth and heredity, but rather on knowledge and fitness (Ali, 2005).

When asked about how they perceive Islamic leadership, one respondent acknowledged the outstanding quality of Islamic leadership, the values it conveys to the people and the loose conviction of the present generation.

*“Yes it is important, because if we look at the great leaders in Malaysia, they have a high Islamic value and practice. It is not superficial, because those who have high steadfast and practice have set up as great leaders. If we look back at our older people, they have more patience and self-control. Actually, if everybody holds on to Islamic principles, then the nation will safe. But now it looks otherwise. So that’s why in Islam we should develop, but many follow destruction. In Islam we should unite the people, but many tries try to destroy the unity. So the changes in our society are sending the wrong signal to our future generation”.* (Respondent 18/institution/male)

Since the culture in this society is quite strong, it has more influence on groups as well as the individuals. Obviously, there are certain cultural aspects that strengthen and weaken the Islamic practices (Ali, 2005). Thus, the construction of the leadership and identity has been shaped considerably more by cultural norms than by religion (Islam). Further, considering the other races with different religions and beliefs (Mutalib, 1993), Islam has not been institutionalised in terms of governance, management and leadership in the public sector. Rather, it

becomes as the choice of the individuals to commit to as personal conviction and leaders may seek opportunities within the prevailing system, structure and culture in order to practice and implement Islamic leadership at their level of capacity.

Within the subtlety among the cultural, political and Islamic ethics and values, the leaders seem to struggle to construct their identities. Undeniably, depending on the strength of their Islamic knowledge and conviction (*Iman, Taqwa and Ehsan*), the way they assess their 'internal self' and 'external self' could be influenced by their Islamic worldviews. For example, Ali, (2009) noted that there is a tendency among Muslim group members to not criticize, reveal or inform about others wrongdoings, regardless of their backgrounds. This tendency may serve to keep group cohesiveness and friendly relationships. Similarly, respect for the senior and older people is of highly valued and emphasised in Islam. The observation of this phenomenon is visibly explicated in this study, that open and direct criticism is largely avoided by leaders. The value is in tandem with the collective and high context culture of the society (Hofstede, 2001; Hall, 1991).

Observation during the interviews and from the researcher's previous experience working with the department indicate that the leaders tend to turn to informal groups in the case of when their roles are marginalised and their functions are primarily subordinated to the political and higher authority. Informal groups could consist of peers or the extension of formal groups (Ali, 2005), such as research teams or working committees. Their proliferation in an organizational setting is important as an alternative venue to seek the shared meaning and finding strength in facing contradictory and pressured situations. In this sense, informal groups become (Ali, 2005) both the source of self-esteem and identity for its members, a place to reduce tension, uncertainty and ambiguity in the workplace.

### 7.6.8 Model of the Construction of Leadership and Identity



**Figure 7.3 Model of the Construction of Leadership and Identity**

This model exhibits the macro and micro contextual factors that describe leadership as necessarily embedded in the context and socially constructed in and from a context. This model is proposed from the consideration and examination of context in both theorizing and operationalization. It embraces the role of the contextual factors as a shaping force on the individual and collective construction of the leaders and identities. It exhibits that the reality is no longer constructed on its own but rather it is the outcome of the relationship between the leaders and the followers and the context. As noted by Haslam (2004), *Leadership is curiously*

*hard to analyse, dissect and recreate because it derives from locally negotiated and retrospectively renegotiated understandings of identity.*

The social processes influencing this particular situation, in some respects, indicate the phenomena that define and shape the leadership process within this specific higher education context. These social processes emerged from the data and reflect the contextually developed understandings and experiences of participants concerning the process of leadership. The theoretical model that emerged from the data reflects the symbolic and thematic nature of the various participants and organizational narratives that occur within the situation.

This model depicts the relationship of the environmental, organizational and leadership factors. The outer sphere represents the environmental domain that consists of political, cultural, economic, technology and legal factors. These factors affect the organizational (higher institution) environment through the “power” of these respective factors –the political power, cultural power, economic power (neo-liberalism) and legal power. The technology factor is embedded and permeates all those factors, and is not a stand-alone factor. In this sphere, the participants perceive that those factors are a precondition to any leadership undertakings. Hence, the organizational and leadership are dependent on the environmental factors.

The second sphere represents the organizational domain, in which it denotes the assimilating process between organizational factors and the leadership. Organizational factors, such as structure, culture, processes, goal/objective, people, and others, are the elements that shape and nurture the leadership in an organization.

The third sphere is the leadership. By looking at the outer sphere and the second sphere, it is very significant that the surrounding factors cognitively provide the leaders with a systematic means of describing how they should perform their roles, and defining themselves in relation to social environment. This would further enable a leader to locate him or herself in relation to the environmental and organizational situation.



The spheres are being influenced and shaped by historical factors. This perception is described by many respondents as that of colonial ancestry.. Shamsul (2001) clearly mentions that, “in Malaysian history, a crucial element in every identity formation is still based on colonial knowledge”. He confesses that the most pervasive by-product of colonial heritage is the ‘nation-state’, which is the natural embodiment of history, in that the “nation-state’ has become dependent on colonial knowledge and its ways in determining, codifying, controlling and representing the past has formed the basis of the government. The history lies at the foundation of the modern; that ‘the identity of a history’ forms the basis of historiography. It is within this history that modern identities in Malaysia, such as Malay, Chinese and Indian have been described and consolidated (Shamsul, 2001).

With regard to the identity construction process, meaning making is about negotiating the order of social reality and identity, and within an environmental and organizational setting, leadership orchestrates the ordering of social data (Haslam, 2004). This negotiation process stimulates category creation and identification of ‘the self’. Senge (1990) mentions the word “identification” means not only ‘how we make sense of the world, but also how we take action’. This socio-cognitive process becomes an essential part of the way human beings structure their environment and their interactions with it (Denzau and North, 1994).

#### **7.6.8.1 Governmentality Process**

Beginning with history as the foundation, the colonial knowledge permeated the local thought system, and is reflected in the identity of Malaysia. The British colonial conquest was not only a matter of weapons, political shrewdness, and economic energy, it was also a cultural invasion in the form of the conquest of native ‘epistemological space’ (Shamsul, 2001). In other words, politically, economically, and culturally, Malaysia has been dominated, shaped and ‘factualised’ by colonial knowledge.

Considering that foundation, it has also shaped the contextual impact on the organization. Thus, it could be observed here that the relationship between the broader environment and the organizational functioning reflect the governmentality process that has occurred in the governing system (as described in Para 7.3.1.1). The governmentality process is opposed to the evolving or natural growth of organizations in normal practice. In this sense, environmental factors become the “turning” factors for any policy, strategies, and even the operational undertakings. As a matter of fact, the composite picture of organizational structure and culture and other elements is highly likely to be derived from environmental factors. Hence, the environmental conditions located within the larger environment enter the local aspects of organizational ideology and functioning catalysed by the governmentality processes. Meyer and Rowan (1977), in elaborating the concept, suggest that, “Organizations both deal with their environments at their boundaries and adapt environmental elements in their structures” (p. 346).

Further, the understanding and representation emerging from this study demonstrates that the central dimension of governmentality stimulates the contextual conditions that reconcile a seeming paradox concerning the relationship of the environment and organization. As described in Para 7.3.1.1 above, political power is being exercised and embedded in the management practices of higher institution. This demonstrates that external forces have the ability to impose the higher institutions to adapt to the increasing changing environments through policies, regulations, and other means as an essential condition for institutional well-being and future survival. As such, leadership and social identity is constructed via the process of interaction with outsiders, for instance, political power, rivals, and regulatory enforcement. As noted by Hogg and Terry (2001) in discussing Social Identity Theory and the impact of a highly salient group identification and the role of prototypicality, the implication of this process for leadership is quite straightforward. As group membership becomes increasingly salient, and leaders identify themselves in response to the external demand; the leadership perceptions, evaluations and effectiveness are increasingly based on the perception of how group-prototypical the leader is (p. 200).

The governmentality process is also reflected in the changing nature of identity construction. As acknowledged in the previous discussion concerning social identity, the identity is potentially a precarious and unstable notion (changeable character), which is frequently subject to redefinition and revision by organizational members. It is argued that the instability of identity arises mainly from its on-going interrelationships with organizational image (Hogg & Terry, 2001), which is clearly characterised by a notable degree of fluidity, and is adaptive in facilitating organizational change in response to environmental demands. From the study, this was clearly indicated by the unpredictable changing of policies and strategies formulated by central office, and thus manifests in the fluid construction of leadership as well as identity. As such, the governmentality process is obvious, that it frames the social context and shapes the nature of what is desirable from the perspective of authority.

#### **7.6.8.2 Shaping and Nurturing Process**

Normally, an organization has an identity to the extent that there is a shared understanding of the central, distinctive and enduring character or essence. This identity may be reflected in shared values and beliefs, missions, the structures and processes, organizational climate, and so on (Ashforth & Mael, 1998). The more salient the identity, the stronger the shaping and nurturing process become (Ashforth, 1985).

Regarding this study, as has been illustrated above in this chapter, the issues of hierarchy and bureaucratic nature of organization, central direction, less autonomy, emphasis on output and not process are examples of the higher education characteristics that have become the shared understanding of the members. The prevalence of a mechanistic structure, for instance, could make leadership salient and provide compelling images of what the leadership or organization epitomized (Ashforth & Mael, 1998). This process refers to the shaping and nurturing process in the organization.

Another example, the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure describes the traditional top-down relationship, command and control, and powerful leaders.

Such a structure recognizes the suppression of the emergence of bottom-up, interactive, and spontaneous processes. It tends to reduce heterogeneity by limiting the flow of ideas in favour of those in power (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Thus, the kind of conforming and less innovative leaders will be shaped and nurtured.

It is important to locate and understand that what takes place in the organization becomes the mould for the leadership process. In other words, the structure of the internal aspects of the organization becomes the parameters for identity formation. The organizational elements constantly impinge upon the construction of leadership in various ways, as described in the findings chapter.

The manifestation of the shaping and nurturing process in the mechanistic structure (as emerged from the study) could be observed by looking at the way the leaders acted in the organization, for example, the leaders show more concern for making close relationships, particularly with the upper level; irregular decision-making processes, which shows the signs of the uneven and politically inclined decision-making; tend to focus more on seniority in their reward systems, have less flexibility in their reward systems; have to comply with the civil service system; have more specialized and invariant job designs; higher levels of accountability, more rules, more regulations, more constraints, and higher level of formalization. The leaders are more concerned about compliance with rules and regulations. Seemingly, these characteristics are heavily influenced by externally imposed bodies of law, rules, and oversight activities on many governmental department/agencies.

The leadership practices often represent the refraction of societal values that are enacted through the shaping and nurturing process. Non-assertive is a case in point, as a result of collective cultural values. The question whether non-assertive is desirable may be construed as an ethical issue rather than a strictly practical one. In this way, it is feasible that the fairly widespread deployment of practice is a product of the leader's perception of what is acceptable in the organizational practices.

As such, it could be argued here that organizational characteristics constrain the behaviour of the manager. The leaders seem to have little discretionary power, and goals are determined by political leaders, rules, and regulations. The amount of discretion available to the leaders is constrained by forces internal and external to the organization. Bryman (1986) asserts that, “subordinates respond mainly to the discretionary influence of the leader” and “discount those leader behaviours which are externally determined”.

### **7.6.8.3 Assimilating Process**

The individual and collective identity of the leaders is informed by multiple factors. Individual’s social identities may be derived not only from the organization, but also from one’s work group, department, union, and so on. From here, they share a common identity across a subunit (Ashforth and Mael, 1998). Likewise, individuals tend to choose activities congruent with salient aspects in their organization, and the organizational structure and culture is likely to embody those salient aspects. These prevalent aspects represent the significant components of organizational factors. This social categorization process is important in the leadership construction process.

In performing their roles, leaders need to interact with other people inside and outside of the organization. Through interaction, leaders learn to ascribe socially constructed elements related to them and others. Therefore, through immersion in the social milieu, leaders gradually assume their identities. Frequent interaction and social comparison with fellow leaders, upper management, followers, and out-group people, slowly shape leaders self-conceptions and their understanding of the paradigms, values norms and job related matters. This perspective is called as the assimilating process, in which the leaders assimilate themselves in response to the organizational and environmental factors represented by the arrow coming out of the leadership sphere.

One example of the assimilating process is the ceremonial nature of leadership behaviour as a consequence of the organizational factors. To some extent, leadership is considerably affected by the climate of the organization. From the

study, it is found that it is difficult to effect long-term change in leadership behaviour through training programmes when the nature of the change clashes with organizational climate. It would seem that the leaders prefer to conform to the values that prevail in their institutions, in which the leaders are unwilling to act in a way that is inconsistent with the ethos of the organization.

Leadership construction is a reciprocal interaction of environmental and organizational determinants. This perspective suggests a more dynamic orientation that looks into the reality of the leadership and identity construction, in which environmental circumstances are not simply a moderating variable, but are mercurial phenomena to whose changing implications the leaders must constantly adjust.

### **7.7 Summary**

It is clearly explicated in this chapter that the external and organizational factors play important roles in shaping the construction of the leadership. The former are deemed to be more influential than the latter, as has been described above. The influence has been translated into the policies and strategies of higher education, and, further, in the action of the leaders at university level. The chapter also addresses how the minority groups (women and other ethnic minorities) construct themselves in respect of the majority group. The construction of the Islamic leadership is highlighted at the same time to show the minor impact on the leadership process.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This study was designed to provide rich and deep insights into understanding the social construction of the leadership and its identity in higher education Malaysia, through an interpretive analysis. The study supports the postmodernist approach and the social constructionist way of interpreting the phenomena. This research investigates various contextual and situational factors from external and internal views affecting the leadership and how the leadership enacted within those factors. This chapter will conclude the main findings of the study, which include the prevailing historical and social influence in shaping the leadership, the neo-liberalisation endemic on higher education context, and the internal context of the organisation. Subsequently, the contribution of the study to the knowledge, theory and practices becomes the essence of the study. Then, the implications and limitations of the study will be highlighted. Finally, the recommendations for future research will also be proposed.

#### **8.2 Objectives and Key Findings of the Study**

##### **8.2.1 Research Objective 1**

*To explore the effect of environmental factors on the construction of leadership in higher education in Malaysia.*






Even though the leader is embodied in an individual person, more importantly, leadership is a social phenomenon that emerges only in interaction, and has no value without interaction. Hence, there is a distinction from the dominant way of thinking about a leader as holding an assigned position to oversee activities and seeking to achieve a desired outcome (Karp & Holgen, 2009). The scholarly perception concerning the leadership skills/characteristics/style possessed by a person appointed to the task, thus far has turned into a rather dynamic concept, in that leadership is viewed as a process that emerges between people that obviously

depends on contextual phenomena. The findings from this study demonstrate that the environmental factors, according to PESTEL analysis, seem to dominate the situation surrounding the higher education, particularly the political and social factors. The historical and cultural tradition has largely shaped the background design and landscape for the leadership construction in the context. This is congruent with the relational perspectives of leadership that focus on process in local-historical-cultural contexts (Ulh-Bien, 2006). Inherently, the findings exhibit the interdependence and inter-subjectivity of the leadership with the environmental factors. Environmental factors are uncontested factors that legitimate a particular form of action and constitute the world in the process.

The historical and cultural factors lay the foundation in terms of ideological predisposition of the leader to execute certain kinds of action. The inherited colonial system and structure of governance accompanied by the high power distance culture has led to a 'command and control' kind of management. The legitimate power held by those in authority has constructed the 'un-autonomous' leadership. The newly established MOHE introduced new and superfluous bureaucratic procedures onto a system, which has already been noted for its adversity. The policies and strategies, as well as the appointment of the leaders and the operation of the university appear to be under the direction of the central management. The high context culture amplifies the situation that highly values the personal relation and establishment of social trust prior to any dealings. The interplay between the political dominance and cultural values shapes the relational conduct of the leaders.

The following figure illustrates the process of colonialization and its consequences in developing the culture and subsequently the societal way of life. British invasion was not only in the form of political, economic and diplomatic shrewdness, but also in the form of cultural 'epistemological space'. Briefly, the colonial impact invaded the local thought system, and increasingly disempowered the natives by limiting their ability to define their world; the process that has effectively been conducted through a systemic view (Dzulkifli 2012a).



<b>The Chain Effects of Colonialization</b>	<b>Elaboration</b>
Colonial Policies 	Classes in educational system - elite schools, English medium schools and Malay medium schools Classes in economic activities -e.g. agriculture, mining, administration
Classes in Society 	Elite class - royalty, bureaucrats and English educated group Medium class - administrators and teachers Low class - workers in agriculture sector
Hierarchical Bureaucratic System 	A network of power relation and authority vested in formal position and defines which people can be influential beyond the boundaries of their positions
Culture of the People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Power distance culture</li> <li>- Collectivism (non assertive and fear culture)</li> <li>- Uncertainty avoidance ( wrong doing will be punished by top/elder people)</li> </ul>
Identities of the People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tend to be of lower aspirations</li> <li>- Tend to be lesser involvement with works</li> <li>- Greater concern with peer group relations</li> <li>- More concern about relationship with other people than the task of the jobs</li> <li>- Limited or block mobility</li> <li>- Marginalized minority groups</li> <li>- Lower morale among subordinates</li> </ul>

**Figure 8.1 Process of Colonialization in Malaysia**

The processes of colonialization began when British colonial divided the society into a few social classes, i.e. elite, medium and low classes through different types of schools as outlined in Figure 8.1 above. This societal class was transformed into a hierarchical and bureaucratic system of administration particularly in the government departments or bodies (Shamsul, 2004). The system gradually

became acceptable in the society which then developed as a culture for the country (as mentioned in the Figure 8.1 above). This colonialization processes apparently brought in a substantial impact to the people that was translated into their daily life in terms of shaping their identities and demeanours (Shamsul, 2004).

Hence, it could be construed that economically and culturally Malaysia has been dominated and shaped by colonial knowledge, in which the modern identities in Malaysia have been described and consolidated. Advocated the concept, Shamsul (2004) exerts that post colonial society has played a major role in portraying and reinforcing the authoritarian image. Therefore, it could be argued that any attempt to make changes would require sombre and earnest efforts. This would include the Government Transformation Program (GTP) - the program introduced by the Prime Minister Department aiming at transforming the Government to be more effective in its delivery of services and accountable for outcomes that matter most to the people, and spearheading the efforts to become an advanced, united, and just society with high standards of living for all. Even though the objectives of the programs were obvious, the attempt indeed would become as a very challenging endeavour, considering the abovementioned factors of the context.

Nonetheless, one of the pertinent factors encircling the higher education at the moment is the overwhelming neo-liberalism effect. Neo-liberalism is a pejorative way of referring to a set of economic/political policies based on a strong faith in the beneficent effects of free markets. The embedded neo-liberalism culture in Malaysian higher education acts as a framework and a catalyst in economics and in the area of higher education as well. It shapes the way of thinking of the leaders, the policies and strategies, and entangles the higher institutions in competitive scenarios. This is obviously reflected in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and National Higher Education Action Plan as elaborated in a previous chapter. These plans accentuate the free market indicators, such as the KPIs, rating and ranking, quality standard, competitive performance, and others.

Leaders seem entrapped in this situation, even if individual leaders do make a difference, that difference is only marginal as compared to the influence of more structural features like the economy or religion or political party or social class or any other of the myriad variables (Grint, 2005). Hence, the context and the leaders are continually interrelated in such a way that, finally, the situation is constituted by those in authority.

Given the above illumination of the environmental factors, the leadership is enacted between the interplay of those factors. Apparently, the leadership construction appears to be intermingling with contextual variables. The main point is that the way in which leaders relate themselves to the context is itself complex and uncertain, which means that leaders do not always have choices and do not have the control that most leadership theory suggests (Grint, 2005).

### **8.2.2 Research Objective 2**

*To explore the effect of organizational factors on the construction of leadership in higher education in Malaysia*

The organisational/internal context is the surrounding environment for the working teams and its leaders. Organisations are rich in people diversity, structure, activities, processes and culture, and it is not possible for a management team or a single leader to understand the cause-effect loops or systemic connections (Grint, 2005). The organisational structure and culture are examples of organizational factors that shape the construction of the leadership. The organizational factors become endemic and are implicated in a two-way causal relationship with leadership.

The findings exhibit that the internal forces are not as strong as the environmental factors in outlining the ground for the leadership construction. The colonial legacy – hierarchical and bureaucratic – structure of organisation is still pervasive in governance system in public higher education. The structure, which is highly mechanistic in nature, provides little opportunity for leaders to act in novel and authentic ways.

The other pertinent organizational factor is organisational culture. It is explicated in this context that the bureaucratic mode of governance ascribes the systemic culture in the organisation. Emphasising more on order and measured output (which is also the reflection of the neo-liberalism underscore), leaders are intertwined with more administrative and routine tasks. The blueprint of the national agenda on higher education, as stated in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and National Higher Education Action Plan has prominently crafted the kind of organisational culture that shape the mind and action of the leaders and followers in higher education.

### **8.2.3 Research Objective 3**

*To explore the emergence of leadership identity in the context.*

Identity is a person's self-understanding about who they are, who they say they are and trying to act as though they are who they say they are (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain, 1998). The development of identities is a historically contingent, socially enacted, and culturally constructed frame of social practices individual and collective behaviour is mediated by the senses of self or identity (Holland et al., 1998). The forming of leadership identity is a result of hard work relating to the understanding and development of oneself in relation to others (Grint, 2005). Leaders construct and reconstruct the relationships with others, and constructing relationships means constructing the identity (Stacey, 2003; Shaw, 2002). The leaders' identity is predominantly formed by the group or the contextual factors and vice versa. The role of the leaders emerges from the leader-follower relationship. This relationship is a configuration of power (Griffin & Stacey, 2005), in which the power balance in the context of this study is highly tilted towards the leaders (high power distance culture).

Furthermore, similar to the study done by Bresnen (1995) regarding social constructions of leadership, this finding reveals that leadership holds multiple roles. Bresnen found that leaders socially construct their roles between the more proactive views of being a change agent and the more authoritarian views of control over followers. This study shows that leaders are at the crossroads in

holding their roles. They were struggling to move from being more passive – that blindly being obedient, to become more proactive as change agents. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the circumstances that influence the social construction in this context, appear to be related to the concept of “power” (command and control), and climate (bureaucratic/hierarchical). In this sense, the individual leader’s inspiration becomes trivial in many cases. Thus, as proposed by Meindl (1995), the social construction of leadership and identity in this context appear to be the product of relevant contextual variables operating in higher education, and, to a certain extent, also give recognition to the depiction of leaders’ depiction.

### **8.3 Implications of the Findings**

#### **8.3.1 Contribution to the Theory and Knowledge**

The leadership concept is arbitrary and subjective. This research takes a different approach to understand leadership by adopting the postmodern approach as distinct to most mainstream approaches in leadership research. The conceptual framework utilises the relational theory that contributes to complexity science research. This theory is believed to be one of the best methods to understand, examine and explain the interrelationship of the leaders and the followers as depicted by the concept of social construction. This research also attempts to contribute to the new form of looking at the leadership; that is from the perspective of relationships rather than the authority, superiority, or dominance perspective (Drath, 2001). Moreover, this research investigates the relational dynamics of leadership by looking at the process of leadership, which has been overlooked in leadership research (Hunt & Dodge, 2000; Ropo & Hunt, 2000). It considers processes that are not just about the nature of the relationship or even the type of relationship, but rather about the social dynamics which leadership relationships form and evolve in the workplace. Further, the study also reveals the process of interaction and negotiation of social order among organizational members that form the leadership identities.

This study offers an empirical account in a different context to the Western setting. It provides the richness from other historical and cultural milieu that could be

explored further on the same ground or intercept with other disciplines. On the other hand, over the past few decades, leadership studies in context were largely done using the survey-based method, which demonstrate an inability to draw effective links across various factors, and are unable to explain the leadership events and outcomes. The focus was more on leadership as an entity, leadership style, attributes and behaviour. Thus, this research could enrich the leadership literature in the context by offering a rigorous and in-depth exploration of the subject, taking into account the subjective ontology of the knowledge.

### **8.3.2 Contribution to the Research Methodology**

This study looks at the insights to be gained from ‘alternative’ perspectives, such as interpretivism, critical theory and postmodernism, in favour of a focus on more normative and positivist studies of organizational life. In this sense, this study has made a contribution to methodological research through the employment of phenomenological and inductive paradigm in support of the social constructionist approach. Such a paradigm provides the opportunity to the researcher to unpack and reveal the rigour and richness of the leadership study in the context. As mentioned earlier, in general, very little research has been done in this context, as well as in Malaysia, utilising the qualitative paradigm, as opposed to the numerous quantitative researches.

### **8.3.3 Contribution to Practice**

The research findings of the thesis can, arguably, be directly applied to the higher educational sector. It is anticipated that universities, policy makers, government officials and politicians considering making changes to their higher education systems might gain insightful information from this study. For example, this empirical work might help those who are responsible in appointing the top university leaders. It might also benefit the training and development division for higher education leadership, in executing the planning and designing of the succession and training programmes.

This study could further contribute to the academic community in such a way to elicit the overwhelming dilemma situated in their daily life. Very few attempts

have been made to explicate the predicament, confusion, and disappointment regarding academic life in this context. It is hoped that this empirical work could further attract the attention of the higher authorities to embark on appropriate endeavours to clear the perplexity.

The study might assist policy makers in revisiting and reviewing the blueprint of Malaysian higher education; namely, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and National Higher Education Action Plan, which are the central reference for any leadership undertaking at university level, and, in which, these policies strongly embrace the neo-liberal strategies as in the West. Thus, this study advocates the subsequent central issue that affects leadership – the mechanistic and managerialist jobs. It also exhibits the critical state of university autonomy in Malaysia's higher education, as depicted by Morshidi (2010) and Morshidi & Razak (2008) – *education policy (reflecting the strategic directions) is clearly an attempt to be current and fashionable to face the new challenges in higher education but operationalising these through the familiar state-centric framework will be an acid test for the whole system, in particular the corporatized state-controlled universities.*

#### **8.4 Limitations of the Study**

This study employs cross-sectional data. Hence, one of the greatest challenges of this study was the data collection process, as the data have to be collected over the same period of time across different localities. Time constraints and limited accessibility to resources are the two main problems arising from this study. Further, the legal constraints, such as the General Order Law, Official Secrets Act and University and College University Act create a limit of the respondent's freedom to discuss the matters.

It is anticipated that some challenges might exist regarding the recognition and endorsement of the findings by the authoritative level. As has been indicated previously, the centralised administration, which reflects the centralised decisions and determinants, may not be comfortable with the findings or be willing to proceed on the basis of these results.

The collection of the data was done in mixed language (English and Malay). Whilst the English versions of the interviews leave smaller arguments concerning the validity aspect, this was not so with the Malay version. The “language” barrier, particularly during the translation process, presented unavoidable challenges in terms of the (re) translation of original data. The researcher attempted to maintain the original meanings as far as possible but, inevitably, there is a possibility that these language issues have affected the findings.

The goal of this study is not to create a new theory of leadership, the intention is to further the understanding of how leaders make sense in constructing their leadership and identity. Given the nature of interpretive qualitative research and a small number of human informants in this study (32 respondents compared to the whole population of higher education), one cannot make sweeping generalizations about the results. A respondent’s perception of how the leaders act and react, and how the leaders respond and relate to others might look different from other people’s perspectives. A limitation of this approach is that only one or two individuals could be interviewed from a public university. The researcher only managed to obtain the randomly selected respondents, in which were not representing all 20 public universities throughout the country, and from all levels of leaders in the universities. Expanding the data collection to all 20 public universities in different regions would strengthen the study. Many of the universities or organisations were not willing to allow the researcher to engage in participant observation, citing confidentiality issues. A study of this nature would be made stronger by taking a longitudinal approach – spending several weeks or more in each organisation, observing and interviewing a wide variety of individuals, and being immersed into their culture to understand the phenomena better.

### **8.5 Suggestions for Future Research**

Research via the social constructionist approach has begun to recognise the leadership domain. Hence, similar studies could be conducted using only the constructionist procedures, such as narrative and ethnographic approaches. The



study could also be extended to provide a deeper account of social identity construction or from the psychological perspective in the same context or in other departments in Malaysia. In other words, this study can be treated as the opening step towards various aspects of leadership and organisational studies via the same approach.

The study could be improved by strengthening the validation process in data analysis. This could be done by putting more effort into triangulating the process, such as respondent validation or expert group validation, which the researcher had very little opportunity to carry out due to time constraints.

From the perspective of the researcher, the topic of the study was still broad in nature. It could be segregated into different narrow focuses, such as interrelationship of the leaders and followers, the implicit effect of the contextual factors, the social construction of the leadership from follower perspective, and many others.

Finally, the experience gained from conducting this study has brought the researcher to realise that research on Islamic leadership is extremely limited. Thus, the rigorous and in-depth study on the process of Islamic leadership construction and Islamic leadership identity is worthy of much further exploration.

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## Appendix A

### LIST OF MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

NO.	NAME OF UNIVERSITIES	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
1.	University Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur	1-1-1962
2.	Science University of Malaysia (USM), Penang	1969
3.	National University of Malaysia (UKM), Selangor	18-5-1970
4.	University Putra Malaysia (UPM), Selangor	4-10-1971
5.	University Technology Malaysia (UTM), Johor	1-4-1975
6.	University Technology MARA (UiTM), every state	26-8-1999
7.	International Islamic University (IIUM), Kuala Lumpur	10-5-1983
8.	Northern University of Malaysia (UUM), Kedah	16-2-1984
9.	University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Sarawak	24-12-1992
10.	University Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Sabah	24-11-1994
11.	Sultan Idris Education University(UPSI), Perak	24-2-1997
12.	Science Islamic University Malaysia (USIM), Negeri Sembilan	13-3-1998
13.	University Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Trengganu	15-7-1999
14.	University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Johor	30-9-2000
15.	University Technical Melaka (UTeM), Melaka	1-12-2000
16.	University Malaysia Pahang (UMP), Pahang	16-2-2002
17.	University Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), Perlis	2-5-2002
18.	University Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Trengganu	1-1-2006
19.	University Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), Kelantan	14-6-2006
20.	National Defense University Malaysia (UPNM), Kuala Lumpur	10-11-2006

*(Note : USM has also been awarded APEX university status.)*



## Appendix B

### LIST OF MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY (As of December 2011)

NO.	NAME OF UNIVERSITIES	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
1	Multimedia University (MMU) 2 campuses: Cyberjaya / Melaka	1992
2	University Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) 2 campuses:Putrajaya/Pahang	1999
3	University Tun Abdul Razak (UniRAZAK) Selangor	1999
4	University Teknologi Petronas (UTP) Selangor	1999
5	International Medical University (IMU), Kuala Lumpur	1999
6	University Selangor (UNISEL) Selangor 2 campuses: Shah Alam and Bestari Jaya	2000
7	Open University Malaysia (OUM), Kuala Lumpur	2000
8	Malaysia University of Science & Technology (MUST), Selangor	2000
9	AIMST University 2 campuses: Sg.Petani /Bedong	2001
10	University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) 4 campuses: Petaling Jaya/ Bandar Sungai Long/Cheras/Perak	2001
11	Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) 11 campuses located in Kuala Lumpur and around the country	2001
12	Wawasan Open University, Penang	2006
13	Albukhary International University, Kedah	2006
14	Limkokwing University of Creative Technology (LUCT), Putrajaya	2007
15	Management and Science University (MSU), Selangor	2007
16	Asia e University (AeU), Kuala Lumpur	2007
17	Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), Selangor	2007
18	International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF), KL	2007
19	UCSI University, 3 campuses : Kuala Lumpur/Terengganu/ Sarawak	2008
20	Quest International University Perak	2009
21	INTI International University (IIU), Negeri Sembilan	2010
22	Taylor's University, Selangor	2010
23	Sunway University, Selangor	2011
24	Manipal International University, Selangor	2011
25	Perdana University, Selangor	2011
26	HELP University, Kuala Lumpur	2011
27	University of Management and Technology (UMTech) Selangor	2011
28	Raffles University Iskandar (RUI), 2 campuses: Johor/ Selangor	2011

## Appendix C

### LIST OF MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGES

NO.	NAME OF UNIVERSITIES	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
1	International University College of Technology Twintech (IUCTT), 4 campuses : Kuala Lumpur/Sabah/Bangi/Kota Bharu	2003
2	Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College (KLIUC), Selangor	2003
3	Binary University College of Management and Entrepreneurship, Selangor	2004
4	Asia Pacific University College of Technology and Innovation (UCTI), Kuala Lumpur	2004
5	Selangor International Islamic University College (SIUC), Selangor	2004
6	Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences (CUCMS), Selangor	2005
7	Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan University College (KLMUC) , Kuala Lumpur	2006
8	INSANNIAH University College, Kedah	2006
9	Nilai University College, Negeri Sembilan	2007
10	TATI University College, Terengganu	2007
11	SEGi University College, Selangor	2008
12	Berjaya University College of Hospitality, Kuala Lumpur	2008
13	Masterskill University College of Health Sciences, 2 campuses: Selangor/ Johor	2008
14	International University College of Nursing, Selangor	2008
15	MAHSA University College, Selangor	2009
16	Melaka International Islamic University College, Melaka	2009
17	City University College of Science and Technology, Selangor	2010
18	KDU University College, Selangor	2010
19	Allianze University College of Medical Sciences, Kedah	2011
20	Shahputra University College, Pahang	2011
21	KPJ International university College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Negeri Sembilan	2011
22	Lincoln University College, Selangor	2011

## Appendix D

### LIST OF FOREIGN UNIVERSITY BRANCH CAMPUSES

<b>NO.</b>	<b>NAME OF UNIVERSITY</b>	<b>YEAR</b>	<b>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</b>
1	Monash University Malaysia, Selangor	1998	Australia
2	Curtin University of Technology, Sarawak	1999	Australia
3	University of Nottingham, Selangor	2000	United Kingdom
4	Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak	2004	Australia
5	Newcastle University Medicine, Johor	2009	United Kingdom
6	University of Southampton, Johor	2011	United Kingdom
7	University of Reading	In-process	United Kingdom
8	Heriot-Watt University	In-process	United Kingdom

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol

#### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Organisation/Institution** : \_\_\_\_\_

**Date & Time** : \_\_\_\_\_

**Name** : \_\_\_\_\_

**Position** : \_\_\_\_\_

<b>OPENING</b>
----------------

#### **Greeting**

My name is Rokimah Mohamad, senior officer in the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, and a second year PhD student at the University of Hull (United Kingdom). I am conducting research, under the supervision of Professor Susan Miller –University of Hull, with the aim of examining the impact of organisational (contextual) factors – internal and environmental factors on leadership in higher education in Malaysia. Subsequently, from the findings, the appropriate leadership development models will be proposed.

Considering the aim of this research, the following objective will be explored:

1. To explore the extent of environmental factors (politics, economy, social and technology) impact on leadership in Malaysian higher education.

2. To explore the extent that organizational factors (goals, process, people, organizational structure, organisational culture and time) impact on leadership in Malaysian higher education.
3. To discover the nature of leadership construction in Malaysian higher education.

Given your significant expertise and experience related to this topic, I would request your assistance and co-operation in providing and extending information on leadership and leadership development in your organisation.

I assure you that information obtained from this interview will be treated confidentially, and for the purpose of academic research only. A preliminary draft of the findings will be sent to the interviewee(s) for verification.

<b>START</b>
--------------

<b>1. Objective: To explore the extent of environmental factors (politics, economy, social and technology) impact on leadership in Malaysian higher education.</b>
--

- 1.1 What resources outside of this department have you found useful in supporting your work?
- 1.2 Have you ever faced any challenges from outside to perform your job and to what extent do they affect you?
- 1.3 How would you describe the importance of outside parties (stakeholders) giving you support and assistance?

1.4 How have the changes in policies and funding from the government affected your department and your work as leader in the last few years?

1.5 How do you envision the future of higher education in Malaysia and its possible challenges?

**2. Objective: To explore the extent of organizational factors (organisational goals, process, people, organisational structure, organisational culture and time) impact on leadership in Malaysian higher education.**

2.1 Organisational goals

1. Do you think that the vision, mission and goals play an important role in shaping the leadership in your organisation? How far is this situation true?

2.2 Process

2.2.1 Is there a process that you use to help staff reach a decision about setting goals and future planning?

2.2.2 Has technologies technology become an important element in Leadership? Are such facilities being provided by your organisation?

2.2.3 How do you go about completing tasks in your organisation, for example, delegating, empowering, evaluating or decision making?

2.2.4 It is understood that as a public sector department, there are certain rules or regulations that leaders have to abide by in performing

their jobs, such as job procedures or financial procedures. Do you think that this situation is helpful for tasks?

## 2.3 People

2.3.1 How do you develop and maintain interpersonal relationships/ open communication with staff and customers?

2.3.2 What are some of the ways you give and/or encourage your staff in performing their jobs?

2.3.3 How do you assist your staff in meeting their individual or professional needs?

2.3.4 How would you describe your relationship with your staff or your superior?

2.3.5 Are you satisfied with your relationship with staff and your superior? Would you suggest any changes?

2.3.6 Do you have any specific needs with regards to leading or managing your organization? How do you ensure your needs are being met?

## 2.4 Organisational structure

2.4.1 How can you describe the formalization and centralization in your system?

2.4.2 Does power and hierarchy really matter? What is your opinion or suggestion?

2.4.3 Preparing credible future leaders with proper succession planning is very essential for any organisation. How far would you agree with regard to your department?

## 2.5 Organisational culture

2.5.1 How would you describe the values/beliefs/practices in your organisation?

2.5.2 To what extent do you think these values/beliefs/practices are helpful and important for leaders in performing their tasks?

2.5.3 What are some of the ways that allow you to practice your philosophy and beliefs in your daily routine?

## 2.6 Time

2.6.1 It is understood that seniority is one of the important aspects being considered for job promotion? Would you explain further with regard to your organisation?



**3. Objective: To discover the nature of leadership construction in Malaysian higher education.**

3.1 Could you tell me a story about an experience that you have had when leadership was demonstrated in an extraordinary way. This might be an experience when you felt the most engaged and energized through some leadership effort, and illustrates the best leadership you have ever experienced.

3.2 Western leadership has prominently become the reference or model for our leadership practices and development. Do you agree?

3.3 Do you think we should also look for other leadership concepts or practices? Do you have any suggestions?

**Appendix F**  
**Supporting letter**



**HULL UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL**

Tel: (+44) 01482 466116

---

Secretary,  
Scholarship Division  
Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia  
Menara PJH, Presint 2  
62505 Putrajaya, Malaysia.

Dear Sir,

**RESEARCH FIELD WORK**

With reference to the above matter, I am very pleased to inform you that my student, **ROKIMAH MOHAMAD**, one of your sponsored students at this university, has already completed the first stage of her study programme. She is now ready for the next phase of her research, the data collection, which she will conduct in Malaysia for approximately 3 months. She will be returning to Malaysia for this purpose. Therefore, your assistance in helping this student would be greatly appreciated, particularly in the matter of logistical arrangements, such as flight tickets.

As evidence, attached is the interview protocol, which provides further information.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

SUSAN MILLER  
Professor of Organisational Behaviour  
Hull University Business School  
Cottingham Road  
Hull. HU6 7RX.UK  
Tel: +44 (0)1482 463203  
email: [s.miller@hull.ac.uk](mailto:s.miller@hull.ac.uk)

**Appendix G**  
**Consent Letter**

ROKIMAH MOHAMAD  
32, Sidmouth Street, Hull,  
HU5 2LB, UK.  
Tel: 0044 01482 444597 (home), 0044 7988527419 (mobile)

---

26 Mei 2008

Director,  
Higher Education Leadership Academy,  
Level2, Block E3, Parcel E,  
62505 Putrajaya.

**INTERVIEW FOR PHD RESEARCH**

With reference to the above matters, I would like to conduct an interview for my PhD research.

2. I am a PhD student from University of Hull, UK. I am also a staff member from the Department of Polytechnic and Community College Education Ministry of Higher Education, Putrajaya. Now I am working on my research entitled '*An investigation of the construction of leadership in Malaysian Higher Education*'. This research will explore the impact of environmental and organizational factors on the leadership in Malaysian higher education, and how the leadership in higher education is constructed within those contextual factors. This research has been chosen because leadership is one of the important factors in driving changes in higher education in Malaysia.

3. Based on the your background and experience as a leader in the higher education leadership academy, I am interested in obtaining your opinion and experience regarding leadership in higher education institutions. Your experience and opinion regarding this issue may well bring a new dimension to leadership in higher education.

4. Therefore, I would be happy to conduct the interview with you for this purpose. The interview session would take approximately one hour. The input from this interview will be strictly confidential. Should you agree with this interview, I will then proceed with the interview appointment.

5. Your cooperation and consideration are very much appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

**(ROKIMAH MOHAMAD)**  
**University of Hull, UK**

**Appendix H**  
**List of Respondents**

<b>NO.</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>POSITION</b>	<b>ZONE</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>
<b>Central Admin. Office</b>						
1.	Department of HE	Director General	Putrajaya	Male	27/8/08	2.30 pm
2.	HE Leadership Academy, Putrajaya	Director	Putrajaya	Male	18/8/08	12 noon
3.	Private HE, Putrajaya	Dep. Director General	Putrajaya	Male	18/8/08	2.30 pm
4.	Inspectorate & Enforcement Div. Private HE	Director	Putrajaya	Male	19/8/08	2.30 pm
5.	Research & Dev. Div. ,Dept of HE	Assistant Director	Putrajaya	Male	20/8/08	3 pm
6.	Alumni Div., Dept. of HE	Director	Putrajaya	Female	25/8/08	1 pm
7.	Industrial Liason Dept. of HE	Assistant Director	Putrajaya	Male	26/8/08	2.30 pm
8.	Curriculum Dev. Dept of HE	Assistant Director	Putrajaya	Male	27/8/08	4.30 pm
9.	Curriculum Dev. Dept of HE	Principle Assistant Director	Putrajaya	Male	28/8/08	4.00 pm
10.	Policy & Dev. Dept of HE	Principle Assistant Director	Putrajaya	Male	19/8/08	8.30 am
<b>Public HEIs</b>						
11.	University of Malaya	Retired & Contract Prof	Central	Male	26/6/08	10 am
12.	Univ. Of Technology Malaysia	Dep. VC Innovation & Research	Southern	Male	28/7/08	3 pm
13.	Islamic & Science Univ	Dep. VC, Academic	Central	Male	17/7/08	9 am
14.	Science University Malaysia	Dean Computer Sc. Faculty	Northern	Female	25/7/08	3 pm
15.	National University Malaysia	Dean Mgment & EconFac.	Central	Male	3/7/08	9.30 am

16.	International Islamic Univ.	Retired & Contract Prof.	Central	Male	1/7/08	9 am
17.	International Islamic Univ.	Retired & Contract Prof	Central	Male	7/7/08	12 noon
18.	Tun Hussein Onn University	Dean Faculty of Education	Southern	Male	29/7/08	9 am
19.	Tun Hussein Onn University	Dean Faculty of Communication & Multimedia	Southern	Male	29/7/08	3 pm
20.	Northern University Malaysia	Senior Lecturer	Northern	Male	22/7/08	8 pm
21.	International Islamic University	Director Management Centre	Central	Male	8/7/08	4 pm
22.	University Technology MARA	Senior Lecturer	Central	Female	10/7/08	11 am
23.	University Science Malaysia	Programme Coordinator	Northern	Male	24/7/08	11 am
24.	Northern Univ. Malaysia	Lecturer & Fellow Stdn Accomodation	Northern	Male	22/7/08	2.30 pm
25.	University Malaysia Sarawak	Senior Lecturer/ Asst. Director	Sarawak	Male	7/8/08	3 pm
26.	University Malaysia Sarawak	Senior Lecturer/ Asst. Head of Dept.	Sarawak	Male	8/8/08	3 pm
27.	University Malaysia Sabah	Lecturer/ Program Coordinator	Sabah	Male	4/8/08	10 am
28.	University Malaysia Sabah	Counselor	Sabah	Male	5/8/08	3 pm
29.	University Malaysia Pahang	Head of Business Department	Eastern	Female	12/8/08	3 pm
30.	University Malaysia Kelantan	Lecturer/ Assistant HOD	Eastern	Female	14/8/08	12.30 noon

	<b>Private HEIs</b>					
31.	University Industry Selangor	Dean of Faculty of Education	Central	Male	14/7/08	9 am
32.	Management & Science Univ.	President	Central	Male	16/7/08	5 pm

## Appendix I

### Planning Programme for Data Collection

<b>No.</b>	<b>Division of Zones In Malaysia</b>	<b>Date/Duration</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Central Zone (Kuala Lumpur/Selangor)</b>	<b>23 June – 17 July 2008</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Northern Zone</b>	<b>21-25 July 2008</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Southern Zone</b>	<b>28 July-1 August 2008</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Sabah/Sarawak</b>	<b>4 - 8 August 2008</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Eastern Zone</b>	<b>11-15 August 2008</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Central Zone (Putrajaya)</b>	<b>18 – 30 August 2008</b>

## Appendix J

### Example of Consent Form

#### Hull University Business School

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I, Prof. Brent Davis of Hull University Business School

**hereby agree** to participate in this study to be undertaken

by ROKIMAH MOHAMAD

and I understand that the purpose of the research is to examine the impact of organisational (contextual) factors – internal and environmental factors–on leadership in higher education, in particular Malaysian higher education. Subsequently, from the findings, the appropriate leadership development models will be proposed.

#### **I understand that**

1. Upon receipt, my questionnaire will be coded and my name and address will be kept separately.
2. Any information that I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my identity to an outside party, i.e., that I will remain fully anonymous.
3. Aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results **will not** be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.
5. That I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature:

Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: PhD Room, HUBS.

The contact details of the secretary to the HUBS Research Ethics Committee are Hilary Carpenter, The Quality Office, Hull University Business School, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX. Email: [h.carpenter@hull.ac.uk](mailto:h.carpenter@hull.ac.uk) tel. 01482-463536.

*In some cases, consent will need to be witnessed, e.g., where the subject is blind/intellectually disabled. A witness must be independent of the project and may only sign a certification to the level of his/her involvement. A suggested format for witness certification is included with the sample consent forms. The form should also record the witnesses' signature, printed name and occupation. For particularly sensitive or exceptional research, further information can be obtained from the HUBS Research Ethics Committee Secretary, e.g., absence of parental consent, use of pseudonyms, etc.)*



## Appendix K

### Deriving Themes from Transcripts

**Example of how the themes were derived from transcripts.**

#### Research Question No 2.

*1) How do the organizational factors affect the leadership in public higher education in Malaysia?*

Respondents	Main ideas	Codings	Categories	Themes
13/institution/male	I think they are more <i>concern of managing themselves</i> rather than managing the organisation: they are more concern about whether their positions will be renewed, because they are on contractual basis.	concern of managing themselves	Self-interest	Organizational factor
	...in terms of the leadership role that they should be playing, many of them try to fit their actions with what the ministry the higher level wants, so they try to <i>fit into and create the congruent</i> between what they are doing and what the ministry doing,	fit into and create the congruent	Organisational goals/objectives	Organizational factor
	...because it is quite obvious the fear is there, that you are doing something which may be <i>against the thinking of the higher management</i> , may be not the policy, the thinking...	against the thinking of the higher management	Organisational culture	Organizational Culture

	So the leadership is <i>following the middle road</i> , they are so scared to be at any end because people will say this particular leader is too extreme, contradicting to or create some controversy with top management, top policy level, and you are not going this way fear that it might create issue with your organisational staff, so it is always like that and is proven in management study...	following the middle road	Self- interest	Organizational factor
	...when they see the emphasis on certain areas of KPI that will become their focus, when the <i>view from the top</i> changing again then their focus also will be on the ministry's focus	view from the top	Hierarchical structure	Organizational Culture
	Take a look at the 20 universities, see whether what they are doing is inline, so that is <i>organisational objective</i> , and the ministry at the higher level of the hierarchy is seeing from overall perspective.	organisational objective	Organisational objectives	Organizational factor
	So this is one issue where everybody is waiting, let say, ok now everybody is going towards developing for human capital, everybody wants <i>to be seen that they are the main player</i> .	to be seen that they are the main player	Organizational politics	Organizational factor

	To some extent yes, it is a strong word and terminology to use. However, to another extent <i>the thinking is being directed by them</i> . When we talk about strategic leadership and how the strategic mind is being shape; to some extent is being shaped by them.	the thinking is being directed by them	Authority and power	Power and authority
	Because the strategic mind has been <i>shaped by the policy</i> not by the knowledge, for example, now everybody is concern about student getting job, so it's been shaped by the policy not by the knowledge proper.....or by what is going on in the industry.	Shaped by the policy	Policy	Power and authority
	But for other cases, for example, who is going to be the next dean of the faculty, there is <i>some political elements from outside involved...</i>	some political elements from outside involved	Political factors	Environmental factor
	University's <i>organisational structure is a bit loose</i> compared to let say Diplomatic Officer. Therefore, others will find their own ways to contribute, so that mean it is not strictly like Diplomatic Officer	organisational structure is a bit loose	Organisational structure	Organizational factor

	You have to have <i>a high degree of command</i> as well in order to instruct people. That's why for me leaders are very important, not only leaders as VC, but leaders who can feel of that particular subjects who are commanding their subjects.	a high degree of command	Leaders credibility	Organizational factor
	If you ask people to go back to what they have done, go back to what they believe in themselves; I am sure they will not do something which they don't believe in. People will only do whatever they believe in. If they <i>believe but they are not doing</i> , for me it is not call a belief, it is only knowledge	Believe but they are not doing	Belief system	Organizational culture
12/institution/male	...but as I mentioned to you earlier, as we are in feudalistic society, very structured system, in order to become a leader you have to have a so-called 'tree' somewhere. So in order to go up, <i>you have to find someone up, to pick you up.</i>	You have to find someone up, to pick you up.	Hierarchical structure	Organizational structure
	I would say the work load of the Dean is 70/30, in which <i>managerial and administrative works is 70% and academic works is 30%</i> , whereas we should be otherwise. So we are more of organizational leadership type rather than academic leadership. The decision as well as other	Organisational structure is 70% and academic structure is 30%, we should be	Managerial works	Organizational factor

	things should be based on academic leadership rather than organisational leadership.	otherwise.		
	Here <i>everything must be through the dean</i> . For example, getting approval to attend seminar, student unable to attend classes, or you are taking profession somewhere, all must get approval from the dean.	Everything must be through the dean.	Hierarchical structure	Organizational structure
	Here, we are emphasising so much on <i>organisational structure</i> .	Organisational structure.	Hierarchical structure	Organizational structure
	We must <i>change towards flat organisation</i> and professor command	Change towards flat organisation	Hierarchical structure	Organizational structure
	In academic culture, the duty of head of department is to carry the 30% of organisational works. However, <i>our practice is otherwise</i> , so it is on the opposite way. By right when come to decision making process, it will goes to the pool of professors, and the professors will make decision.	Our practice is otherwise	Managerial works	Organizational factor

	In fact sometime <i>HOD decides</i> the promotion of a professor, or HOD decides whether the professor can or cannot go to any programs. Actually we are not a company, we are academicians, and academic leaders are different	HOD decides	Power and authority	Power and authority
	It was existed because of our feudalistic system, and this is very important for feudalistic people. They <i>do not care about the doings, they only care about how to control people.</i>	Do not care about the doings; they only care about how to control people.	Power and authority	Power and authority
	...and they are <i>emphasising on the ruling and organisational part</i> of the country.	emphasising on the ruling and organisational part	Power and authority	Power and authority
	.. But most of us are <i>organisational leaders, so it is difficult</i>	Organisational leaders, so it is difficult.	Power and authority	Power and authority
	Because they will be putting <i>many rules and regulations</i> ; you have to do this and that, you have to achieve this and that...	Many rules and regulations;	Hierarchical structure	Organizational culture

	...we are rules by <i>feudalistic nature of leadership</i> , so this is against our interest.	Feudalistic nature of leadership	Hierarchical structure	Organizational factor
	This is so contrast as compared to ours, <i>we have to get so many approvals</i> ; head of department, then dean, then DVC and VC before getting started. Sometime, it goes up to board members or even the minister	We have to get so many approvals;	Hierarchical and bureaucratic	Organizational structure
	....it depends on a lot of factors. One is <i>his relationship with higher up</i> . I believe that in Malaysian system is such that if you have good relationship with higher up everything can go. If you happen to be out bound then whatever good suggestion you have it will not work.	His relationship with higher up	Hierarchical structure	Organizational Culture
	....this is from my observation that <i>a lot has to do with relationships that you know</i> and because of that it crisp into the working condition. You have to foster good relationship with whom you know,...	.A lot has to do with relationships that you know	Organizational politics	Organizational factor
22/institution/female	<i>Saving face</i> is extremely important. The right person may be punished and the wrong person can get away from it because of face saving. So these are the things that work	Saving face	Organizational culture	Organizational Culture

	against the true leadership.			
	In the meeting <i>nobody says things directly</i> , because of culture again	Nobody says things directly	Organizational culture	Organizational Culture
	Take for example <i>a poison letter</i> . Obviously this is a wrong concept to me, totally wrong. But in any government office we can see that they entertain it.	A poison letter	Organizational politics	Organizational factor
	If there is a case of sexual harassment we <i>should not just listen to one party and cover the case</i> . Many times I see that the ladies suffer in a sexual harassment case and the guys walk away freely because he has been there longer or he has a thumb up at least the leader does not dare to expose the case.	Should not just listen to one party and cover the case..	The unfortunate group	Organizational factor
	<i>.. a lot of bureaucracy</i> , you are supposed to do certain things that are not the jobs of the leaders.	a lot of bureaucracy	Hierarchical structure	Organizational structure
	In government sector non-Malay cannot go up because there is a <i>glass ceiling</i> where they cannot go up...	Glass ceiling	Policy for non-Malay	Organizational factor



	In private sector if the leader works very hard, has good management skills, and respect everybody, this is a good leader, and <i>not the one that says 'I am bigger (higher) than you, so you have to follow me'</i> .	Not the one that says 'I am bigger (higher) than you, so you have to follow me'	Power and authority	Power and authority
	If you look at foreign universities, <i>no body (the leaders) sits on the low rail...</i> So what is the standard of our leaders or professors and associate professors?	No body (the leaders) sits on the low rail.	Leaders dignity	Organizational factor
	But if I know whatever I say nothing is going to happen, I will not say anything. <i>It depends on how high my position is.</i> If I am in a power to command change then I will take the challenge, but if I am not in the power to command change I will not.	It depends on how high my position is.	Power and authority	Power and authority
	...this is how I see the case; it has a conflict of aspiration (between the top and the lower leader). Person A has a plan, so as person B. So the plan doesn't match, and somebody has to go, <i>so the lower down has to go.</i>	So the lower down has to go.	Organizational politics	Organizational factor

	From what I hear it is everywhere. Any government department sure <i>there are a lot of political elements.</i>	There are a lot of political elements	Organizational politics	Organizational factor
	<i>.. Politic is number one</i> in any leadership deals.	Politic is number one.	Political factor	Environmental factor
	The <i>bureaucracy and hierarchy divide the line so much.</i> For example a top person will not come down to a small cubicle of a clerk. I haven't seen it actually, I have been there for one year, I might be wrong	Bureaucracy hierarchy divide the line so much	Hierarchical and bureaucratic structure	Organizational structure
	But have you seen in the government department the <i>top man going out with the driver for a drink?</i> This one I cannot accept.	Top man going out with the driver for a drink	Hierarchical structure	Organizational Culture
	So this is hierarchy, <i>this boundary is artificial;</i> I feel it should be removed. Leadership is more than the boundary, it doesn't that you only sit in a cosy room you only mingle with other people who also sit in a cosy room as well.	This boundary is artificial	Hierarchical Structure	Organizational structure

	... I think they (the leaders) are well aware of what they should do. But <i>because of the system</i> , they just follow the system, even though it is against the points that the leader should do.	Because of the system	Organizational structure	Organizational factor
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