

The Relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication and Leadership Styles - In the Context of Malaysian Higher Education

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to assess the level of IMC implementation, to investigate the factors for developing and implementing a successful IMC plan, and to determine the interconnection between leadership styles and IMC in the selected Malaysian public and private higher learning institutions (HLIs) based on the perceptions of administrators and lecturers. Qualitative methods were employed, whereby IMC four-stage framework and seven dimensions of full range leadership theory served as the basis of this study. The results of this study show that a majority of the interviewees claimed that their institutions have reached stage 4 (strategic integration) of the IMC framework. Nevertheless, there were inconsistencies in the answers between the administrators and lecturers. The results also reveal that the important factors in developing and implementing a successful IMC plan in Malaysian HLIs are uniting functional operations by aligning the activities of the HLIs toward serving the customers, getting support from the top management of HLIs, studying their customers thoroughly, and utilising social networks to communicate with their current and prospective customers. Moreover, the leadership styles practised in the interviewees' institutions expose that the dimension of intellectual stimulation was the most mentioned, followed by laissez-faire, inspirational motivation, and management-by-exception. The leaders of the selected Malaysian public HLIs showed a higher tendency of practising transformational leadership style compared to the leaders of the selected Malaysian private HLIs who showed the tendency of practising transactional leadership style. Thus, practising an appropriate leadership style is an important factor that influences the effectiveness of leaders in the Malaysian HLIs.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communication; integrated marketing communication framework; leadership styles; full range leadership theory.

JEL Classification: M31

INTRODUCTION

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been conceptualised by Schultz (2004, p. 9) as “a strategic business process used to plan, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communications programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates, and other targeted relevant external and internal audiences”. In brief, IMC can be generally understood as a concept which provides the idea of how organisations could sustain in the highly competitive global market through a business process that can be evaluated and measured, whereby the communication and behaviour of both internal and external stakeholder groups are being put into emphasis to form a coordinated and consistent brand communications (i.e. brand messages, brand image, brand relationships, etc.).

In the complex global marketplace where intense competition is evident, the traditional marketing tactics which focus on the Four Ps (i.e. price, promotion, place, and product) (Schultz & Schultz, 2003) and the supply-chain approach (Kitchen & Schultz, 2000) are unsustainable for an organisation’s long-term survival (Holm, 2006). To add on, higher learning institutions (HLIs) are urged to adopt a marketing-oriented approach in order to survive (Wiese, 2008); improving their MARCOM programmes by getting familiar with the principles of service marketing (Szántó & Harsányi, 2007) and encouraging communicative interchange among internal and

external stakeholder groups (Schüller & Rašticová, 2011).

In fact, in Malaysia, education reforms are constantly taking place in order to adapt education to national development needs (Goi & Goi, 2009). In the recent Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015 to 2025 for higher education, it has been outlined in the 10th shift, that is, a transformed higher education learning that the objective is aimed at breaking down the operating silos across departments, forging stronger partnerships with HLIs, industry, and community, and improving its efficiency and effectiveness in its role as a regulator and policy maker (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). These efforts of addressing performance issues in the Malaysian education system are in line with the aims of IMC, that is, to bridge the gap in relationships by promoting the ‘non-siloed’, cross-functional organisational structure.

Besides that, Malaysian private HLIs were expected by the State to attract more international students as they do not have to meet targets for domestic students as required in Malaysian public HLIs (Chang, Morshidi, & Dzulkifli, 2015). Thus, universities need to transform themselves in order to meet the challenges presented by the policies by realigning their organisations with the environment, redesigning themselves to achieve new goals, redefining roles and responsibilities, and reengineering their organisational processes, of which, such dramatic and bold changes require reform before they can be

successfully implemented (Lujan et al., 1997).

Nevertheless, any reform that takes place in an organisation is accompanied by the support of leaders. Thus, leadership plays a crucial role in soothing the way for gaining success in any scheme within an organisation (Gelard, Boroumand, & Ali, 2014, p. 68). In the recent years, leadership has been seen as an effective approach for managing employees and organisation to enhance both employee and organisational performance (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015). More specifically, leadership styles are one of the important factors which impact the organisational performance (Ojokuku, Odetayo, & Sajuyigbe, 2012; Nazanin, 2015) since their various functions enable organisations to make a selection from among them based on the suitability of the organisations, situations, groups, and individuals (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015).

Therefore, these interrelationships fortify the foundation for this study, whereby the purposes of this study are to assess the level of IMC implementation, to investigate the factors for developing and implementing a successful IMC plan, and to determine the leadership styles practised in the Malaysian HLIs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Integrated Marketing Communication Framework

IMC, as a contemporary marketing strategy is aimed at advancing

organisations from the tactics to strategy by switching the organisational structure from one that is functional to one that is cross-functional, presented in its four evolutionary stages, that is, tactical coordination, scope redefinition of marketing communications (MARCOM) or commitment to market research, application of information technology (IT), and financial and strategic integration.

The primary focus of IMC at the first stage, that is, tactical coordination of MARCOM is to achieve the goals of “one sight, one sound, one voice” in the outbound communication efforts (Caywood, Schultz, & Wang, 1991; Schultz & Schultz, 2003). In the context of higher education, the primary external stakeholder is student who directly receives services, whereas the internal stakeholders are lecturers and support staff who are the employees of the institution (Munirul, 2015). Thus, issues concerning internal communication should be given due attention in order to ensure that all communication efforts eventually reach the customers or students. Internal communication reflects the ability of top management in using marketing techniques to create effective links between the efforts of senior management and staff by facilitating employees’ understanding of how individual objectives align with organisational goals; both of which are necessary conditions for achieving organisational success in its external markets (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Keller et al., 2006).

The next emphasis of IMC's first-stage framework is development of cross-function in organisations which aims for a high-degree of interpersonal and cross-functional coordination and communication between internal departments and external consultants (Kitchen et al., 2004). The success of client-agency relationship (i.e. client satisfaction) is partly dependent upon the client's effective performance which involves complex functional, managerial, and interpersonal skill requirements (Beard, 1996, pp. 208-209). The client's performance effectiveness can be assessed through corporate identity management, internal brand, organisational culture, and leadership style as discovered by Bahtiar et al. (2016) in their study of Malaysian higher education sector. The corporate behaviour and employee behaviour are the corporate identity and internal brand dimensions (Bahtiar, Hassan, & Nik Adzrieman, 2009), whereas the organisational culture contains multiple sets of dimensions (i.e. behaviour, beliefs, and values) which work as a substructure for organisation management practices and systems, guiding organisational viewpoints toward employees and customers (Bahtiar et al., 2016, p. 177).

The second stage of IMC framework is commitment to market research, whereby at this stage, organisations attempt to gather a broad and deep understanding of their customers or consumers through brand contacts (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). Brand contacts are defined as any information bearing

experience that a customer or consumer has with the brand, the product category, or the marketer that relates to the marketer's product or service (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993). Customers or consumers are studied in order to answer the 'hows', 'whats', and 'whys' of their behaviour, opinion, and experience upon consumption of certain products or services.

Subsequently, application of IT is the third stage of IMC framework that is meant to develop databases in order to segment customer data into customer knowledge (Ireland, 2002). The advent of the internet technologies enables organisations to automatically capture and register customer data (demographic or behavioural) and customer feedback and to automatically analyse the information collected about customers to a level of segmentation (i.e. geographic, demographic, and psychographic and behaviour variables) and detail that allows the implementation of one-to-one MARCOM (Gurău, 2008, p. 176), tailored specifically to the demands of homogeneous submarkets (Chin, 2002). Thus, market segmentation helps higher education managers to fulfil the personal needs or goals of customers (Timofeeva et al., 2016).

The new trends in MARCOM that HLIs should follow is to utilise the social networks to communicate with the current and prospective students (Szánto & Harsányi, 2007; Schüller & Chalupsky, 2012). The results of Noor Raihan's, Romiza's, and Cheng's (2013) study of two Malaysian private universities show that there are

positive correlations between social media and trust, as well as social media and retention. Hence, it has become a necessity for organisations to look for new communication touch points, particularly touch points social media could offer (Lucenko, 2012).

The final four stage of IMC framework is financial and strategic integration which describes an organisation's ability to continually measure performance from a return-on-investment (ROI) perspective by market segment. The organisation's resources in MARCOM

programmes will be invested to selected customers and measured on the returns to be used as the basis for the next level of investment (Schultz, 2009, p. 14).

The four stages of IMC framework provide the guidelines to organisational progression, starting at a tactical level to a strategic level. Therefore, an organisation needs to demonstrate competency in the activities and fulfil the requirements of each of the four stages in order to be truly integrated (Schultz & Schultz, 1998, p. 19) (see Figure 1).

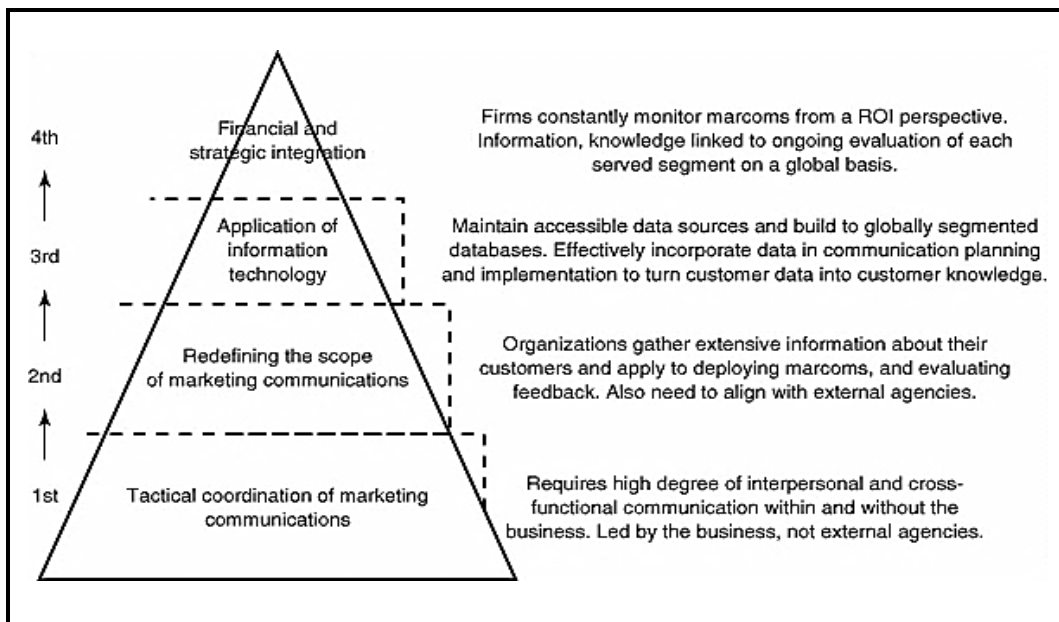


Figure 1: IMC Four-Stage Model (Source: Adapted from Kitchen & Schultz, 2001)

The Interconnection between Leadership Styles and Integrated Marketing Communication

Implementing IMC is crucial in today's complex global marketplace, and thus, leaders must predict the future probabilities and plan choice strategies to satisfy uncertainties in order to be effective (Riaz & Haider, 2010). Dutschke (2005, p. 13) stresses that HLIs need effective

leadership at all levels of the institution's administration in order to navigate and survive the rough waters present in the 21st century. Bensimon and Neumann (1992) claim that the development of effective leadership is crucial for performance and success not only in commercial organisations, but also in academia.

Therefore, practising an appropriate leadership style is an

important factor that influences the effectiveness of leaders (Hogg et al., 2005; Bruno & Lay, 2008; Hur et al., 2011). A full range leadership theory which consists of transactional, laissez-faire, and transformational leadership styles was proposed in Ataus et al.'s (2015) study of the lived experiences of leadership amongst academic and professional staff working in an Australian regional university as they believed that it could provide a way to concurrently examine how these differing leadership styles may impact on leadership effectiveness in the higher education context. In fact, it has been proven that transactional and transformational leadership styles are related to leadership effectiveness amongst heads of academic departments of Malaysian Research Universities (Amir & Zaidatol, 2012).

Transactional leadership can be defined as "leaders who induce subordinates to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations, the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and subordinates" (Burns, 1978, p. 19). Meanwhile, laissez-faire which is known as the avoidance or absence of leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) is also a part of transactional leadership, even though it is treated separately from the other transactional dimensions (i.e. contingent rewards and management-by-exception). In the business context, transactional leaders tend to focus overwhelmingly on tactical goals, and thus, they are primarily about the tangibles required to motivate employees to

strive for operational excellence (Seidman & McCauley, 2011). Hence, it works best at the basic level of need satisfaction (i.e. physiological and safety) which is at the lower level of the Maslow's hierarchy (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013).

Transformational leadership can be identified when the leader advances the employees beyond prompt "self-interests through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualised consideration" in order to elevate the employees' "level of maturity and ideals as well as concerns for achievement, self-actualisation, and the well-being of others, the organisation, and the society" (Bass, 1999, p. 11). In the business context, transformational leadership is primarily about the intangibles required to motivate employees in the organisation to make changes that optimise their performance (Seidman & McCauley, 2011) in a long term. Thus, transformational leaders strive toward higher needs of Maslow's hierarchy (i.e. love, esteem, and self-actualisation) (Sosik, 1997), reaching to self-transcendence which calls to a common purpose, a global perspective, and joint responsibility for the fate of the whole organisation that it enriches the organisational culture and leadership (Venter, 2012). Odumeru and Ifeanyi (2013) claim that transactional leadership being applied to lower-level needs provides a foundation for transformational leadership to apply to higher-level needs.

The increasing importance of cross-functional team processes and

the need to innovate products and practices in current business scenario has also increased the importance of transformational leadership because it enhances competitiveness, achievement-orientation, performance expectations, results-orientation, innovation, and taking advantage of opportunities (Kawatra & Krishnan, 2004, p. 7) - all of which are requisites of IMC as IMC helps organisations to be competitive in the complex global marketplace by focusing on cross-functional processes to encourage on-going dialogue across departments and units, leading to better organisational performance.

Even though transformational leader has been highlighted in many ways as being capable of leading organisation in the challenging global business environment, today's new form of organisational structure which promotes cross-functional relations requires organisational learning, whereby managers and employees are brought together and that they are being rewarded for taking shared corrective actions or reaching mutually valuable solutions. In this sense, both transformational and transactional leadership styles have roles to play in minimising cross-boundaries and opening necessary channels for exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge (Mirghani, Stankosky, & Murray, 2004).

Besides that, all three of the leadership styles in the full range leadership theory were found to be positively and significantly correlated with organisational performance of Malaysian public HLIs

in the Klang Valley area (Hazira et al., 2014). The interconnection between transactional, laissez-faire, and transformational leadership styles and their unique effects can hardly be separated (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and thus, the full range leadership theory provides a viable measurement of organisational performance, particularly that of IMC implementation.

METHOD

Qualitative methods were employed in this study, whereby semi-structured interviews were conducted with one administrator (A) and one lecturer (L) from the selected Malaysian public (i.e. in Negeri Sembilan, Penang, Perlis, and Terengganu) and private HLIs (i.e. in Kedah, Pahang, Perak, and Selangor) HLIs. The administrators who participated in the interview were individuals responsible for strategic planning and execution or support of IMC plan in their institution, whilst the lecturers who participated in the interview were individuals responsible for teaching MARCOM and/or IMC-related courses and/or coordinating marketing and/or IMC programme. In this study, Malaysian public and private HLIs were both used as a case study since they are bound to the same National Education Philosophy that aspires to nurture a balanced human person, which is viewed to be the ultimate outcome of higher education - one who offers his or her service and contribution to the family, community, and nation (Chang, Morshidi Sirat, & Dzulkifli, 2015, p. 271). Hence, the Ministry of

Education Malaysia (2015) sees both Malaysian public and private HLLs as being complementary rather than being competitive with each other.

The gathered data of this study were firstly transcribed to facilitate the process of identifying emerging themes. The Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), QSR Nvivo was utilised to code the interviews of this study. Subsequently, the researchers worked with nodes which represent categories throughout the data, and thus, the function of nodes is to store

a place in Nvivo for references to code text (Wong, 2008; AlYahmady Hamid & Saleh Said, 2013). In this study, tree nodes (codes that are organised in a hierarchical structure) based on the IMC four-stage framework and full range leadership theory (see Table 1 and 2) were utilised. Meanwhile, in theming the data of this study, thematic analysis method was employed. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

Table 1. Pre-set Themes of Integrated Marketing Communication Four-stage Framework

Orientation	Indicator
Stage 1	<p><i>Tactical coordination of MARCOM</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to achieve the ‘one sight, one sound, one voice’ in the outbound communication efforts. • Focuses on strengthening internal communication. • Encourages on-going dialogue across departments and units. • Facilitates employees’ understanding of how individual objectives align with organisational goals. • Builds a cross-functional organisational structure by developing horizontal communication systems. • Unites functional operations by aligning the activities of the organisation toward serving the customers. • Integrates MARCOM by maintaining consistency in the message throughout all mediums. • Represents or strengthens the organisation’s brand identity.
Stage 2	<p><i>Commitment to market research in support of IMC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathers a broad and deep understanding of customers through brand contacts. • Collects and evaluates information on the consumers’ feedbacks, experience with the brand, product category, or the marketer, as well as the consumers’ behavioural patterns. • Performs market segmentation to identify the taxonomy of consumption patterns.
Stage 3	<p><i>Application of IT in support of IMC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops databases in order to segment customer data into customer knowledge. • Enables organisations to analyse the information collected about customer to a level of segmentation (by homogeneous sub-markets)

Stage 4	<p>that allows the implementation of one-to-one MARCOM.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilises the social networks to communicate with the current and prospective customer. <p><i>Strategic integration of IMC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes an organisation’s ability to continually measure performance from a ROI perspective by market segment. • Examines the dynamics of customer purchase and retention patterns to benchmark the costs to acquire, retain, or to migrate customers. • Invests the organisation’s resources in MARCOM programmes to selected customers. • Measures the returns to be used as the basis for the next level of investment. • Needs active support of organisational leadership.
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Table 2. Pre-set Themes of Full Range Leadership Theory

Orientation	Indicator
Dimension 1	<i>Idealised Influence</i> indicates whether one holds subordinates’ trust, maintain their faith and respect, show dedication to them, appeal to their hopes and dreams, and act as their role model.
Dimension 2	<i>Inspirational Motivation</i> measures the degree to which one provides a vision, uses appropriate symbols and images to help others focus on their work, and try to make others feel their work is significant.
Dimension 3	<i>Intellectual Stimulation</i> shows the degree to which one encourages others to be creative in looking at old problems in new ways, create an environment that is tolerant of seemingly extreme positions, and nurture people to question their own values and beliefs and those of the organisation.
Dimension 4	<i>Individualised Consideration</i> indicates the degree to which one shows interest in others’ well-being, assign projects individually and pay attention to those who seem less involved in the group.
Dimension 5	<i>Contingent Reward</i> shows the degree to which one tells others what to do in order to be rewarded, emphasises what one expect from them and recognises their accomplishments.
Dimension 6	<i>Management-by-exception</i> indicates the degree to which the leader takes corrective action on the basis of results of leader-follower transactions.
Dimension 7	<i>Laissez-faire</i> measures whether one requires little of others, is content to let things ride and let others do their own thing.

Source: Adapted from Bass and Avolio (1992).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 2 shows that most of the interviewees claimed that their institutions have reached the

top-most stage of the IMC framework, that is, stage 4 (strategic integration of IMC) (7 references). Besides that, the interviewees also claimed that

their institutions have achieved up to stage 3 of integration, that is, the application of IT in support of IMC (4 references), followed by stage 2 of integration, that is, commitment to market research in support of IMC (3 references). None of the interviewees claimed that their institutions were at the first stage of IMC, that is, tactical coordination of MARCOM. Meanwhile, the lecturer of the selected Malaysian public HLI in Penang and the lecturer of the

selected Malaysian private HLI in Kedah refused to give any answers to this question.

In brief, a contradiction is present in the responses of the administrators and lecturers of the selected Malaysian HLIs regarding the level of IMC implementation in their institutions. This finding is evident where most of the answers of the administrators' and lecturers' of the same institutions were different.



Figure 2: Level of IMC Implementation in Selected Public and Private Malaysian HLIs by Coding References

Figure 3 shows that uniting functional operations by aligning the activities of the HLI toward serving the customers is crucial in developing and implementing a successful IMC strategy as embedded in stage 1 of IMC framework, that is, tactical coordination of MARCOM (8 references). Subsequently, getting support from the top management of HLI is also crucial in determining the successfulness of IMC strategy development and implementation because they are directly involved in the decision-making of the HLI as indicated in stage 4 of the IMC

framework, that is, strategic integration of IMC (8 references). Besides that, it is important for the Malaysian HLIs to study their customers thoroughly as indicated in stage 2 of the IMC framework, that is, commitment to market research in support of IMC (5 references). Last, but not least, it is an added advantage for the Malaysian HLIs to utilise social networks to communicate with their current and prospective customers as indicated in stage 3 of the IMC framework, that is, application of IT in support of IMC (1 reference).

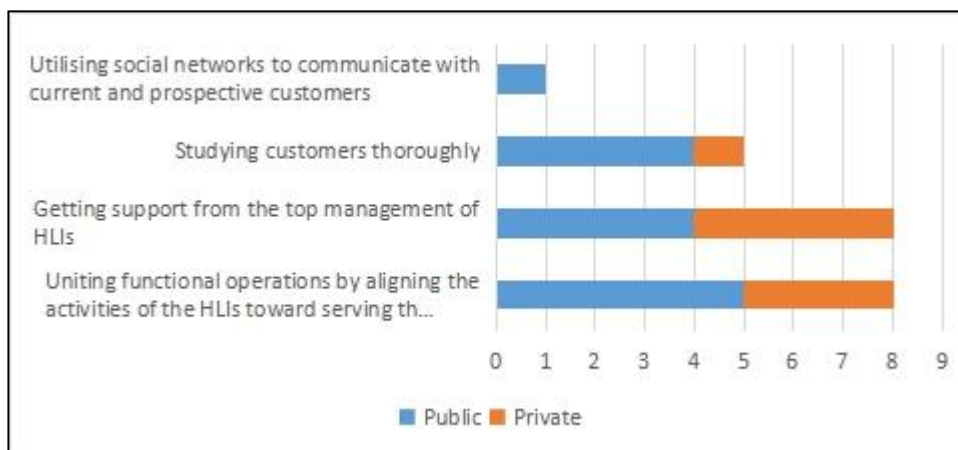


Figure 3: Factors for Developing and Implementing a Successful IMC Plan in Selected Public and Private Malaysian HLI by Coding References

The interview findings on the perception of the administrators and lecturers of the selected Malaysian public and private HLI of the leadership style(s) practised in their institutions expose that the full range leadership dimension of intellectual stimulation was mostly mentioned by them (7 references), alongside laissez-faire (5 references), inspirational motivation (4 references), and management-by-exception (3 references) (see Figure 4).

The dimension of intellectual stimulation was demonstrated as the leadership style practised by the leaders of the selected Malaysian HLI, particularly the private institutions due to the attributes of democratic, discussion-based, and putting into emphasis of employees' ideas that were mentioned by the interviewees of this study. Listening attentively to employees' ideas and opinions is a trait of leader who practices intellectual stimulation, whereby the leader solicits subordinates' ideas (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

The dimension of laissez-faire was practised by some of the leaders of the selected Malaysian public and private HLI (5 references), whereby they were described by the participants of the interview of this study as being irresponsible due to their lack of attentiveness toward the employees, leaving the employees to decide on their own, and thus, working aimlessly. This finding echoes to Bass' and Avolio's (1992) and Judge's and Piccolo's (2004) statements that laissez-faire leadership is known as a non-involvement and non-dependence of leadership since leaders who practice laissez-faire leadership style are prone to pushing away responsibilities, providing little to no direction.

The dimension of inspirational motivation was also evidently practised by the leaders of the selected Malaysian public HLI (4 references) because the leaders were demonstrated as individuals who were concerned about vision and mission and that they were committed to having a vision that is

being shared together with the rest of the university communities.

Furthermore, the dimension of management-by-exception was practised by a number of leaders of the selected Malaysian private HLIs (3 references), whereby they were described by the interviewees of this study as autocratic-like leaders who maintained the gap in relationship between their employees when it comes to work.

In brief, the interview findings of the leadership style(s) practised reveal that the leaders of the selected Malaysian public HLIs showed a higher tendency to practice transformational leadership style compared to the leaders of the selected Malaysian private HLIs who showed the tendency of practising transactional leadership style.

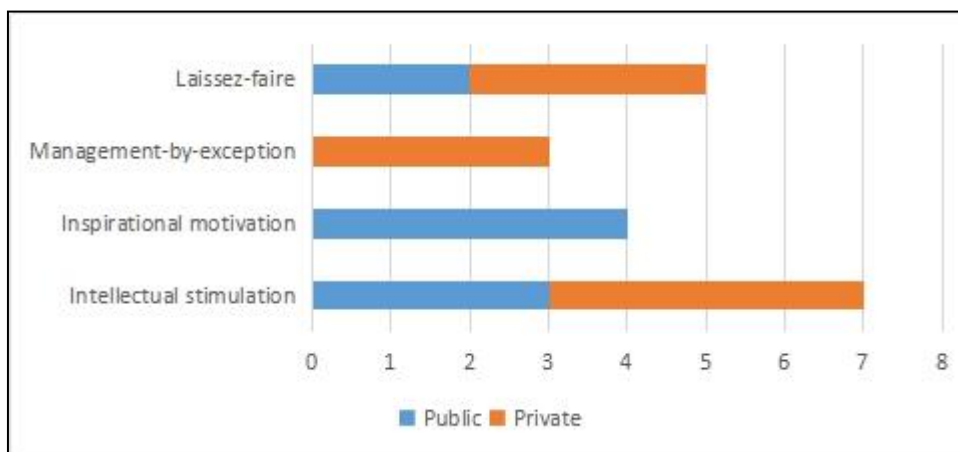


Figure 4: Leadership Styles Practised in Selected Public and Private Malaysian HLIs by Coding References

CONCLUSION

In summation, the leaders or top management plays an important role in the growth of IMC in Malaysian HLIs. Since Malaysian private HLIs were expected by the State to attract more international students, it makes sense as to why they were prone towards transactional leadership style as they have to take good care of their customers' personal needs or goals in order to attract new customers. Malaysian public HLIs have to meet targets for domestic students, and thus, it makes sense as to why they were prone towards transformational

leadership as they have to practice market-oriented approach in order to enhance their capability of generating their own income instead of solely relying on the government's funds. Therefore, practising an appropriate leadership style is an important factor that influences the effectiveness of leaders in the Malaysian HLIs.

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