The Use of Political Skills by Academic Leaders as Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

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This study aims to explore how political skills are performed by university leaders while pursuing for high achievement and quality in this competitive era. Political skill is the ability to strategically plan a beneficial move to achieve organizational missions and work effectiveness. A qualitative method approach was used by employing interviews as a data collection method to university leaders in Semarang city, Indonesia. Drawn from the collected data, it can be concluded that: (1) there are eighteen political skills explored in this research that have been implemented by respondents and (2) There are seven strategies carried out by academic leaders to fulfil university missions. In doing so, each strategy utilizes different groups of political skills. Finally, it is suggested that further research on the political skills of academic leaders in several different academic settings are required to illustrate a bigger picture of politically skilled leaders in higher education institution.

Key words: *Higher education, leaders, political skills, Semarang-Indonesia.*

Introduction

Challenges that face academic leaders in higher education institutions (HEI) in the 21st century are far more severe and multifarious than ever before. Universities around the world desperately want to be recognized as part of the "World Class University (WCU)" and become the destination of every best HEI in the world. WCU is known to have international

standard as worldwide leaders in teaching and innovation with high tolerance towards cultural diversity (Sadlak & Cai, 2013; Jacob et al, 2015 and Puriparinya, 2009).

Challenges of Higher Education in Indonesia

Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia have undergone through several development. The Directorate General of Higher Education has given more authority to universities to manage themselves since 1990s (Moeljodihardjo et al, 2012). Since early 2000, the Indonesian government has been progressively converting the legal status of some public universities into a separate entity which is called *Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Berbadan Hukum* (PTNBH) through the Government Regulation where the universities are given autonomy and self-governance, including managing their own financial and human resources through its Board of Trustees (Moeljodihardjo et al, 2012).

Higher education in Indonesia is currently encountering multifaceted challenges such as the demand for national accreditation, the global competition target to achieve as World Class University, and the student and society demand to solve unemployment problems, etc. Other important issues faced by higher education include how to find external supportive financial resources, develop and maintain international collaboration, becoming an incubator for future leaders, and becoming a powerhouse of innovation.

1. National accreditation

HEIs in Indonesia are required to hold a legal permit from the Directorate General of Higher Education (DGHE), which is evaluated every five years. This is one way to assure the quality of the HEIs and meet the national requirement. This has made every higher education institution in Indonesia constantly carry out self-evaluations and make sure their study programs, faculties, and whole institution meet every requirement indicate by the Ministry. Regulation from the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education No 32/2016 on Accreditation of Higher Education Institution stated that accreditation in Indonesia are carried out to assure the quality of the institution both academic and non-academic to protect the needs of both students and society.

Re-accreditation applies for all HEIs every five years to ensure the quality of the education being given to students. Every HEI holds the rights to apply for re-accreditation just before the permit expires. In order to fulfil this, HEIs needs to assure that they have met all criteria set by the DGHE and work hard to provide all evidence and documentation during field visit by the Higher Education National Accreditation Board (Badan Nasional Akreditasi Perguruan Tinggi/BAN-PT) (Arifin, 2017).

2. Global competition

World Class Universities have become something of a global obsession in the last decade as governments across the world have put the development of competitive higher education and research systems at the heart of their national economic strategies. Each HEI develops their own strategies to achieve higher score. This of course, has put more pressure onto the academic leaders.

Indonesia is also among those playing this competitive game. Recently, the Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education declared that his target for eleven top universities in Indonesia to be among top 500 of world rank (Zubaidah, 2019). Currently, only three universities have reached this prestigous stage, and force other universities work harder to fulfil the Minister's target.

3. Demands of society to solve unemployment problem

Unemployment is one of the issues that higher education graduates are experiencing in many parts of the world. In Indonesia, families predominantly send their children to study in a HEI with the expectatiom that their children will be able to get decent work after they graduate. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Some graduates find it difficult to get jobs as competition and requirements are getting higher and higher during employee recruitments. Some creative students opt to become an entrepreneur and many HEIs are now supporting entrepreneurship and infuse this in the curriculum.

4. Rapid development of technology

Technology has now become inseparable from the daily life of society. Digital tools such as mobile phones, computers, laptops, and TV has shifted the way society live at home, at school, at work, and in most places. This means that technology has changed and shifted the society to a more developed and modernized era (Martin, 2008). The rapid changes in technology are all results of research and innovation in digital technology. This modern digital era has drawn into the hopes and expectations of society to higher education institutions which is known to be the source of research to always come up with new innovations. This situation put pressure on leader of universities to fulfil this expectation.

5. Financial Challenges

To have the adequate finance to carry out all matters and operational costs of a university is also a challenge for sustainability in HEIs (Wright & Wilton, 2012) and currently is more and more reliant on private or external sources (Aula & Tienari, 2011). These financial challenges include focusing on the major issues facilitating the university development and invest

financially into them, initiating some research and services projects (centres cooperating with industries with their donations and investment), and establishing some faculty members' research and service teams (centres) to focus on the advance topics facilitating the academic development and industrial advancement.

6. International cooperation challenges

International cooperation is much more than initiating a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between institutions, but the implementation of the activities of the MoU itself is more meaningful. For example, conducting students\staff exchanges, facilitating international students to carryout internships (also provide projects). This challenge includes the ability to initiate cooperation with foreign institutions. This can be carried out through several approaches, such as direct contact through visits, indirect contact through emails, or even unplanned through international conferences or seminars. International cooperation also includes: (1) facilitate faculty member to conduct research\services with international organizations and foreign universities. Many foreign institutes provide research funding to be executed with foreign counterparts through international collaboration (Mok, 2016), (2) faculty members lead students to join the international world by means of cross-national research, exchanging teaching overseas (both inbound and outbound), (3) encourage faculty members to have the similar research projects with international scholars, each faculty submit the projects to his\her own government for funding.

7. Become an incubator for the next generation leaders

HEIs are believed to be the incubators that develop future leaders. It is stated by Klawe (2014) that "To tackle these problems successfully, we need innovative, able leaders who are skilled in their fields and dedicated to pursuing creative and innovative solutions. How do we develop these leaders? One of the best learning strategies may surprise you. We need to engage more students in undergraduate research". This statement clearly shows how important universities are in shaping the leaders of tomorrow. This may include imbedding soft skills in curriculum and teaching materials. A university is known as an education facility which provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, expertise and at the same time learn leadership. Various programs within curriculum and extracurricular are arranged to provide students the opportunity to learn being a member of organization and how to become leaders.

8. Becoming a powerhouse for innovation

Innovation has currently become a part of the university ranking indicator, which made academic leaders take the effort to constantly stimulate the growth of innovation of their

institution. Arunagiri et al (2016) asserted that many industries are now seeking collaboration with HEIs to support their research and development. It is believed that universities are a powerhouse with the sources of intellectuals to support new innovations. Additionally, innovation has become a part of university world ranking performance indicator (Times Higher Education, 2018) and the industries are now counting on HEIs to support their business through their innovative inventions (Arunagiri, 2016).

The Important Role of Higher Education Leaders

Leadership has been defined in various ways, Ghasabeh et al (2015, pg 460) has defined leadership as "as influenced interactions with groups of followers to implement changes and achieve the determined goals", while Purwaningrum (2016, pg 760) asserted that leadership is "the ability to influence a group to reach a vision or to reach some certain goals". In relation to academia, the definition of leadership can be described as the ability to motivate people that work in an academic environment to achieve target set by the academic institution. Consequently, an academic leader would be the person who has the ability to do so. Academic leaders also require the ability to envision the future, integrate various resources, manage and inspire professionals, and the like to achieve high quality of university. Considering the heavy load being put onto HEIs, an excellent leader is required. The academic leader will need to multitask, so the leader will have to have several dimensions of abilities. The dimensional role of an academic leader involves visioning which include planning and implementing the plan, fundraising, managing and allocating new sources, and safeguarding the institution to create a campus environment that can enhance productivity.

An excellent leader has been identified as the person who has the capacity to motivate team members to attain organizational targets, and at the same time, successfully gain the respect from their followers while carrying out and focusing on a few tasks at once (Mehmood et al, 2012; Cardno, 2012). In this study, an academic leader is defined as a person who harmoniously manages multifaceted resources and proactively reaches pioneering achievement in the university setting.

Political Skills

Political skills were defined by previous researchers such as Vicher (2010, pg 4) which related political skill with "a combination of knowing what to do and knowing how to do it in a manner that was effective and convincing but not obvious". Mencl et al (2016) defined political skill as "understanding people and being able to influence them in ways that contribute to personal, group or organizational success". Based on the above definitions,

political skills in this paper can be defined as a personal power or ability to strategically plan a beneficial move. A person who possesses political skill is insightfully aware, understands situations socially, uses their knowledge and power to build up personal relationships, and communicates with people even with different intentions, and in an influential way to look sincere and will make other people convinced and willingly follow their lead to reach organizational missions and work effectiveness.

Previous studies on political skill emphasize heavily on leaders in a business or governmental setting, and no previous research has explored political skill in academic leaders. This study will fill in the gap through studying on the political skills of leaders in a higher education environment in Indonesia.

Research purposes and questions

This study was conducted to explore the political skills facilitating the excellent academic leaders in their careers. In addition, this study is highly concerned with how these excellent leaders utilize political skills to execute strategies for goal pursuit. In order to fulfil the research purpose, this study focused on two major research questions:

(1) What political skills are implemented by an excellent academic leader?
(2) How do these academic leaders utilize political skills to integrate multifaceted resources in university administration?

Material and Method
Research Design and respondents

This study used a qualitative method approach where interviews were used to collect data. This approach was chosen in order to obtain data which cannot be carried out using a quantitative method. This includes data on how the leaders feel and think, and also explore believes and values that leaders hold.

Respondents of this research were excellent leaders of higher education in Semarang City, Indonesia. Leaders were chosen purposively with the following criteria:

(1) Leader comes from a HEIs in Semarang city which is considered as a well-known institution
(2) Leader comes from an institution that showed a very significant development in past few years.
(3) Leader have the availability of time to participate in the interview
(4) Leader is willing to participate in this research.

Eight leaders from well-known public and private higher education institutions were approached through a network that researchers have established. An official letter was sent to the higher education leaders that were targeted, and we received confirmation from 6 of 8 targeted leaders. Six confirmed their willingness and availability, while two others were on duties, one out of town and another was abroad and therefore, were unable to participate. A follow up appointment for the interview was made with the secretary or the Head of International office of the institution prior to the visit to carry out the interview. The academic leaders that had participated and interviewed were:

1. Prof Dr Fathur Rokhman, Rector of Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), who is recognized for his expertise in the growth leadership.
2. Dr. Muhdi, S.H., M.Hum, Rector of Universitas PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS). His famous achievement was to successfully unify two higher education institution into UPGRIS
3. Prof. Dr. Ridwan Sanjaya, SE, S.Kom, MS.IEC, Rector of Universitas Katholik Soegijapranata (UNIKA). His expertise is in IT, and he has become the youngest Professor in Central Java at the age of 40 and the youngest Rector of his university's history
4. Prof Dr Ir Edi Noersasongko M.Kom, Rector of Universitas Dian Nuswantoro (UDINUS), expert in computer science. He pioneered IT based higher education in Semarang city and the founder of his university.
5. Prof. Dr. Masrukhi M.Pd, Rector of Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang (UNIMUS). Besided his position as university rector, he is also trusted as the head of Muhammadiyah Islamic Organisation in Semarang
6. Ir. Supriyadi, MT, Director of Polytechnic Negeri Semarang (POLINNES). This is his second period to lead as Director which proved his leadership has been trusted by his team member.

Measures

Questions for interview were prepared by adopting some questions from previous research. The questions focused on the major missions the Rectors had set for university leaders to their university development explored by the mission of the university, and how and who the mission was formulated (Tam, 2001). This part of the question also asks about any concern while developing the university mission (such as students' needs, social development, technology advancement). The second part of the questions emphasized on the attitude of university leaders towards the rapid changes in the world. The question asked were related to the university condition (level, concerns, size); strategy on how university can achieve its mission or how to upgrade its achievement and the obstacles in achieving it (Hazelkorn,

2015; Sadlak & Cai, 2013). The next part of the question were exploring the major approaches for the Rectors to undertake and fulfil their university missions (Marginson, 2007; Kallio et al, 2016). Questions include asking the indicators of achievement at the university? How was it formulated and who played key role in formulating it? The academic leaders were then asked about the major resources they utilize for university improvement and their major concern (Simmering, 2006 and Ferris et al, 2007, Danish et al, 2014). The last part of the questions was the political skills of leaders (Ferris et al, 2007; Munyon et al, 2015), how important it is, how they see the future, strategies in leading teams and if there were any drawbacks.

The interview was carried out between January-February 2019. Each academic leader was interviewed at their own office at different times, depending on their availability. Approaches to academic leaders were carried out approximately two months in advanced to make sure enough preparation was made and that academic leader can provide time for the interview in his schedule. The interview was carried out in the leaders' office within the period of two weeks, including several rescheduling experienced due to some sudden agenda of the leaders.

The interview itself, was recorded using a voice recorder, with prior permission from the leaders. Questions were asked according to the structured questions. However, most of the time, questions were naturally expanded according to the answers of leaders. When this happens, researcher slowly lead back the interview to the initial questions. Interview time ranges from approximately 30 minutes up to 120 minutes. All interviewed leaders were giving positive responses and showed interest towards the interview questions. Data obtained was coded using keywords of each aspects of political skills and were used to interpret understanding and viewpoints of leaders.

Results

Reframing back on the major purpose if this research, there are two focus of study: (1) observing and identifying political skills that have been implemented by academic leaders and (2) how the leaders utilize these political skills in the university administration.

Identification of political skills

Based on the collected data, there were 18 political skill which were identified as follows:

1. **Social awareness / social astuteness**

In a higher education setting, social awareness usually comes in the form of being understandably aware of the social environment in campus. For example, a lecturer was

unable to achieve her/his target to publish their research in a reputable international journal, due to unforeseen circumstances. Another example is administration staff who took too many leave days due to taking care of his/her ill family. Or a student who cannot take his/her mid test because of family issues. These conditions often occur in academic or non-academic settings, where leaders are required to rise his social awareness by making wise decisions based on social sensitivity, social insight and social communication.

Some of the answers from the interviews with leaders indicated social awareness, such as a leader of university showed social awareness through goodwill or good intention. From this explanation, all lecturers and staffs have their own key performance indicator (KPIs). If their indicator were not fulfilled, leaders will call them, ask them why they were unable to achieve they KPIs and help them find a solution. Lecturers have obligations to fulfil every semester which include education, research and publication, and public service. The indicator every semester comes in a value of credit with a minimum of 12 credits must be fulfilled. Currently the credit report system is done online, therefore, a leader can easily check whether his/her team members have fulfilled the minimum credit requirement. If this was not achieved, leaders will help to find the root problem as well as solution. Leaders are aware that lecturers in Indonesia must fulfil three aspects: education, research, and community service. Leaders understand that many lecturers have hard times attaining the target, therefore the leader of this university cater the needs of academics to develop themselves. What they need, the university will try to fulfil. They understand that being a leader it is important that the growth of team member (professors, lecturers, staff and students) is put forward. When team members grow and reach satisfaction, then it will be easier to lead them. This is in line with previous research carried out by Alonderiene & Majauskaite, (2016) that a higher job satisfaction is indicated when the leadership style showed a higher concern towards team member such as focusing more on their needs, welfare, showing empowerment and other kinds of positive attention towards followers.

2. Interpersonal motivation / influence / encouragement

Political skill includes the ability to influence other people through persuasion, manipulation, and negotiation in order to achieve their goal (Ferris et al, 2007, Imran et al, 2017). Influencing other people in a way that they will follow is an important skill for leaders and not everyone is equipped with this skill. However, based on observations and interviews, it is indicated that leaders possess these skills. This was shown from their actions by becoming a good role model and encourage team member to walk forward together. He believed that showing how to act will influence team member to do the same. Another leader prefers to use the implementation of good governance. All university programs are discussed together and carried out through: 1. active participation 2. transparency 3. justice and 4. work in harmony. Other higher education leaders influence through equally give team member the same

opportunity. He also encourages his team to follow the same mission, he believes this way lecturers and staff will then follow.

3. Alliance development / networking ability

Political skilled individuals are an expert in identifying, developing and holding to valuable alliances to create beneficial relations. Furthermore, they are powerful negotiators and skilful in conflict management (Ferris et al, 2007, Imran et al, 2017). Building up constructive networks with multifarious resources and communities. Networking will indicate key persons that are most influential in initiating and maintaining collaboration. Politically skilled individuals are an expert in identifying, developing and holding to valuable network to create mutual benefit relations through building up constructive networks with multifarious resources and communities. A leader with such competency is important in its role to engage in collaborative relationships with external institutions. This ability will also help leaders in formulating talent development of staffs through institution collaboration (Brady & Campbell, 2014). Leaders claimed that they already have many established partners globally to support their network. "We are an International university since we already have many important foreign partners". Other universities target not only implementation of collaborative partnership but also include number of graduates that can work abroad as one of the university's indicator of achievement. "Indicators of achievement include 1. real collaboration (joint research, lecture mobility etc). 2. Number of graduates that can work abroad 3. Communication that are established with foreign university".

4. Honesty / sincerity

Ferris et al (2007, pg 292, Imran, 2017) disclosed that "politically skilled individuals appear to others as having high levels of integrity and as being authentic, sincere, and genuine. They are, or appear to be, honest and forthright". Establishing the personal reliable reputation and maintaining the coral values of universities for long-termed development. Honesty is one characteristic that is crucial in any working position. As asserted by Munyon et al (2015, pg. 1) that "…in a post hoc test of political skill dimensions, we found that networking ability, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity (but not social astuteness) predicted task performance".

Being able to act sincere is one important strategy and an aspect of political skill. Not everyone has this ability and only true and genuine leader is equip with this ability. To successfully act open and transparent in every leaders' words and actions will create trustful and respectful environment in workplace. This situation will of course, support both in handling partnership and evolving staffs talent and capacity within organization (Brady & Campbell 2014). Further, it was acknowledged that although it seems unfair, but female

leaders are expected to exhibit more sincerity than male leaders. One of the higher education leaders perform sincerity though implementing good governance at his university. All programs developed were discussed together between leaders and his team member. He emphasized that good governance at his university were carried out through participation, transparency, justice and working in harmony. Another professor and leader of another university asserted that he prefers to become a role model for his team members and walk together. Leaders believe that when good governance is implemented, where team members are being involved and their voices are being heard in future development of institution, followers will have trust in leaders. Transparency is also important in order to grow confidence in followers to believe that their leaders will never cheat or corrupt.

5. Visioning

Academic leaders in Semarang City already have the visioning ability. This was identified in their answers where most of them already have a short term and long-term plan for the development of the institution. One of the institutions have even planned up to the year 2045 for their university planning. Other universities claimed that IT development is the future and therefore, their strategies include the significant development of e-learning and IT. How academic leaders are able to identify the trends that the institution will be emphasized in the future. Therefore it is important in constructing the master plan for the development of HEIs in the upcoming years.

6. Image management

Image management was also part of leader since they already know well when and how to talk and respond to many situation settings. This was manifested during in their interview where academic leaders used their own strategies to make his team willingly follow their decisions. These strategies include employ other professors to support his decisions and strategies to other team members.

Other leaders used strategy on being fair or becoming a good role model and implement good governance. Other leader approach team member using grounded belief of team members and other simply use good communication between leader and team members. Although using different strategies, academic leaders knows when and how to communicate with his team to enforce his policy and decision. This is an important aspects and skills required by leaders as it will ease them in leading the institution and gaining trust from his/her members. It was also asserted that image management are assisting leaders to have higher influence at workplace, especially for middle managers (Braddy 2016).

7. Propaganda

Propaganda is defined by Oxford as an information, especially of a deceptive type, used to promote a political perspective. It is a perfect tool to spread ideas and opinions independently in a form of campaign (Huang et al 2018). In this modern era where technology has become an effective tool to distribute information and promotion has also become an effective tool to spread propaganda. An excellent academic leader is smart to utilize social media and internet to distribute out their propaganda. They realize the effectiveness of social media to get the words and information spread through to many people at once. All interviewed academic leaders have utilized technology for their propaganda. They have university website and some are actively using social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp for communication as well as spreading information.

8. Creativity

Excellent academic leaders are compelled to be a creative risk taker in terms of actualizing their strategic plans (Brendel et al 2016). The interviewed academic leaders have this skill which is shown in the form of taking actions to achieve their strategic plans of performance indicators. All leaders have the ability to explain in detail their unique creative strategies to attain university missions. One university utilized incentives as their creative strategic plans, while others use a religious approach, and some provide funding to develop team members' research and publication potentials. Whatever their creative strategies may be, they have used this skill to motivate others to achieve vision and missions of the institution.

9. Resiliency

Encountering continuous pressure and challenges is not an easy job for academic leader, that is why resiliency is an important skill for them to have. Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from problems, difficulties and toughness (Oxford dictionary 2019). Excellent academic leaders have this skill to face the reality that no matter how tough a situation may be, they will have the ability to learn from it, extract the meaning of it and utilize every available resource to keep the university wheel running (Brendel et al 2016). This ability does not only give the leaders ability to bounce back quickly from a bad situation but being able to attain higher target despite the roughness of turbulence they have to fly through. This was explained by interviewed leaders that they often encounter tough problems but to quickly recover and look for new solution if the others failed.

10. Tolerating ambiguity

Estimation of the future is not always successful or correct, and ambiguity will always shadow every prediction. Academic leaders need the capacity to tolerate ambiguity once they encounter uncertain situation. Tolerance for ambiguity is the capacity to perceive indefinite circumstances as desirable (Brendel et al 2016). Forming the mindset of uncertainty will help leaders to keep flowing smoothly no matter unpredictable the environment may be.

Academic environments are also encountering many ambiguous situation for example the government policy that keeps changing from time to time. Often academic leaders need to change the university policy to make it in-line with changes from the ministry. In this situation, academic leader requires a high toleration to find the best solution.

11. Dealing with stress

Excellent academic leaders are expected to keep provide wise and strategic decision making no matter how stressful a situation may be. Previous research has shown that high levels of stress will impact leaders in their decision making (Brendel et al 2016). Therefore, it is important leaders have a good sense of stress regulation mechanism.

12. Quelling anxiety

Challenges and uncertainty increase the level of anxiety of academic leaders and will influence and decrease leaders' overall performance (Brendel et al 2016). This situation is notbeneficial for academic leaders since they are expected to always perform at their best. Therefore, leaders need the ability to suppress their anxiety, otherwise they will not be able to perform as effective leaders.

13. Anticipating

Every business holds risks, including business in educational industry such as tertiary education. The nature of education which may not seem to be as "aggressive" as industrial or trade businesses sometime makes leaders poorly anticipate ambiguous situations (Schoemaker et al 2013). Nevertheless, politically skilled leaders are equipped with this anticipation skills and make them aware of changing trends and follow every change in this modern era. This way, they will not "miss out" on any important and potential changes that will benefit the institution.

14. Challenging

One of the main characteristics of an excellent leader is that they are not easily satisfied with what they have achieved (Schoemaker et al 2013). They will keep on challenging themselves again and again until they uncover the root cause of a certain problem. They also challenge assumptions of others and see it from different viewpoints. They carefully examine, reflect and analyse a certain issue before they finally make judgements and decisions (Schoemaker et al 2013).

15. Interpreting

Leaders are often challenged by having to face a complex problem where he received conflicting and confusing information, where both seems convincing. An excellent academic leader will be able to gather all information from many perspectives, synthesize, and analyse to reach the most logical interpretation. This need the ability to gather as many inputs as possible, distinguish certain patterns, force through uncertainty and find new insights (Schoemaker et al 2013).

16. Deciding

Making decisions are one of the main duties for leaders. Often, leaders are faced with a situation where quick decisions must be made but without enough supporting information (Schoemaker et al 2013). An excellent academic leader will think strategically and not simply make a yes or no decisions. They will consult and discuss the situation with team member who has decisive role, they will consider long and short-term goal and the influence of some optional decisions. They always ask team member "are there any other options?" and take a "what if" situation into account and have courage of their convictions to make the decisions more robust.

17. Aligning

Aligning several interests among stakeholders is sometimes frustrating. However, an excellent academic leader will have a strategy to continuously communicate proactively with stakeholders to build trust, and engagement as well as to avoid misunderstanding (Schoemaker et al 2013). Moreover, excellent leaders will "Identify key internal and external stakeholders, mapping their positions on your initiative and pinpointing any misalignment of interests. Look for hidden agendas and coalitions" (Schoemaker et al 2013, pg 4).

18. Learning

An excellent academic leader learns from both successful and unsuccessful consequences (Schoemaker et al 2013). They will see failures as something to study about, they will study why it happened, and how it happened to anticipate similar mistakes from happening in the future. Excellent leaders are not afraid to make changes after finding out the hidden lesson from a certain strategy that does not work as expected.

Based on the observation, interview, and analysis, it shows that political skill is an important skill that supports other skills in leadership. Not only will it ease leaders in their leading positions, but it also increases the rate of success since the careful planning of strategies in pollical skilled people are calculated in detail. This in general indicate that political skill plays a great role to enhance the chances of success in academic leaders.

Utilization of political skills

In their attempt to achieve university missions, academic leaders utilize political skills through implementing several approaches: (1) leading team members, (2) integrate various resources and (3) envision future trends (Table 1). Different universities utilize different strategies, but some use the similar method.

Table 1: Strategies implemented by academic leaders

Strategies	Univ. A	Univ. B	Univ. C	Univ. D	Univ. E	Univ. F
1. Leading team members						
a. Cater needs of team member	*	*	*		*	
b. Positive approaches	*	*	*	*	*	*
2. Integrate various resources						
a. Improve supporting facilities	*	*	*	*	*	*
b. Improve quality of HR	*	*	*	*	*	*
c. Improve quality of programs and collaborations			*			
3. Envision future trends						
a. Construct indicator of achievements	*	*	*	*	*	*
b. Develop short-term and long-term plan	*	*	*	*	*	*

Some academic leaders choose to lead their followers through catering the needs of team member which includes serving, giving equal opportunities and growing together. Leaders

emphasize that walking together in the same direction will produce effective result as they consider and concern on the needs of followers (Harms & Crede, 2010). Leaders also make positive approaches through becoming good role models for followers, creating positive communication, implement good governance and persuade to follow missions.

While managing various resources, academic leaders utilize these resources by improving the quality and quantity of supporting resources such as buildings and finance. Quality of human resources, in terms of the number of lecturers with doctorate degree, is also one of which in all universities academic leaders are concerned. Therefore, academic leaders emphasize on increasing the number of PhD degree lecturers. Leaders are also making the effort to always improve the quality of programs and collaborations to increase teaching and learning outcome as well as improving the overall performance of the university.

Academic leaders implement strategies of envisioning the future, which was presented through constructing indicator of achievement based on the future needs of the institution. They also develop short-term and long-term plans according how the envision future trends, even up to the year 2045 as mentioned by one of the respondents. The universities have similarities and differences in their future plans, depending on the mission of each university. For example, university that focuses on the development of technology have the vision to become a technology-based university. On the other hand, university with entrepreneurial perspective would emphasize their vision to produce alumni with successful business.

Discussion

Missions of the universities differ to one another, depending on the focus and strength of each university. Consequently, the emphasis of the university strategies of each university will also differ. In this study, seven strategies to achieve missions were observed, and each strategy was carried out by academic leaders through utilizing different kinds of political skills (see Table 2).

Among seven strategies, 'improving quality of human resources' and 'improving quality of programs and collaborations' utilized the most political skills. Sixteen different political skills are required to be moved at once when carrying out these strategies. Both of these strategies require the ability to be socially aware of the followers need. In this position, academic leaders need to transform themselves as a mentor for the followers, where they can express motivation, encouragement for individual development through formal or informal meeting (Harms & Crede, 2010; Wu et al, 2018). They also need to give confidence to followers by giving positive expectations of the future (Norman et al, 2010). Many of the academic leaders stated that they experience drawbacks in encouraging lecturers to study PhD forvarious

reasons. Hidayati (2016) asserted that reasons why not many lecturers are in favor to study doctorate was because of financial and domestic reasons.

Table 2: Political skill needed to carryout strategies

Strategies	Soc. Awareness	Interpersonal motivation	Networking ability	Sincerity	Visioning	Image Mgt	Propaganda	Creativity	Resiliency	Tolerating	Dealing stress	Quelling anxiety	Anticipating	Challenging	Interpreting	Deciding	Aligning	Learning
Facilitate needs of team member	*	*		*		*				*						*	*	
Positive approaches	*	*	*	*		*	*	*		*	*	*	*		*	*	*	
Improve supporting facilites							*	*					*		*	*	*	*
Improve quality of HR	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
Improve quality of programs and collaborations	*	*	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Construct indicator of achievements	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*		*				*		*
Develop short-term and long-term plans	*		*		*		*	*		*		*	*		*	*	*	*

Some are also busy with their businesses, fear to walk out from their comfort zone, and also the sheavy requirement to study PhD degree. This is where 'creativity' takes place to motivate followers to study in a creative and communicative way to successfully create organizational change (Gilley et al, 2009). Similarly, improving the quality of programs and collaboration also need many political skills to integrate with each other. This strategy requires the ability to socially engage not only with lecturers, but also with students, administration staff, as well as external institutions. With many stakeholders to manage, academic leaders should be confident enough to make necessary effort and succeed challenges (Norman et al, 2010); develop a solid team to make changes (Gilley et al, 2009) and show optimism towards a certain goal (Harms & Crade, 2010).

Second strategy to utilize most political skills was 'positive approach'. While implementing this strategy, academic leaders need to run 14 political skills at once that integrate one with another. The ability to keep positively towards all actions are required for this strategy. Academic leader must show his optimism (Norman et al, 2010; Harms & Crede, 2010) and positive communication (Gilley et al, 2009) to create positive environment. This is important since how leaders act towards his followers will influence and determine the followers' performance (Boerner et al, 2007). Therefore, if an academic leader can spread and maintain positivity, followers will do the same.

Next strategies were 'construct indicator of achievements' and 'develop short-term and long-term plans' which employ 12 different political skills. Indicators of achievement are the milestone targets of the university mission, and short-term and long-term plans are the strategies to achieve it. Therefore, in a way, both are closely related to one another and in order to carry out both strategies, 12 political skills are needed (Table 2).

Both strategies utilize social astuteness, networking ability, visioning, propaganda, creativity, tolerating, quelling anxiety, deciding and learning; while three other political skills varies. While developing milestones and short/long term plan, academic leader needs the ability to envision the future, how the institution will shape in the future, what target should be reached, what are demands of future society will be like etc. Political skills support academic leader in identifying these milestones and plans while considering university mission as well as other stakeholders' needs. In a word, political skills helps academic leaders to become a just and fair leaders.

The last two strategies 'facilitate needs of team member' and 'improve supporting facilities' both use seven political skills. In facilitating the needs of team member, academic leader requires to move seven political skills (social awareness, interpersonal motivation, sincerity, image management, tolerating, deciding and aligning). When facilitating followers, leaders will run their social skills where they need to be aware with social environment as well as the ability to relate with other people. They also need to show that they care about other people's needs through being sincere and show their image management. At the same time, academic leader needs to be able to tolerate any possible occurrence of ambiguity, making the right decisions and aligning any conflicting interest. In improving supporting facilities, political skill that takes the role include propaganda, creativity, anticipating, interpreting, deciding, aligning and learning. Improvement of supporting facilities must be aligned with university mission and leaders require the ability to learn and interpret these needs and decide the best improvement possible. Propaganda is also important to spread the vision of leaders on why he decided on certain improvement in order to minimize conflicts from unsupportive people.

Conclusions

This study confirms the importance of political skills for excellent academic leaders in higher education. The tension between demands, challenges, concerns, and resources, puts a lot of pressure on HEIs academic leaders. In general, exploration and analysis in this study can be concluded as follows:

(1) Various aspects of political skills have been explored in this research and based on the interview to six academic leaders, eighteen aspects have been extracted and identified. All eighteen political skills were utilized by leaders in their administrative academic settings.

(2) In their attempt to achieve university missions and performance indicators, academic leaders utilize political skills in seven strategies where in every strategy, leaders employ different types of political skills.

Limitations

This study explored the political skills needed for excellent academic leader. With a very limited time, this study only explores small sample size in one city. In order to observe a greater picture, it is suggested that similar studies are carried out with different types of academic settings, such as public vs private universities, universities from different areas where possibly have different values, beliefs and approaches.

Universities from different countries may also come out with different result as the challenges may be different and government regulations also differ. Result from different angle and perspective can give more information on the formation of political skills in higher education and challenges that underpin academic leaders of higher education and how they utilize it in a campus setting.

Implications

Result of this study provides information on eighteen political skills that are needed for effective academic leaders. It is expected that this result will provide information for academic leaders who need to strengthen their leadership skills, especially their political skills, so that they can successfully encounter challenges that arise in the HEIs.

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