Influence of Military Commander's Leadership Style towards Subordinate's Morale

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Abstract

Leadership is regarded as one of the strategic matters in the development and management of morale. In military, leader control both interpersonal and material rewards and punishment that often shape subordinate's behaviour and influence subordinate's performance, morale, motivation and attitude. The objective of the study was to empirically investigate the direct effect of Military Commander's transformational and transactional leadership styles towards their subordinate's morale. This study seeks to determine whether the two different leadership styles have direct effects on the subordinate's morale. This study employed quantitative methods for data collection. The respondents of this study are infantry soldiers from Border Regiment consisting of officers and other ranks. The research instruments consisted of structured questionnaires using MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004), along with items of morale. The result of this study is expected to provide insight into the importance of the application of concepts of morale for subordinates, transformational and transactional leadership styles that exist within a unit.

Keywords: Morale, Leadership Style, Transformational, Transactional

Introduction

In any organizations, morale has long been recognized as a critical determinant of performance, motivation and enthusiasm. As in military, high level of morale will translate into superior performance during different types of military operations (Manning, 1991). Morale is state of mind. Morale can be regarded as a set of attitudes and responses to any work conditions that may influence the behavior of the individuals (Kanter, 1977). A high level of morale can be demonstrated when an individual shows determination to do the best under any given circumstance and the ability of a group of people to pull together continuously and consistently for a common purpose (Bayens, 1967). Studies of morale within a variety of organizations have identified a number of common effects resulting from low morale, namely: low productivity and levels of achievement, reduced quality of output, increased turnover,

absenteeism, and disciplinary problem. Prior research on leadership has shown that how a leader acts and communicates with followers during very challenging periods can create the foundation for future trust in the leader and impact on morale (Kasper-Fuehrer and Ashkanasy, 2001). Researchers have noted a large number of leadership qualities that have the capacity to influence motivation and performance (Chemers, 2000). Gal (1986) found that one of the strongest predictors of soldier morale was relationship with unit commanders. Leadership is the ability of influencing people so as to achieve the objectives of organization in most efficient and effective manner. It may be done in various ways. Leaders may employ various styles and different instruments to accomplish this process. Past research indicates that a supportive leadership style leads to lower levels of employee turnover. However, few studies have looked at other aspects of leadership style that could have positive effects on morale. This study fill the gaps by looking the influence of military commander's transformational and transactional leadership styles towards subordinate's morale.

Leadership In Military
Leadership in the military, like all leadership, concerns itself with the influence of members so that they willingly strive to ethically achieve assigned missions. Military leaders are one who inspires member commitment throughout the lead-up to, and involvement in, operations. They support members so that they are able to confront and accept the moral component of operations and encourage members so that they can deal with and suppress the fear of battle. Good military leaders put the needs of the mission and the concerns of the member before their own needs and concerns. According to Kane and Tremble (2000) and Shamir et al (1998), even in peacetime, military performance is associated with cohesion commitment to the organizational values and goals. It requires an effective leadership role to influence, motivate and inspire individuals to achieve the desired outcome. Leadership involves at least two people or groups, one which leads and another which follows. Leaders must balance successful mission accomplishment with how they treat and care for organizational members. Taking care of people involves creating and sustaining a positive climate through open communications, trust, cohesion, and teamwork.

Military Morale
Within military, morale has been for a long time ago of interest among military leaders (Manning, 1991). Most morale definition emphasizes state of mind for a person. Morale can be defined as a forward-looking and confident state of mind relevant to a shared and vital purpose (Smith, 1985). Manning (1991) view morale as the enthusiasm and persistence with which a member of a group engages in the prescribed activities of the group. Morale also merely defined as the psychological forces within a combat group which impel its members to get into the fight (Grinker, 1945) and also the capacity of any group of people to pull together consistently for a common purpose (Leighton, 1943). Slim (1986) concludes that morale as a state of mind which acted as an intangible force which impelled groups of men to achieve something without counting the cost to themselves; and also that they felt part of something greater than them. Having examined the various definition of morale in the military view, it can be conclude that morale has an objective direction towards a goal and is coupled with a determination to get the job done. William (2002) posited that morale is important to operational effectiveness. Morale was critical to the modern army, as it will play a key role in overcoming some of the changes and challenges that face the army. It also noted that morale was the foundation upon which the army of the future may rely upon. According

to the Australian Army's *Leadership Theory and Practice* (1993), the key element of a soldier's morale is his attitude to the army, himself, his companions, and his leader.

Relationship between Leadership Style and Morale

Leadership has been an important topic in the social sciences, business circle, organization and military for many decades. In military, leadership catch military people interest as it have all direct experience with it, either in the role of leader directing others or as a follower, benefiting from the lead of others. Anyone who has been reading either popular works on leadership or academic literature on the subject will be likely to have noticed the emergence of a new concept in this field, transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Past research found a significant relationship between leadership style and morale. According to Finger (2005), morale is more influenced from the top down (that is by leadership) than from the bottom up. High or low morale is not just made up of a single factor; it is a combination of related factors. These factors include changes in the internal and external environment as well as the leadership approach taken in responding to those changes. A study by Moore (2013) shows that businesses in smaller countries must look to innovative leadership styles that will increase employee morale to remain competitive in the emerging global community and global markets to attract investors. Houghton & Yoho, (2012) assert that a company's structure, leadership style, and policies set the tone for employee satisfaction and morale. According to Saari and Judge (2004), use of transformational leadership can boost up employees' morale and result in job satisfaction. Finding by Dye and Garman (2006), revealed that distrust of management, poor interpersonal relations, and inflexible working conditions could also contribute to low employee morale. According to Schuler (2004), among the reasons given for low morale are poor leadership qualities of the immediate supervisor. Past research work focusing on education established that change and poor leadership are primary causes of low employee morale (Robbins, 2003). Figure 1 shows the proposed theoretical framework for this research.
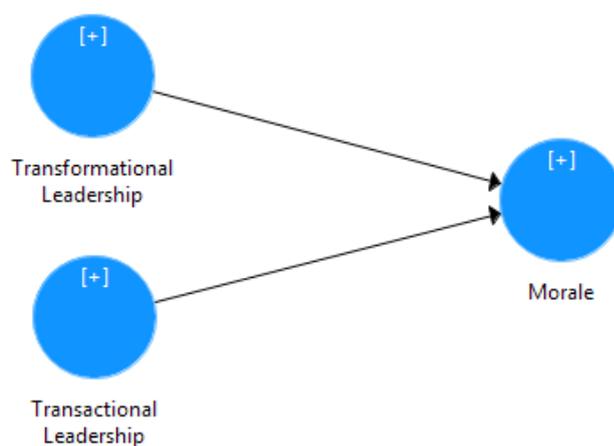

Figure 1 Proposed Theoretical Framework

Conclusion

Overall, this research is extremely important for military commanders while monitoring or supervising the subordinates because it may help them to understand and to implement a right leadership style to increase morale of the followers. The results of this study reinforce the concept of the relation between leadership styles, and subordinate's morale. Moreover,

this study will benefit Military Commanders in the sense that the recommendations that will be made will contribute towards effective leadership style. Effective leadership is a critical driver of subordinate's morale. Therefore, the derived utility of the study is that it could provide leaders with tangible tools that can be used to positively influence the morale of the units in which they serve. Additionally, this research attempts to provide a better understanding of what morale really means in a military context. In addition, the study intends to establish the best practices leadership styles that is important to military commanders to be coup in order to managing morale among their subordinates. Since there are limited morale studies in Malaysian military perspective, this study hopes to provide further insights on leadership style, eliciting by Military Commanders that influence the soldier's morale.

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