

**The Impact of Externally-Driven Change on Middle Leadership  
in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

The University of Leeds  
School of Education

December, 2018

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my daughters, Saathana and Tehjanaa

## **Acknowledgements**

Om Saravanabhavaye Namaha

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Michael Wilson and Professor Jeremy Higham for their guidance and support throughout the completion of my thesis. Without their constant encouragement and feedback, this EdD would not have been possible.

I also like to take this opportunity to thank the man behind all my success, my husband Muthukrishnan Renganathan for his love, sense of humour and patience.

A special thanks to my two daughters, Saathana and Tehjanaa who are the reason behind my EdD journey. I wish to express my gratitude to family members and in-laws who are the pillar of my strength.

Thanks to my father, Maniam, mother, Jayaletchimi and my sister Dr Lalitha Malar who believed in my abilities to excel in life.

Most notably, I like to convey my gratitude to all my doctoral peers, Syakima, Hanan, Rumana, Zuraidah, Liza, Dung, Van, Chung, Tracey Flex and Paulette who were constantly understanding and supportive throughout my studies.

I would also like to extend sincere thanks to my participants, who provided me with valuable data that allowed me to research and reflect on my own journey as a middle leader.

Special thanks to British Educational Leadership Management and Administrative Society (BELMAS) for awarding the research student bursary.

## **Abstract**

The focus of the thesis is the impact of externally-driven change on the role of academic heads of departments (middle leaders) in a Malaysian higher education institution. The investigation is timely because of the Malaysian government's recent reform of the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Education (MEB HE) to improve standards and enhance competitiveness in the wake of the pressures of global competition by 2025. Moreover, while middle leadership has received considerable attention in Western countries, it has been less well researched in the Far East, including Malaysia.

The research is qualitative Malaysian university case study, drawing on the perceptions of ten heads of departments across a wide range of academic disciplines, regarding: (a) the impact of changes to their leadership role on their professional working lives; and (b) their experiences of leadership learning, both formal and informal, through the change process. Their lived experiences were captured through in-depth interviews and their descriptions of critical incidents (professional turning points) in their career trajectories. Relational Leadership Theory (RLT) provided a framework for understanding the change process through working with significant others, including superiors, subordinates and peers.

Key findings indicate evidence of positive experiences characterised by ingenuity and resilience in the way the heads of departments adapted to their new roles. They also reveal evidence of difficulty and frustration arising from a need for more systematic recruitment strategies, better support mechanisms and preparedness of staff in taking on new middle management responsibilities. While the findings from a single study cannot be generalised in a conventional sense, they have the potential to resonate with readers working in similar contexts through naturalistic generalisation. They also provide fresh insights into an understanding leadership role change and leadership learning in a non-Western higher education context.

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# Chapter 1

## 1. Introduction

Middle leaders in higher educational settings are challenged to meet rapid changes from time to time. These challenging circumstances have certainly put the spotlight on middle leadership in higher education regarding their changing roles, responsibilities and identities. Higher educational institutions need individuals with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead in an era of uncertainty and change (Tierney, 1999). Particularly in a developing country such as Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) aspires to broaden access and expand overall higher education system and institutional quality to meet the demands of internationalisation and global recognition. The legislation of the new higher education policy in Malaysia from 2015 until 2025 is expected to increase sustainability and expand quality of higher educational institutions.

However, this major change of policy in higher education has implicitly involved immense challenges and contributions of middle leaders. Thus, it is assumed to impact middle leaders' roles and leadership practices in a multi relational manner. Their leadership roles and practices can be heard and viewed in a relational approach to understand their roles, practices and leadership learning needs.

### 1.1 Contextual Background

#### 1.1.1 Higher Education in Malaysia

Higher education in Malaysia has thrived since independence in 1957 to meet the demand for quality education (Grapragesam et.al, 2014). It comprises of public and private institutions. Currently, Malaysia has 20 public universities,

53 private universities, 6 foreign university branch campuses; 403 private colleges, 30 polytechnics and 73 public community colleges. Five of the 20 public universities in Malaysia have been assigned research university status with additional funding for research and development and commercialisation of research. This includes the choice of university made for this study. The remaining 15 public universities have been categorised as either comprehensive or focus universities. In 2012, the MOHE announced that five public universities have been given autonomy in administration, human resources, financial and academic management and student intake. They are Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. This move is aimed at encouraging excellence among local institutions of higher learning. Three years later in 2015, a new higher education system was introduced.

The new higher education system is a complicated transitional phase for both public and private universities for middle leaders. From independent regulatory institutions, public universities are expected to regulate its operation collaboratively with private higher learning institutions. This is a major decision from MOHE which can directly affect leadership roles either positively or negatively. Also, from a highly-centralised governance system model, the new system has been transformed to an earned autonomy within the regulatory framework.

As front-line leaders, heads of departments are expected to play pivotal role to make the process of change faster in academic departments (McArthur, 2002). In line with the new system or 'external drive' from MOHE, higher education departmental leaders are confronting with different changes in their

roles and leadership practices in their institutions by experiencing highly interdependent relationships with others. In these circumstances, departmental leaders in the universities have to meet the demand of the higher education system to perform leadership roles and responsibilities effectively.

### **1.1.2 New Higher Education System in Malaysia**

The higher education system in Malaysia has undergone changes that have altered its nature, scope and aims. A major shift has been proposed to uplift the quality and standard by 2025. The effort to realise the proposal was evident from the review of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, or *Pelan Strategik Pengajian Tinggi (PSPTN)* which lasted from February 2013 until March 2015. As a result of the review, a new higher education system has been introduced in 2015. Ten shifts were finalised and documented in the Malaysian Education Blueprint for Higher Education (MEB HE) to spur continued excellence in the higher education system. Figure 1 illustrates the shifts which are regarded as key focus elements to attain quality and efficiency in the Malaysian higher education landscape.

The first four Shifts focus on outcomes for key stakeholders in the higher education system, including students in academic and technical & vocational education & training (TVET) pathways, the academic community, as well as all Malaysians participating in lifelong learning. The other six Shifts focus on enablers for the higher education ecosystem, covering critical components such as funding, governance, innovation, internationalisation, online learning, and delivery.

(Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025)



**Figure 1: 10 Shifts of MEB HE 2015 -2025**

Evidently, all the ten shifts are essential mechanism to ensure level of effectiveness in higher learning institutes (HLI). However, apart from senior academic staff such as deans and deputy deans, HLIs require middle leaders from various levels to contribute their leadership skills and commitments to achieve overall quality in the new system and the desired outcomes. Amid fulfilling the outcomes, middle leaders could be significantly influenced by new roles, responsibilities and leadership practices. The community of middle leaders assigned with departmental leadership positions before 2015 and during the implementation process of this system between 2015 until 2025 is highly possible to encounter both positive and negative occurrences in their leadership journey. These occurrences can potentially ‘make’ or ‘break’ their middle leadership practices. It is assumed that these ten major shifts are not only significant for the higher education system in general, but also it would be impactful specifically for the community of leaders who are expected to go

through major transformation in their leadership practices. Through this study, their 'voices' are yet to be heard to understand how the changing roles affected them and what kind of support are perceived necessary for the development and quality of middle leadership to surpass. Hence, their 'voices' through this study are significant to materialise the ten Shifts of MEB HE.

The MEB HE indicates that the quality of Malaysia's HLIs can only be good as the quality of its academic community, from educators, researchers, institutional leaders, practitioners, to academic support staff (p.16, Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025). This transformation in the higher education system has prompted the Malaysian government to initiate the establishment of Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) solely to fulfil the goal of making Malaysia the centre of regional excellence in the provision of world class higher education in the year 2020 as outlined in the Malaysian Education Act (Amendment 1996 and The Corporatisation Policy in 1998). In order to attain the world class standard, leadership roles at HEIs in Malaysia have become even more pivotal and therefore, the MOHE considers identifying required leadership roles and developing a pipeline of talents as crucial to strengthen leadership roles. Additionally, institutionalising the right processes in the areas of selection, development, evaluation and renewal of leaders in higher education is emphasised.

It is hoped that higher educational leaders fully understand their institutions' roles, craft their institutions' visions and missions, and rally their community of leaders to meet and even exceed expectations. The long-term sustainability of this transformation path depends on the leadership development process to strengthen leadership roles as envisaged. These leadership roles emphasised



by MOHE should not be only directed for top management university leaders but also should highly prioritise departmental leaders in the universities who are the backbones of every department in the higher education institutions. Thus, research based on middle leadership particularly departmental leaders can contribute to the success of the new higher education system in Malaysia.

## **1.2 From Middle Leader to an Independent Researcher**

I have personal and professional interests in middle leadership which derived from my own experience working as an acting head of department in a higher education institution in Malaysia. There, I started leading a newly established language department. I experienced multiple roles and relational issues as a new department head and often struggled to balance my roles between my superiors and academic colleagues. At a personal level, I was emotionally and physically unprepared to hold highly complex roles which required attention and solutions promptly. I struggled to seek answers and solutions to leadership related issues. I presumed it was a 'lonely voyage' and often worked independently. I faced role conflicts and ambiguities. In terms of relational perspectives, my peer academics and other university staff exhibited varying degrees of relationships which at some points encouraged my leadership practices and at times discouraged me.

Owing to both positive and negative experiences as a middle leader, I developed interest on the topic of middle leadership particularly linked to university departmental leadership. These research findings are expected to be a 'bundle of knowledge' for potential and aspiring departmental heads who share similar career trajectories in higher education institutions to me. I am keen to strengthen my leadership skills in this area and improve my

understanding of middle leadership. Additionally, I could realise how the lack of understanding relational interdependencies in middle leadership undermines its effectiveness in university departments, therefore I committed to complete a research that not only contributes to foster more theoretical knowledge, but also to enhance this effectiveness among middle leaders in practice. The intention of this study is to explore the nature and complexities inherent in middle leadership as practised by departmental heads and make sense of how they perceive their changing roles and practices from a relational perspective. Therefore, I prepared to move from the position as a middle leader to that of an independent researcher for this study.

### **1.3 My Motivation and Value Position**

I realise as a researcher that I should make my own value position clear. My position as a former middle leader helped me in connecting especially well with participants in this study because based on works that suggest that people tend to gravitate toward those with whom they share some level of commonality (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). There are three value positions that underpin the research.

- A positive belief in departmental improvement as a way of giving moral and intellectual benefits to departmental heads to lead efficiently and influence novice leaders.
- A deep admiration for departmental leaders and respect their effortful contributions whether fully or partially benefit the institutions. Their mindfulness in facing and attempting to solve problems in coping with difficult situations are commendable. The departmental heads' 'voices'

are heard to fully understand integral issues which link to their leadership roles and professional career.

- A strong belief in developing effective leadership through understanding departmental leaders' thoughts and the occurring situations as a learning opportunity, rather than viewing problems as burdening job conflicts. Such a belief that leadership problems are best understood and solved by reflecting on critical situations is applicable to all levels of leaders within departments between senior leaders and successors or middle leaders with senior leaders.

#### **1.4 Development of Research Questions**

The development of research questions was the most crucial and time-consuming process. This was the process that enabled me to read extensive literature before developing a feasible set of research questions considering the focus of my study, my motivation to seek specific challenges in roles and responsibilities of middle leaders, financial support and related literature pertaining to heads of departments.

I had to amend my research questions three times throughout my research project before finalising the present research questions. I was inspired and motivated to seek further understanding into the roles and responsibilities of heads of departments after taking up the role as a middle leader two years before I made an application as a doctoral student. Many challenging experiences while serving as a middle leader led me into reading more about middle leadership from the western and eastern context including Malaysia in the higher education settings.

The first stage of development started when I was extremely ambitious to submit my proposal for the doctoral course in education. The initial proposal had four broad research questions which focused on leadership styles and problems faced by middle leaders in three various public universities in Malaysia. This was the pre-stage of my research studies and I was uncertain about formulating good research questions.

The second stage was the amendments of research questions by the end of my first year of doctoral studies, I decided to change my research questions on leadership styles which focused on the 'followers' or subordinates' perceptions of effective leaders. However, with my middle leadership experiences, I was keen to examine the perspectives of heads of departments because there was a gap in the middle leadership researches emphasising on the 'voices' of heads of departments.

The third and final amendment of my research questions was typically to understand how middle leaders receive support and learn their roles. Limited literature focusing on middle leadership in Malaysia indicated that most publications in the Malaysian higher education context examined leadership based on higher level leaders such as deans and deputy deans. The need for support and trainings were scarce in the Malaysian context of literature but I came across publication work on middle leadership in western countries with specific focus on middle leaders' roles and responsibilities and professional development courses. Thus, I refined my research questions further and finalised two feasible research questions.

## **1.5 Research Aims and Questions**

The aim of this study is to provide an insight into middle leaders' perceptions on emerging roles, practices, and the implications of the changes to their leadership learning from a relational lens. The study is also aimed at providing opportunity for my own and middle leaders' reflections about coping and understanding leadership roles, responsibilities in both accommodating and turbulent situations to aid effective departmental leadership by looking from the relational perspectives. Warren Bennis noted, "When you understand, you know what to do" (Bennis, 2003, p.55). Therefore, it is essential to understand problems faced in a leadership role in order to tackle problematic situations, strengthen leadership skills and resolve the problems. Failing to do so often leads to conflicts among departmental heads.

Moreover, inefficiency in resolving conflicts could possibly lead to poor leadership. As Bolman & Gallos (2010) concur, academic leaders go awry for two reasons: (1) they see a limited or inaccurate picture. They miss important cues and clues in their environment and as a result take the wrong course and (2) they fail to take people along with them, they move too fast, too unilaterally, or without understanding the cultural norms and traditions to enable others to buy into their plans.

Two basic assumptions underpin this study: first, that middle leaders' leadership are highly relational and complex as a result of the emerging new roles and practices they undertake with the implementation of the new higher education policy; second, that the process of leadership learning is inevitable and that there is a possibility that their leadership roles, leadership learning and relationship are increased by the virtue of reflecting on critical situations

they face. Therefore, the middle leaders will be more likely to perceive the externally-driven change in relation to critical situations that they encountered either positively or negatively to learn leading and overcome problems. From the aims above, two basic research questions have been formulated:

**1) How do middle leaders perceive challenges and expected changes in their leadership roles and practices?**

The first research question is solely focused on middle leaders' perceptions in terms of their challenges and changing roles and practices because they lead in a multi-relational and multi-directional scope of leadership and further examination of their perceptions can reveal meaningful discussion. All middle leaders in this study represent various departments and disciplines, therefore, it is hoped that they can disclose their highly complex middle leadership roles in a relational manner. The answers to this question will aid in determining the degree of complexity and how their roles are inter-related in relational dimensions. Moreover, it can provide a lens through which relational dimensions contribute to conflicts and challenges to middle leadership.

**2) What have they learnt and how have they learned during the process of responding to the new challenges and adapting to their new leadership roles?**

The second research question is equally essential to gather insights concerning to what extent these middle leaders understood the significance of the new roles, leadership practices and what measures have been undertaken. It will provide opportunities for middle leaders to voice out what they think as practical preparation and solutions to improve middle leadership in different discipline-based departments. This research question also

indirectly explores the behaviours and mechanisms exhibited by middle leaders and relational influence of others in the department and/or institutions that enable them to cope with critical leadership situations.

## **1.6 Definitions of Key Terms**

### **1.6.1 Leadership in Higher Education**

Several key terms are worth defining at this stage before the study is examined further. Firstly, the key term leadership in higher education. Definitions of leadership in higher education are not shaped as 'one-size fits all'. Some definitions in relation to leaders and leadership in academic settings have been inconclusive in researches. Ball (2007) who points out, discourse about leadership invariably refers to the leaders and often seems to suggest that by studying leaders one is studying leadership.

Some scholars indicate there are almost as many definitions of term as there are scholars who have written about it. Most, however, recognise it to be the influence process between leaders and followers. Some studies call for leadership to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities are not new, the emerging definitions of what it means to be an institutional leader or practice leadership are changing. Ramsden (1998, p.4) refers leadership as a practical and everyday process of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues ... leadership in universities can and should be exercised by everyone, from the vice chancellor to the casual parking attendant. Notably, Ramsden stresses one of the many contexts of leadership is the universities' settings.

Despite having many facets of leadership, some see leadership as inspiring performances and achievements among staff that extend beyond what might

have been reasonably expected. There seems to be general consensus that leadership involves setting the general and longer-term directions of the organisation. Analysis of leadership definitions shows that three particular elements commonly feature. These are goal setting and achievement, group activities and influence upon behaviour of others.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Shackleton (1995) noted that no agreement exists about the essence of leadership, or the means by which it can be identified, achieved or measured whether reference is made to everyday speech or to the literature. But Shackleton (1995, p.2) and Bolden et al, (2012) view the idea of leadership similarly. They propose that leadership is the process in which an individual influences other group member (usually called subordinates or followers) towards the attainment of group or organizational goals.

One of the many facets of leadership is described to value the close knit in a socially bounded and constructed process. Values, thoughts and behaviours that are essence of leadership are social and interactive processes; consequently, they are culturally influenced. In other words, it is becoming clear that the meaning of leadership varies across different societal cultures (Dimmock and Walker, 1999). It is not just the meaning of the concept that differs cross-culturally. Differences extend to the ways in which its exercise is manifested in different values, thoughts, acts and behaviours across societies and their organisations. For instance, a country such as Malaysia consisting of multi-ethnic communities may represent its departmental leadership in accordance to the cultural values of its ethnic groups. Undeniably, the process of acculturation can form a totally different facet of leadership in different



contexts ranging from school leadership, intellectual leadership, research leadership and leadership in higher education settings.

Researchers also seem to emphasise two foci regarding leadership in the HEIs. The most prevalent focus is on what works, asking questions including what is effective leadership, and how can we develop an effective leader? (Simkins, 2005). These questions are seemingly embedded in the assumption that knowledge situated in one context can be generalised and replicated in other contexts. The second focus has been associated with formal positions including institutional and departmental headships or managers (Middlehurst, 2008).

### **1.6.2 Middle Leaders in Higher Education**

Another term 'middle leader' requires clarification. Middle leaders are academic middle managers who are also termed as departmental chairs or heads of department in different educational settings. They are responsible to coordinate and monitor discipline-based departments according to various college or university programmes. They have designated posts with formal responsibilities to lead discipline-based departments. Disciplines such as engineering, medical, education, accounting, business, social studies, computer science and other disciplines are led by these departmental heads. In addition, each departmental head is to supervise staff who are categorised under the leadership of the respective departmental heads. In the Malaysian higher education institutions, departmental heads hold the title of 'Head of Department' (HoD) in a rotational basis for three years.

The specific term 'middle leaders' is also widely used in scholarly research to denote departmental leaders. They are called middle leaders based on the

position in the organisational structure. Middle leaders in Malaysia are positioned or 'sandwiched' between the top-level management staff; the deputy dean and dean and the bottom level of academic staff such as those led by the departmental leaders. They include heads of faculty, department heads, discipline area coordinators, student enrolment advisors, and section or unit heads. These leaders have roles dealing with various administrative and managerial responsibilities, and reports directly to a line manager, who occupy a significant and superior leadership role.

Hecht et.al (1999) use the term department chair to refer to departmental heads. They further state, department chairs as front-line managers serve more than one constituency, a fact that requires department chairs to assume multiple roles (1999, p.21). Department heads represent the central administration to department members at the same time that they articulate the needs of the department members to the administration. Consequently, department chairs are an essential link between the administration and department members. Department chairs are more than agents of the central administration. They are also the primary spokespersons and advocates for the academic department. Chairs are the only administrators with delegated responsibilities that allow for a direct influence on programme quality. Department chairs are the only administrators with the requisite discipline training and vantage point needed to assess program quality and identify areas of needed change. As front-line managers, department chairs are both chief advocates for the department and primary agents of the central administration.

Middle leaders' roles and responsibilities are embedded based on synonymous terminologies used to denote them. It is important that readers of this study understand the synonymous word of 'departmental leaders' by associating the terms with their roles and responsibilities. Throughout the study, I have chosen to use the terms departmental leaders, middle leaders and heads of departments (HoDs) interchangeably.

One might expect department heads working in the same university to have similar experiences and career paths, there may in fact be considerable differences, even within the same school and certainly between schools, in the same university (Floyd & Dimmock, 2011). Most probably department heads perform leadership prior to various work culture and domains, experiences, problems, successes and failures which inevitably demonstrate distinctive leadership, depending on the diversity of institutions.

Many departmental leaders who lead university departments certainly play pivotal roles to bring about significant changes that are desired by the HEIs particularly in universities consisting of varied disciplines and departments. Discipline-based middle leaders are considered as backbones of every department in a university and they are expected to lead effectively in multiple roles. In addition, they experience relational connections in multidirectional dimensions which is essential for effective middle leadership.

Since departmental leader from each university department 'represents a crucial unit of analysis in universities' (Bryman, 2007, p.694), a study related to departmental leaders such as this is crucial yet scanty.

### **1.6.3 Role Theory of Leadership**

Role theory of leadership is a concept largely borrowed from sociological role theory which applies to the ideas of leader-follower relations. It is not only an important element of social systems but also a theoretical approach which links between the individual and the group. The concept understands leadership within a group as a result of a process of differentiation by which group members achieve group aims faster and whereby they meet their individual needs (Winkler, 2010, p.75). Three basic approaches are associated with the role theory of leadership which are structuralistic, functionalist and symbolic interactionism. These approaches will be discussed further in the next chapter on literature review.

### **1.6.4 Relational Leadership Theory**

Relational leadership theory is a new approach and its definition is open for interpretation. It is a combination of entity and relational perspectives. This fresh approach draws on relational dynamics of leadership. One perspective is to identify attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationship and the other perspective views leadership as a process of social construction through which certain understanding of leadership emerge.

This approach is an extension of the Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX). Relational leadership approach is related to the quality of relationship between people who hold a specific leadership role and with those who are his/her superiors and subordinates. There is a strong connection between behaviour and quality of relationship in defining relational leadership approach. It also specifies how a trusting relationship between subordinate and leader is formed, and what consequences we can expect from a relationship of explicit

trust between a leader and a subordinate. It is a perspective that focuses on social construction of processes by examining relational engagement and influence in leadership. This concept will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

### **1.6.5 Critical Incidents**

Tripp (1993, p.8) provides a definition of a critical incident that, for the purpose of this research, is helpful:

Critical incidents are not 'things' which exist independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands, but like all data, critical incidents are created ... To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of the judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident.

Research by Mander (2008, p.5) provides a typology of what he describes as 'professional critical incidents' which is useful here:

The specifics of the incident may not always be important; it is the reactions an incident provokes from those directly and indirectly involved that matter most. This could be perceived as negative at first but have a positive effect on an individual's subsequent self-efficacy and being the locus of control.

Mander's (2008) study shows that whilst an incident on its own might not be challenging, when combined with other incidents and leadership emotions it can become so. This is of real significance in terms of the emotional reactions and resilience of departmental leaders when dealing with challenging situations. Mander (2008, p.8) suggests that sometimes these challenges are so critical that they place considerable pressure on those involved with them, whilst at other times they are small, often insignificant, but 'their cumulative effect can be felt to be equally challenging'. In line with the work of Gronn (1999) a central tenet of Mander's research is that there are certain events, experiences or occurrences in the lives and history of leaders that may be

instrumental in shaping their attitudes and ability to cope with problems and dilemmas.

The working definition of critical incidents for my study is critical occurrences / incidents either verbally or non-verbally experienced by departmental leaders within the university setting which encouraged or discouraged their roles and responsibilities during their middle leadership journey.

### **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

So far, in this Chapter 1, I have presented a brief introduction, contextual background, my account of journey from middle leader to an independent researcher, my motivation and value position, development of research questions, research aims and questions along with definitions of key terms. The sections mentioned above are expected to provide initial understanding before proceeding to Chapter 2 on literature review and Chapter 3 on research designs of this study. Chapters 4 and 5 provide findings of the study. They are divided into two major themes followed by Chapter 6 of discussion. This thesis concludes with Chapter 7, conclusion.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2. Introduction**

A thorough and systematic literature search of articles and research studies in the Malaysian context shows the dearth literature of studies pertaining to middle leadership compared to research studies conducted in the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and United States. Therefore, the purpose of the literature is to understand the past literature associated to my research. The three themes identified are (a) reviewing theories and models of leadership (b) reviewing the literature on leadership in Malaysian higher education and other countries; (c) drawing on the literature to provide a conceptual framework for my study.

#### **2.1 Theories and Models of Leadership**

Extensive range of leadership studies has been focused on leadership (Bryman, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Bennis, 2003; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005). Particularly, Leithwood & Riehl (2005) defined leadership in terms of influence to maintain successful leadership works to others to foster and identically, Kouzes and Posner (1995) viewed leadership as persuading, influencing and getting people to reach goals, claiming that effectiveness is contingent upon the followers' perception of leaders rather than the leader' abilities (Watts, 2011).

More than forty years of literature review shows how much leadership theories evolved from the 'Great Man' theory to 'Trait' theories. This advanced to style theory and situational theories and gradually emerged into more recent series of theories emphasised on 'Transformational' and

'Transactional' leadership (Leithwood, 1992; Pearce and Conger, 2003; Bottery, 2004; Harris, 2008). Most of these theories can be grouped into eight major types as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Overview of Leadership Theories

<p><b>Great Man Leadership Theories</b></p>	<p>Great Man theories assume that the capacity for leadership is inherent – that great leaders are born not made. The term 'Great Man' was used because, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership.</p>
<p><b>Trait Theories</b></p>	<p>Similar in some ways to 'Great Man' theories, trait theories assume that people inherit certain qualities and traits that make them better suited to leadership. Trait theories often identify particular personality or behavioural characteristics shared by leaders.</p>
<p><b>Contingency Theories</b></p>	<p>Contingency theories of leadership focus on particular variables related to the environment that might determine which particular style of leadership is best suited for the situation. According</p>



	to this theory, no leadership style is best in all situations.
<b>Situational Leadership</b>	Situational theories propose that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational variables. Different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision-making.
<b>Behavioural Theories</b>	Behavioural theories of leadership are based upon the belief that great leaders are made, not born. Rooted in behaviourism, this leadership theory focuses on the actions of leaders not on mental qualities or internal states.
<b>Participative Theories</b>	Participative leadership theories suggest that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. These leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process. In participative theories, however, the leader retains the right to allow the

	input of others.
<b>Management Theories</b>	Management theories (also known as 'Transactional theories') focus on the role of supervision, organisation and group performance. These theories base leadership on a system of rewards and punishments.
<b>Transformational Theories</b>	Transformational theories (also known as 'Relationship theories') focus upon the connections formed between leaders and followers.  Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. This style often has high ethical and moral standards.

**Adapted from Van Wart (2003)**

Earlier theories focused largely on characteristics and behaviours of effective leaders. This was followed by the focus on the role of the followers and the nature of leadership which shifted from individual to collective nature of leadership. The collective nature of leadership gave importance of responding to different situations and context between leaders and other.

Meanwhile, in the environment of business leadership, transactional

leadership emerged which was essentially a form of scientific managerialism, in which leaders exercise power and influence through controlling the rewards in an organization, rewards they can offer or withhold from the work force (Bottery, 2004, p.16). Consequently, in the twenty-first century, when the burgeoning of Western economy began to experience change, challenge and instability, transactional leadership was deemed as insufficient to cope with high levels of uncertainty experienced in the Western market place (Watts, 2011, p.18). Therefore, the traditional form of transactional leadership was substituted by a new, and socially driven theory of transformational leadership. This theory was cited widely in the business literature as a strategy to cope with constant change. Leaders engaged in transformational leadership were associated with vision, develop the trust of their followers and build loyalty, self-confidence and self-regard. Transformational leadership was considered the most progressive form which aided deep transformation of those led by the leaders and it was labelled as a form which carried out by an individual with or for others to attain specific goal.

When mutual benefit between leaders and others became significant over power hierarchies, transformational leadership became aligned with charismatic theories of leadership. But, Yukl (1999, p.47) argues that the transformational and charismatic theories of leadership were brought about as business and management tools to ensure that workers embrace the managerial and sometimes capitalist 'values' of an organisation, and he cautioned against borrowing models and theories and applying them randomly to educational practices. This implies educational leaders would

need a different approach to lead the institutions they are attached to.

## **2.2 Leadership Studies in Higher Education**

Given dearth literature on middle leadership in Malaysia particularly on middle leadership in higher education, it was vital to seek past literature from other countries which have contributed substantially to understand different perspectives of research carried out emerging from the concepts of middle leaders and leadership. Studies from other countries such as UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and United States have largely contributed to studies on roles of heads of departments in different contexts. From 2001 until present, leadership effectiveness has been debated by many. Scholars have involved in research concerning leadership in higher education institutions and discussed issues of leadership on a similar focus and findings (Knight and Trowler, 2001; Scott and Anderson, 2008; Bryman and Liley, 2009; Bolden et al., 2012; Bryman, 2011, Pepper and Giles, 2015; Campbell and Ampaw, 2016). They argue issues such as influence, change and relationship building through networking and engagement colleagues and middle leaders as essence to effective departmental leadership.

Knight and Trowler, (2001) who wrote a book exclusively on departmental leadership in higher education, argued the changing environment and changing contexts of universities have brought many challenges to universities and have put the focus on leadership in universities. The study also reveals that academic leadership is not exclusively executed by people in formal managerial roles. Instead, leadership involves engagement with other colleagues especially those who are in the same academic life.

This aligns with the findings of Scott et al. (2008) and Bryman and Lilley (2009) examined challenges of poor performers and difficult people. Clearly, participants in their studies recognised the essence of maintaining communication with colleagues and described achieving this by participating in networks, engaging with professional development, accepting faculty support and keeping abreast of the big picture.

Similarly, in another study, Bolden et al., (2012, p.6), described PhD supervisors, current and former colleagues and key scholars as indicative sources of academic leadership who are able to influence one's career. He also mentioned leadership within higher education is strongly influenced by academic discipline, context, and control of material resources, role and identity. The emphasis of influence is stressed too.

Apart from previous scholars who focused on a single context, Bryman (2011) based his work from three countries: the UK, the USA and Australia. His finding reveals little systematic research has been conducted on the question of which forms of leadership are associated with departmental effectiveness. The analysis resulted in the identification of thirteen forms of leader behaviour that are associated with departmental effectiveness. He was interested to examine the notion of competency frameworks and leaders' general implications are explored in relation to the notion of substitutes for leadership.

The significance of consideration for leadership effectiveness in the studies reviewed was not universal. This suggests the issue in higher education institutions is not so much what leaders should do, but more to do with what

they should avoid doing. I am in favour with this finding because department heads deal with leadership problems in critical situations. Many studies have highlighted the issues mentioned previously from the western context. Thus, I am interested to explore what departmental leaders should avoid rather than what they should do from an eastern context. This allows leadership learning opportunities which can be used to cope with critical leadership problems.

Issues addressing work pressure and role complexity through support and training in leadership were given prominent importance by some scholars (Marfarlane, 2013; Preston and Price, 2012; Blackmore and Sachs, 2000; Boyko and Jones, 2010; Chilvers et al, 2018; Sutherland, 2018).

Macfarlane (2013), attempts to address issues about informal leadership within academic faculties and departments. He mentions that professors are expected to handle demanding workloads mainly hoping that they are equipped with sufficient academic leadership. In reality, demanding workloads are not only expected from professors but also from other leaders such as heads of department, programme leaders or coordinators, school teachers and education managers. The expectation of learning the leadership while on job often impact leaders in HEIs in different manner in terms of attitudes, behaviours and work performances. This points out an alternate view of leadership rather than the traditional views which are considered obsolete.

Macfarlane (2013) further argues intellectual leadership is about 'duty as well as freedom'. A problematic concern was raised whether or not leaders in higher education are selected in the sense of rightness to perform leadership roles in general and handle critical situations in specific. A similar concern relating to freedom and duty raised by Preston and Price (2012). They

describe mid-level leaders as becoming embroiled in operational issues rather than being involved in influencing strategy and developing policy while Blackmore and Sachs (2000) suggest that middle managers as a source of leadership are institutionally powerless.

In his research with UK professors, he identifies six main roles of the professor as an intellectual leader namely role model, mentor, advocate, guardian, acquirer and ambassador. Similarly, departmental leaders in countries such as Malaysia could be 'struggling' to find the balance between their academic roles, identities, and freedom and could be facing dilemmas in critical leadership situations which need to be examined.

A study by Boyko and Jones (2010) examined the roles and responsibilities of middle management in Canadian universities to find out whether deans and chairs job functions have changed due to 'new public management or 'new managerialist' paradigm. It was evident that deans and chairs were experiencing mounting pressure to become increasingly entrepreneurial and to seek out new sources of revenue while under financial constraints.

The researchers intended to understand how Canadian universities describe and define these positions through an analysis of institutional documents and collective agreements with respect to the appointment process, terms of office, depiction of duties and other conditions of employment. The findings implied their functions have not changed dramatically. A collective consensus was clear that both positions focus on internal management of financial and human resources particularly deans and chairs were concern with development and administration of budgets and with staff matters such as hiring, promotion and

tenure, career development and compensation decisions. It was interesting to know the tenure period of a chair is between three to seven years. At the end of their tenure period, department chair will return to his/her role as a faculty member with quite a modest remuneration and possible reappointment.

The study indicated an increasing sense of a need to provide chairs and deans with specialized professional development given the increasing complexity of their working environment and the growing skill set required of these positions (Boyko and Jones, 2010, p.22). Specific attempts to support chairs throughout Canadian universities were highlighted by the researchers such as leadership and supervisory support network of staff programmes, conferences featuring challenges facing department chairs and women administrators, and series of structured job-related professional development programmes learning resources and mentoring initiatives were discussed in the study.

Likewise, the previous scholars, role complexity and the significance of support and training were highlighted by scholars from New Zealand (Chilvers et al, 2018). They explored the experiences of fourteen Associates of School by understanding the role, the perceived factors influencing the role and the extent of support provided to prepare them for higher management roles. They argue the development of managers need to begin early in the careers of those interested in leadership position and support needed to undertake their needs to be recognized to ensure the development of human capital (Macfarlane, 2008). The scholars captured past and present leaders' views on factors that they considered as successful and the issues that hindered satisfaction in their roles. The findings indicated job-role ambiguity, role



conflict and work overload as three stress-producing aspects of middle management positions at a university are job-role ambiguity, role conflict and work overload which also aligned to the work of Sutherland, (2018). The study also identified that participants struggled with embroiled in operational issues, people management and dealing with colleagues who treated them with suspicion or indifference given that they were now dealing with them on a management level rather than as colleagues. This was due to a lack of clarity or definition of the role within the school and university leading to misunderstandings of the role and underutilization of position (Preston & Price, 2012). Participants in their study indicated the need for training programmes for addressing administrative tasks, such as how to complete various budget forms, professional skill development opportunities, such as managing conflict, team building, or implementing change, which could be offered through Human Resources, administration support, and moral and social support. These are similar findings to those found by McAdams (1997) almost two decades ago, where he indicated that the main things institutes could do to support middle management roles are:

- make professional development opportunities available and context-specific
- foster leadership growth throughout the department and university
- recognize work/life balance issues
- create network forums and peer connection pathways.

Hence, this indicates, not only training is vital to develop effective leadership, scholars (Pepper and Giles, 2015; Campbell and Ampaw, 2016; Jones & James, 1979; Lurie and Swaminathan, 2009) argue the significance of building relationship to address leadership problems. Different from other studies,

Pepper and Giles (2015) used narratives accounts as a methodology among their six colleagues who are associate deans to find out how they perceive their leadership roles. Participants expressed their relationships with staff on other campuses of their university concerning the provision of professional development, collegial support or receiving directives from superiors.

In line with other studies mentioned previously, participants mentioned the angst of workload which some participants felt it was in appropriate to share their concerns and confidences with colleagues to lighten their load. Notably, participants described situations where other staff did not take them seriously owing to the temporary nature of their role one involving annual performance review and the other implementing a new marketing strategy. The sense of having little power with huge responsibilities were expressed.

Evidently, participants expressed their pleasure in building relationships with academics in their own faculty and across their university, and their pleasure in mentoring and nurturing others. They understood the value of participating in networks and indicated that meeting with others in similar roles enabled them to better understand the many facets of their role, to share ideas and to discuss alternative solutions to issues they faced. The study showed five themes identified across the data which can be tackled by building relationship to reduce overwhelming nature of the role, huge responsibility and little power, reacting to events, and feeling isolated and leading others.

A quantitative study by Campbell and Ampaw (2016) examined the influence of role confidence, personality needs, and role support of new department chairs in predicting role certainty by utilising highly contested debate in literature using a multiple regression analysis. The study conducted among

238 new department chairs show role certainty among new chairs is greater when they know the thinking of their dean, the dean has nurtured a freedom to adjust the goals and relationships of the department, and the new chair views their departmental climate as positive.

Findings strongly indicate departmental climate as the major contributor to the degree in which new chairs can do a good job for and on behalf of the department is first dependent upon the perceived level of cooperation among faculty, faculty productivity, open communication, and an environment conducive to the expression of opinions, ideas, and suggestions (Jones & James, 1979).

Discretion is the second largest contributor which indicates the degree to which they are afforded the latitude to modify the structures of relationships and goals within their department affects what they think the job as chair is about (Fenner & Selmer, 2008; Nicholson, 1984). Increased freedom becomes important when it predicts the capacity for contributing to the department. The data clearly suggest that when freedom is provided for chairs to act independently of their dean, set their own work objectives and targets, prioritize when different parts of the role are done, and choose whom to deal with in order to carry out departmental work, chairs fare better psychologically than those who have limited or no freedom. The findings proved that leader feedback was the third largest contributor in explaining role certainty among new department chairs which supports the work of Klein, Fan, and Preacher (2006) who found that agent helpfulness, a term similar to leader feedback is related with role clarity, or in this case, role certainty. Similarly, Lurie & Swaminathan (2009) support the findings that increasing opportunities for

feedback may be a start for addressing ambiguity among new department chairs so long as the increased feedback is purposeful and useful.

These studies clearly indicate the paramount need to examine middle leadership in various context from the perspective of role complexity, support and training as well as the need to build relationship in higher education settings.

### **2.3 Leadership Studies in Malaysian Higher Education**

Most of previous research on leadership have been conducted in western countries, very few research have focused on developing countries such as Malaysia (Lo et al, 2009), and particularly on institutions of higher education (Voon et al, 2010). Very little empirical research has been conducted on middle leaders, especially department heads in the Malaysian higher educational scene (Morris, 2008). Research is essential in departmental levels because 80% of all university decisions are being made at the departmental level (Bisbee 2005; Gmelch and Miskin 1993). Also, from Bryman's findings (2007), he argues that priorities in leadership research should draw attention to what leaders should avoid rather than advocating what leaders should do.

Almost all research studies carried out in Malaysia so far with regard to leadership in HEIs has been frequently focused on what formal academics such as head of departments, dean, vice dean, faculty administrators, line managers and programme leaders should do rather than what is best to adopt and avoid in their leadership for effectiveness. In Malaysia, research based on middle leadership in universities and the awareness to advocate the need to examine departmental leaders is still in the infancy stage. There seems to be

more general leadership issues related to formal roles of academics and emphasis on traditional approaches which are authoritative, transactional, transformational and laissez faire rather than specific focus on their perceptions related to changing roles and relational leadership needs. Notably, traditional leadership approaches are deemed unfit in this era among the western researchers, yet many studies on transformational leadership from Malaysian researchers were conducted using the Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership approach. It was widely used in examining the leadership behaviours in the higher educational context in Malaysia, but it is not crucially significant to the direction of the new higher education system and the effectiveness of departments in universities to fulfil the aspirations of the Malaysian higher education institutions.

Tahir et.al (2014) explored transformational leadership among 430 academics' by investigating head of departments' leadership behaviours in Malaysian public universities from Malaysian public universities participated in this study. The main finding of this study revealed that the adoption of encouraging leadership behaviour of Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership in public universities was effective. This reinforced the rationalisation for adopting the model within the Malaysian academic setting, where department heads should indeed lead the academic organisation. It was published five years ago and the significance of the research contribution for departmental level is still impractical to understand emerging challenges faced by heads of department. This is simply because adopting one particular model of leadership style in the academic setting does not fit the uniqueness of all the departmental heads in HEIs in Malaysia. Studies emphasising the universal

characteristics, behaviours, or styles, are not suitable for explaining the dynamics of the leadership process (Yukl, 1994, 2006). Identification of leadership behaviour is not an answer to effective leadership. The multi dynamics of leadership can be crystallised by gathering leadership issues based on critical incidents. This can illuminate ways to overcome leadership problems particularly by researching on influences of relationships in leadership rather than exploring leadership as an entity.

Another study by Sadeghi and Pihie (2012) was an attempt to determine heads of academic departments' leadership styles and its relationship with leadership effectiveness at Malaysian Research Universities (RUs). They suggest that heads of departments can act as effective agents to transforming Malaysian higher education institutions to world class institutions. In their study, transformational leadership behaviours are deemed having positive effects on leader effectiveness and performance as opposed to transactional leadership behaviours. 400 lecturers participated in the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) from three Malaysian research universities and rated their heads of departments attributes to find out their leadership styles and leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is viewed as an effort from an individual entity such as heads of departments to determine their leadership styles. This is not a constructive measurement to determine leadership effectiveness. Though the quantity of participants is large, but this method of data collection is inadequate to understand some forms of information such as emotions, actions and feelings. Also, there is no way to tell how truthful a respondent is being and how much thought a respondent has put in while replying to the questionnaires.

Apart from the previous studies on investigating leadership styles, a study by Sirat et.al. (2012) highlighted the need to examine the recruitment of university leaders in Malaysian university and organisation improvement. They discussed the issue of university leadership in crisis by pointing out that there is no proper system in place to appoint the most able, talented, authoritative and respected university leaders to lead Malaysia's public universities. This paper was an initiation to revamp recruitment policy of university leaders. Thus, the researchers studied how leadership and leaders work in different dimensions. The study broadly focused on university leaders which generalised changes in recruitment for them, but this measure was not sufficient. Exploration of different leaders in education settings such as middle leaders is needed to provide specific leadership needs and problems faced by them. Suitable changes in recruitment policies can support effective leadership, understanding changes in their roles and needs will help to shed light on how to address further leadership problems.

Leadership effectiveness is not merely measured from heads of department's styles, but it is paramount to investigate heads of departments and other academics' relational involvement to attain the institutional mission and vision together. For leaders to be effective, they require good relationships with their followers because these relationships should enhance followers' well-being and work performance. These relationships also may connect the followers to the group more tightly through loyalty, gratefulness, and a sense of inclusion (Hogg et al, 2005). There is a knowledge gap in the Malaysian universities in terms of relationships between heads of departments and other academics,

events and acts which require investigation by applying new theoretical lens as a means of providing into middle leadership in Malaysian higher education.

Typically, middle leaders are expected to play multiple roles in higher educational institutions. They are expected to be public intellectuals enabling them to provide an independent perspective on national and international issues. Concurrently, they are expected to actively play their academic roles too. Thus, many university leaders including middle leaders in Malaysia are 'struggling' to find the balance between multiple roles. An examination through departmental leaders' self-reflections can provide a better picture to see how middle leaders learn to balance the roles to benefit their leadership skills. In other words, to understand effective departmental leadership, research to understand their roles can help to strengthen leadership practices.

Ribbins and Gunter (2002) claim that two important areas of leadership research are under-represented namely leading and studies of leaders. The aspect of leading relates to 'what individual leaders do and why they do it in a variety of specific circumstances, how and why others respond as they do, and with what outcomes. The studies of leaders deal with 'what leaders are, why and by whom they are shaped into what they are, and how they become leaders' (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p.362). My study predominantly combines the two important areas by focusing on how specific leadership occurrences affect middle leadership from a relational point of view to shape successful leaders and leadership.

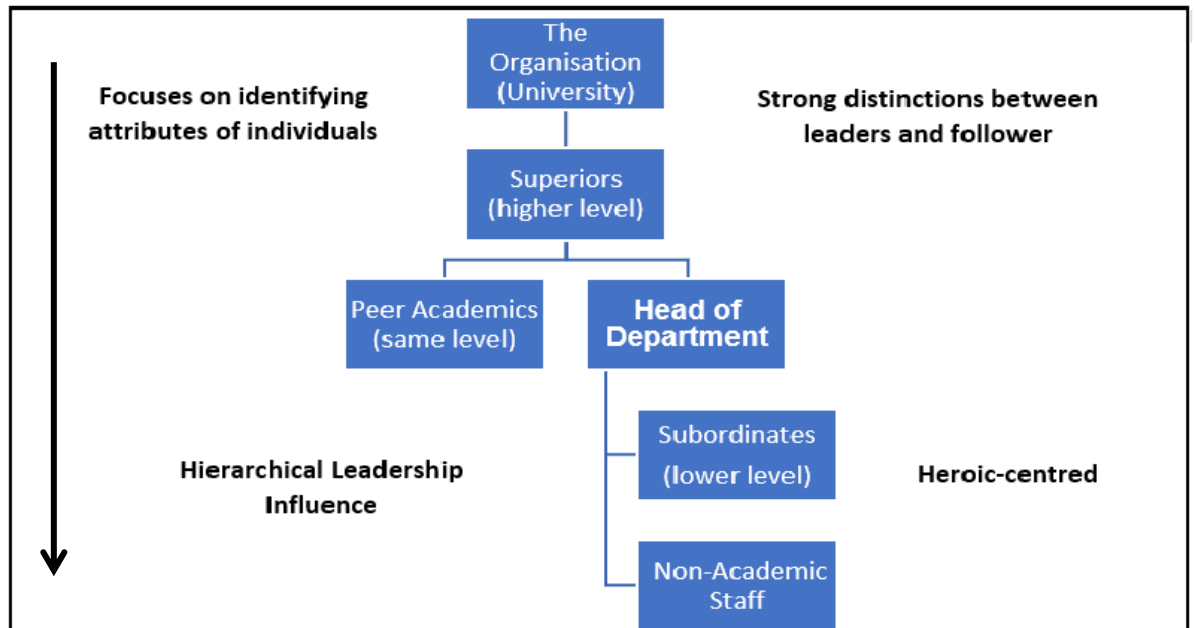
In view with this, I think my study helps to investigate how departmental leaders can understand the situations which involve their thoughts and actions



in relation to what they should avoid and examine how a particular leadership learning and relationship experiences can be applied deliberately to avoid problems.

## **2.4 Role Theory of Leadership**

The concept of role is an essential link associated between the individual leader and the group. The idea of relationship emerges from the concept of role. A role is composed of several segments. Figure 2 illustrates the role set of a head of department which indicates the segments such as superiors, peer academics, subordinates and non-academic staff. The single-headed arrow indicates the one-directional approach or top-down approach. Individual such as heads of departments not only play their roles, but the role and their self are congruent. These roles are subject to interpretation and negotiation, and as a consequence exist in varying degrees of concreteness and consistency. (Stryker and Statham, 1985). Interestingly, a relationship between roles is embedded in a specific social structure framing individual's perceptions and behaviours.



**Figure 2: Role Set in Traditional Perspective**

Winkler (2010) explains the conflicts between role sender and role holder:

Different individuals and groups address behavioural expectations toward a leadership role. Additionally, numerous structures, rules, norms, regulations and other aspects of an organisation serve as role senders as they define expectations for appropriate behaviour. These expectations are not necessarily congruent but can be contradictory. Therefore, conflicts between role holders such as head of department who cannot decode the expectations directed at him or her by role senders cause a range of potential conflicts (Winkler, 2010, p.82).

Because of various behavioural expectations toward a head of department in an organisation, role conflicts become more prominent. These conflicts result from being the role holder of different roles and understood as a temporary instability or inability of the role holder to balance inconsistent expectations. This theoretical perspective contributes to the understanding of explaining different demands and expectations which are directed at members of organisations as well as the resulting roles. Besides, it aids in explaining the manifold conflict situations faced by leader and followers in an organisation.

Based on the changing demands and expectations, a newer approach such as relational leadership is essential by bringing together the understanding of role theory of leadership with strong essence of relationships. Given that leadership is a relational property of a group (Hogg, 2001) which needs emphasis on roles of head of department in a multidirectional and interdependent dimension, examining research using relational approach as illustrated in Figure 3 is crucial. The double-headed arrow indicates the interactive and interdependent relationship between heads of departments (the role holder) and others (the segments of role senders). Unlike the traditional perspective using one-directional approach, the relational perspective uses multi-directional approach which shows no distinctions between leader and followers.



**Figure 3: Role Set in Relational Leadership Perspective**

The process of engaging in leadership roles not only socially constructs relationship with others, but also requires leadership learning at different phases of leadership journey to avoid role ambiguity and role conflicts.

The basic three approaches in the role theory of leadership depict both the traditional and relational leadership perspectives. There are three basic approaches to the role theory of leadership which are structuralistic, functionalist and symbolic interactionism. In the structuralistic approach, the individual is viewed as being permanently influenced by behavioural expectations. The head of a department is considered as a focal point of the expectations of followers, of those holding other positions at the same hierarchical level, as well as of superiors from higher levels of the hierarchy. The expectations of these role senders along with the manifold structures and rules of the organisation define the behavioural demands of the department head and, thus, determine leader's behaviour. In other words, it aligns with the traditional perspective of role set similar to top-down approach.

In contrast, the functionalist and symbolic interactionism approaches correspond to relational leadership perspective. These approaches reject the top-down approach and emphasise the essence of equal involvement of leaders and followers similar to multi-directional approach in relational perspective. The functionalist approach links to the social network the individual is involved in and it does not demand the particular impact of leader or member roles on meeting objectives (Winkler, 2010, p.75). Regardless of leaders or followers, this approach views leadership roles do not exist anymore but only requirements of the system which can be met by people holding different positions regardless of leaders or followers. It is

acknowledged that formal roles exist; yet, the functionalist approach of role theory only attaches importance to the fact that the demands of the organisation are met and not to the specific contributions of superiors or subordinates.

The third approach, symbolic interactionism focuses on the behaviour of an individual as the outcome of his/her account of life as well as the efforts to make sense out of the experienced facts and to follow his/her own interest. It is associated with the emergence and dynamic interplay of roles as a result of interactions. The approach understands that roles will be developed and negotiated via active participation of the individual (Seers, 1989). Since roles are subject to interpretation and negotiation and exist in varying degrees, it influences behaviours of position holders such as heads of departments. They are likely to modify or change behaviours in the course of interaction. It is an active relation between role holder (head of department) and role sender (structures, rules, norms, regulations and other aspects of an organisation).

Talk and actions are set of symbols used by role sender in order to communicate behavioural expectations to the role holder of a position serving as a role receiver. In other words, role relationship is shaped more often as a circle rather than as a causal episode in the symbolic-interactionist perspective. Thus, various behavioural expectations are directed toward a role holder in an organisation which sometimes are not clearly decoded, modified or interpreted by role holder, role receiver and role sender. Hence, possibly resulting in potential conflicts during the headship journey.

## **2.5 Social Learning Theory of Leadership**

Leadership is conceptualised as a product of complex social relationships (Dachler, 1988). Social structures fully determine the behaviour of individuals including middle leaders. It cannot be seen irrespective of the logic and dynamic of the social system in which it is embedded because changes in organisations over time, require multifaceted explanation in which personal leadership will remain a constituent in a much broader concept (Heller, 2002, p.399).

Thus, social learning theory considers the fact of indirect learning processes. According to Sims and Lorenzi (1992), one of the most important psychological processes by which new behaviour patterns are required and previous ones are changed is known as model learning. This concept describes a learning process based on observations of the environment, which includes the behaviour of the other people. For leaders, it is argued that it is important to consider that “the same environment is perceived and interpreted differently from each of the group members”.

Similarly, Fullan (2002, p.20) highlights ‘learning in context’ have the ‘greatest payoff’ because it based on experience and because it builds experience. Vaill’s (1996) learning premise – leading is learning – suggests that no matter how many times a leader has experienced a situation; it is never exactly the same. In a more practical sense, Vaill defines each new experience as a learning challenge and says that there are always a variety of different details that require a leader to process new information and create new knowledge. Middle leaders in the university setting would also

face new experience as a learning challenge. Apart from other scholars, Marsick and Watkins (1992) also suggest experiential, incidental and accidental learning are possible learning processes which middle leaders could be learning to lead.

In addition, Kolb (1984) categorised experiential learning in six characteristics which may influence perspectives of middle leaders in leading to learn. Kolb describes learning through experience first as 'a process' rather than something that is based on 'outcomes', with the emphasis placed not on *what* people learn, but on *how* they learn. The second characteristic of experiential learning is that it is 'a continuous process grounded in experience' (Kolb, 1984, p.27) shaped by one's goals or objectives, whilst the third characteristic described by Kolb is that 'the process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world' (1984, p.29).

For Kolb, learning is filled with tension created by competing modes of experiential learning. The resolution of that conflict therefore leads to learning; this is of significance when exploring how middle leaders learn from dealing with critical situations. Kolb (1984, p.31) identifies the fourth characteristic of experiential learning as 'a holistic process of adaptation to the world', which includes an individual's thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviours. Fifth, experiential learning is influenced by the context in which an individual acts so that 'learning involves transactions between the person and the environment' (1984, p.34). Learning here is not isolated, or separate from, or theoretical, or hypothetical. It is 'real' in that all of what occurs in a

given situation becomes part of the experience and becomes food for learning.

The sixth characteristic of experiential learning is the 'process of creating knowledge' (1984, p.36), whereby learning is created through a dynamic process during which individuals engage their environment and use their experiences of it as the source for their learning. Kolb's explanation of experiential learning, delineated by these six characteristics, is strengthened in the arguments made Glatter (2009) and Eraut (2010), who describe learning as that which is not the domain of experts or organisations, but a process that is controlled by the learner.

These learning theories are socially constructed because social theory indicates that leader behaviour is explained as being reciprocally determined by personal, situational and behavioural aspects. Therefore, mental conceptualisations of leader's own personality, objectives and subsequent behaviours influence the reaction(s) of the followers. This involves the relevance of cognitive processes within the learning process. In other words, social theory may contribute perspectives on leadership learning processes among middle leaders.

Evidently, values, thoughts and behaviours are essence of leadership. They are social and interactive processes; consequently, they are culturally influenced. It is not just the meaning of the concept that differs cross-culturally. Differences extend to the ways in which its exercise is manifested in different values, thoughts, acts and behaviours across societies and their organisations. For instance, a developing country such as Malaysia consisting



of multi-ethnic communities, may represent its middle leadership in accordance to the cultural values of its ethnic groups. Undeniably, apart from social influence, the process of understanding leadership and learning leadership may totally differ among middle leaders based on their leadership roles in the departments. Thus, social theory could probably contribute perspectives on leadership learning theory.

Middle leadership is influenced and constructed socially in a relational approach. Therefore, a model or blended models of leadership learning can be incorporated to further aid in delivering effective leadership roles and practices. Middle leaders have tendencies to learn leadership through various leadership incidents such as positive and negative occurrences as departmental heads. Learning can mean many things to them. They engage in learning processes at different occurrences with different people. Marsick and Watkins (1992) defined the following definitions for learning. These learning definitions are pertinent to university departmental leaders' learning experiences and needs:

- Learning: The way in which individuals assimilate, make sense of, organise and adapt information, skills, attitudes, values, perspectives and knowledge.
- Experiential learning: The learning that is gained through experiences occurring during the ordinary business of life. It is typically non-routine, informal and occurs in the natural setting of work. It may be conscious and organised or tacit and unorganised.

- Formal Learning: Organised and structured learning which has a learning objective. From the learner’s standpoint it is always intentional.
- Incidental learning: The aspect of experiential learning that is tacit and unconscious. It occurs when individuals are not aware of what they learn, do not reflect on their experience and cannot describe their learning.
- Accidental learning: Unanticipated and opportunistic learning which occurs when individuals learn something they did not expect. Typically, something happens that triggers the individual to reflect and the reflection leads to learning

*Adapted from Marsick and Watkins (1992, p.7)*

Bush (2007) bases his review of the literature of leadership learning, to propose a set of ‘polar models of leadership learning’ as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Polar models of leadership learning

<b>Polar models of leadership learning</b>	
Traditional leadership learning Prescribed Standardised Offsite Classroom based Content led Scale Leader development	Twenty-first-century leadership Emergent Personalised Onsite Work based Process rich Depth Leadership development

The author stresses these models can be applicable as an initial point for thinking about development programmes for leaders. These development programmes are likely to support their leadership roles and responsibilities. Based on the same model, Glatter (2009, p.232) suggests the polar models need to be considered judiciously, taking into account the following points:

- Moving from content to process has much to be said for it but learning always needs a stimulus of some kind.
- Raw experience is not a sufficient guide to learning: leaders may need help in structuring and analysing experience to be able to use it as a resource for learning.
- Emphasising collective not just individual development leadership recognises the significance of distributed leadership but may have unintended effects: there can be high turnover in leadership teams, reducing the impact of team programmes, which may also be negatively affected by the culture and climate of the institutions.

Most probably middle leaders begin the process via reflection rather than by relying on someone else to tell them what to learn. Similarly, departmental heads are the ones who determine what they will reflect on and what active experimentation they undertake. Many models based on experience for learning suggest that the experience happens first and then the learner reflects on it (Schön, 1983; Day, 2003). Used in this way, reflection enables individuals to look back over what happened, analyse it

and draw some conclusions. Schön (1983) suggests that reflection can also occur during the experience as individuals use the product of their reflection as the basis for future action. Schön introduced the term reflection-in-action to describe that situation, describing how reflection-in-action occurs when individuals, in the midst of an experience, are able to reflect on the experience as it is happening. Furthermore, leadership research focusing on reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action in middle leadership in Malaysia are meagre. Reflections involve a great deal of relational influences. These relationally influenced reflections are embedded in my research focus, therefore applied in my research.

## **2.6 Relational Leadership Theory (RLT)**

Although the concept of relationship-oriented behaviour had been around almost the same time with earliest studies of leadership in organizations (Stodgily & Coons, 1957), the term relational leadership is a rather fresh approach (Brower et al., 2000; Drath, 2001; Murrell, 1997; Uhl-Bien, 2003; Uhl-Bien, 2005), thus the meaning is still nebulous. In recent discourse (Drath, 2001), relational term is described as a view of leadership and organisation as human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organisations and their members (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p.655). Traditional perspectives or entity perspectives focuses on individual entities and their perceptions, intentions, behaviours, personalities, expectations and evaluations relative to their relationships with one another (Uhl-Bien et al.,2000).

On the other hand, a less common relational perspective views knowledge as socially constructed and socially distributed, not accumulated or stored by individuals. Therefore, this perspective views knowing is always a process of relating; relating is a constructive, ongoing process of meaning making-an actively relational process of creating (common) understandings on the basis of language; meaning can never be finalized, nor has it any ultimate origin, it is always in the process of making; and meanings are limited by socio-cultural contexts (Dachler & Hosking, 1995).

To put it into perspective, relational orientation does not focus on identifying attributes of individuals involved in leadership behaviours or exchanges, but rather on the social construction processes by which certain understandings of leadership come about (Meindl, 1995). Although both entity and relational approaches view leadership as a social process, entity approach views relational processes as centred in individual's perceptions and cognitions as they engage in exchanges and influence relationships with one another. Meanwhile, relational approach views persons and organisations as ongoing multiple construction made "in" processes and not the makers "of" processes (Hosking, 2000). Thus, by scrutinising between entity and relational approaches, it is indicative that relational leadership needs to be explored further in the higher education context because leadership is a form of relationship.

Using a relational approach in my study helped to understand how middle leaders make sense of complexity, resolving problems, shaping strategic direction and practical actions (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). It is a view used to describe leadership and organisation as human social constructions. It

focuses on the rich connections and interdependencies of organisations and their members. Unlike the traditional leadership approach which focuses on persons and identifying attributes of individuals involved in leadership behaviours or exchanges, relational approach processes by which certain understanding of leadership emerges (Uhl-Bien, 2005).

This approach breaks down the traditional distinction between “leadership of people” and “the management of organization” (Hosking, 1988; Dachler, 1992). It precludes the searching for traits, behavioural styles, or identifying particular types of leaders or people management techniques which is the focus of a traditional leadership approach. Relational perspectives identify the basic unit of analysis in leadership research as relationships, not individuals.

As Murrell (1997) states:

Relational leadership puts the emphasis of study squarely on human processes of how people decide, act, and present themselves to each other. In this study, it is possible to see relationships other than those built from hierarchy and those in which nurturing and supporting roles could be legitimized as means of influence. It is also possible... to envision transformational phenomenon where the social change process occurs well outside the normal assumptions of command and control. (p.39)

In contrast, the traditional orientation of leadership follows the hierarchical leadership influence, Rost (1995) sees leadership as a multidirectional influence relationship which can act in any direction and not just from top down. Similarly, middle leadership in Malaysian university involves relationships with leaders and collaborators. It is a mutual and interdependent process. It is not a leader-follower or manager- subordinate dyad. There could be possibilities of having a number of relationships in one department, and the people are not necessarily the leaders in these different relationships. It is

hoped that this study can shed light to see relationships other than those built from hierarchy as means of influence as stated by Murrell (1997) because relational leadership breaks down the distinction between leader and follower. It involves some type of social influence relationship as well as with views that see leadership as change (Bryman, 1996).

Similarly, in the Malaysian context, this relatively new approach can sensitise leaders to the impact of their actions and relationship with others. The idea of traditional, heroic-centred leadership focusing singly on individual leader should be shifted to collective form focusing on individuals, their perceptions, intentions, behaviours, personalities, expectations, and evaluations relative to their relationships with one another (Uhl-Bien et al., 2000). Thus, this study can be useful to ascertain whether or not departmental heads in Malaysian HEIs practise relational leadership approach driven by the impact of change in the new higher education system.

Relationships are at the heart of middle leadership, but also stresses the need to be better able to understand the complexity of the relationships that middle leaders are challenged to navigate, negotiate and maintain in their changing roles. A growing body of research highlights a range of tensions in middle leadership with regard to the inherent difficulties for the role holder in trying to fulfil varied and often conflicting demands (O'Connor, 2008). In recent era, it is not sufficient to explain leadership by just concentrating on individual characteristics or patterns of leader behaviour that might vary with situational differences. Those approaches are unable to depict the dynamics of leadership process and fail to provide clear empirical evidence for the influence of traits on the emergence of leadership or leadership

effectiveness because of certain type of behaviour. Relational approach is a fresh approach encompassing four inter-related dimensions.

Branson et.al (2016), states that the important relationship are not only between the middle leader and the colleagues she or he is leading, but also between the middle leader and their own leader/s, as well as between the middle leader and his or her co-middle leaders. The actions of middle leaders therefore need to be understood as located in and framed by a specific context (Branson et.al, 2016, p.131). The study involving Chair of Departments were addressed using four dimensions investigating relational leadership such as structural and power relations; trust and credibility relations; learning relations; and discursive relations. The first dimension looked at structural and multi-dimensional relationships between peer leadership roles, inherent tensions, parallel hierarchies and position and authority. The second dimension is related to trust - credibility relations. It deals with the development of trust as multi-directional phenomenon grounded in fairness of decisions and actions. The third dimension of learning relations emphasized the importance of opportunities to be able to learn from and with others who are positioned in a structural sense above, alongside and below them. The last dimension of discursive relations is reflected in middle leaders' expressions, legitimation and/or suppression. The representation of expression of particular discourses in and amidst middle leadership are considered as essential because this relation is argued as inherently tied to the other three dimensions which are structural and power relations and impact by matters of trust and credibility.



These dimensions are relational phenomenon which is worth examining in Malaysian higher education context because this approach is rather new. A study similar to this can shed light on new insights to investigate middle leadership in a relational approach involving departmental leaders in Malaysia. By identifying relational phenomenon, practical leadership learning needs can be identified to lead effectively.

To reiterate, relational perspectives are dynamic approaches which require new standards of validity, reliability and trustworthiness that lack in relating to an individual. Higher educational institutions are not restricted to hierarchical positions or roles. It is relational, thus research capturing individual attributes alone in a traditional approach cannot fully explain how human behaviors are influenced at all levels. It can be crystallized through the process by which social systems change through the structuring of roles and relationships (Uhl-Bien, 2005).

## **2.7 Summary**

In this section, I reviewed models and theories of leadership, different approaches related to middle leadership and the literature related to this topic in Malaysia and other countries and the idea of relational leadership theory. This made possible the identification of some research gaps, specifically related to the aim of this study. The first one is about focus. Studies on relational leadership is surprisingly new (Uhl-Bien, 2003; Uhl-Bien, 2005). Thus, there is a lack of studies dedicated to middle leaders which focuses on relational approach as opposed to the traditional approach that relates to dyadic discussions. There is also very little research in

Malaysia about university middle leadership although it plays a significant role in higher education.

The second gap is regarding methodology. Researchers heavily relied on statistical measurement to study traits and attributes of top-level management using survey and questionnaires. There is specifically no middle leadership research in Malaysia which used critical incidents as one of the methods to gather initial understanding of leadership issues to research middle leaders in a qualitative approach in order to examine challenges faced by middle leaders and how they receive support and training to lead effectively.

This research project aimed to address these gaps through the study of Malaysian middle leaders of a research university with a special focus on their perceptions of middle leadership by reflecting on the changes in roles and responsibilities. In higher education, the role of middle leaders is formed and ill-formed by the influence of the nature of relationship. It is not a sole entity. It is largely shaped with many contributing dimensions of relationship. Therefore, consistency in examining the roles of middle leaders and reinforcing the nature of relationship between the middle leaders and those they are leading were necessary to understand the changing roles, demands and leadership practices. In addition, there seems to be a gap in research evaluating roles and relationships at departmental or disciplinary-based university leaders in Malaysian higher education institutions. Issues related to roles, responsibilities and experiences of departmental heads proposed in my study not only address the gap and can contribute new knowledge in the context but also provide opportunity for 'voices' of middle leaders to be heard.

The following Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology, procedures of data collection methods, sampling of research participants and the rationale for choosing the methodology.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3. Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology for this study. The chapter provides research paradigm, research design, the case study organisation, sampling of research participants and data collection methods. It also presents the data analysis process, research phases, ensuring research rigour and ethical consideration.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The research is based on an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, including a case study. The choice of a qualitative approach has several significant advantages in answering my research questions. An interpretive research stance is thought to be the most suitable approach to use as the underlying research paradigm while drawing upon phenomenological principles for my study. The interpretive approach aims to advance knowledge by describing and interpreting the phenomena of the world in order to obtain shared meaning with others (Bassey, 1999). It puts emphasis and value on the human, interpretative aspects of knowing about the social world and the significance of the investigator's own interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Snape and Spencer, 2003). In addition, using the interpretive approach will provide detailed understanding of how heads of departments see or experience themselves and their world (Hammersley, 2012) in view of the external change.

### **3.2 Research Design**

Smith et.al (2009) define a qualitative approach as an examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. The philosophical underpinning for the research is based on HoDs' experiences and their relations with phenomena. To determine critical situations faced by the HoDs and avoid risk of bias, the methodology for my study needed to be one whereby these departmental leaders are free to express their own views on role challenges and perceptions, without leading questions from the researcher and without judgement. A method of data collection was needed whereby heads of departments are free to recall and describe their experiences and those descriptions can be interpreted to ascertain their relational approach in leadership and how other senior academics and leadership trainers view the leadership roles and practices in a valid and reliable way. Therefore, to extend my knowledge in research activities and help understand the theoretical assumptions before embarking in the study, qualitative method has been chosen.

### **3.3 Research Design: Case Study**

The selected methodology for this research is a case study, which is the study of one specific site, event, person or organisational unit and allows researchers working in depth to look for meanings and understandings (Knight, 2001). Its aim is not achieving generalisable findings but observing a situation from different angles to see it in its completeness (Thomas, 2013).

In this research I studied one public university in Malaysia because the university as a key case to respond my research questions (Thomas, 2013), not only due to its reputation as a research-led university, but also because of

the decentralisation that it is going through. It is also a local knowledge case (Thomas, 2013) because I have previous experience studying and working for this institution, so I am familiar with its organisational culture and I have access to it.

I adopted a case study which enabled me to seek answers to my research questions by focusing only on research outcomes relevant to the study. I found that using a case study is more relevant since it can also offer rich and vivid descriptions of events relevant to the case. Therefore, the relevance of using this approach for my study is this case study which involves heads of departments focussed particularly on them to seek their understanding and perceptions based on the research questions and focus of my study. By adopting a case study, the participants are able to provide a chronological narrative of events associated to their critical leadership incidents. Thus, the descriptions of blended events which may vary from one head of department to another attached to different disciplines. This can help to highlight specific leadership events that are relevant to the case.

I adopted a case study research because I am interested to investigate a contemporary phenomenon, or the 'case' related to relational approach of head of departments in depth and within its real-world context. Therefore, case study has its unique strengths of the ability to deal with full variety of evidence which include interviews, critical incidents techniques and focus group interviews.

Also, there are different types of case studies as highlighted by Creswell (2012). I carried out an instrumental case study that provides insight into an

issue (or theme) and for this study which involves multiple cases. As Stake (1995) suggests if the intent is to gain insight and understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon using of instrumental case study is appropriate.

The multiple cases in my study were represented by ten heads of departments. I used a Multiple Instrumental Case Study (also called a Collective Case Study). Creswell (2012) and Punch (2009) state that Multiple Instrumental Case Study is a study of several cases that provide insight into a single issue or theme. My study involved middle leaders from ten different departments providing insights into one single theme which is the impact of externally-driven change to their middle leadership. The purpose of selecting a collective case study is to learn more about the phenomenon, population or general condition as suggested by Punch (2009).

### **3.4 The Case Study Organisation**

For the purpose of this study, I selected one of the public universities located in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. This was an appropriate research site because of its quality, reputation and the wide range of staff recruitment and student enrolment. The university comprises twelve faculties, two academies and three centres namely Faculty of Law, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Built Environment, Faculty of Economics and Administration, Faculty of Business and Accountancy, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, Academy of Malay Studies, Academy of Islamic Studies, Cultural Centre, Sports Centre and Centre for

Foundation Studies. However, participants who volunteered for this study were from four faculties and one centre as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3 Participants and Interview Details**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Departments</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Known As</b>	<b>Duration of Interview</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>
A	Faculty of Computer Science	2	HoD1	46.00 minutes	Face-to-face
			HoD2	50.58 minutes	Skype
B	Faculty of Language and Linguistics	2	HoD3	42.02 minutes	Face-to-face
			HoD4	39.57 minutes	Face-to-face
C	Faculty of Arts and Science	1	HoD5	49.42 minutes	Face-to-face
D	Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry	3	HoD6	1 hour and 4 minutes	Face-to-face
			HoD7	45.33 minutes	Face-to-face
			HoD8	46.14 minutes	Face-to-face
E	Cultural Centre	2	HoD9	35.03 minutes	Face-to-face
			HoD10	39.45 minutes	Face-to-face

In 2012, the university was granted autonomy status by the MOHE. It is the highest ranked higher institution in Malaysia and middle leaders from the



section of faculties and centres as illustrated on the far left of the organisational chart participated in the study (See Appendix J).

Each faculty is sub-divided into various departments according to disciplines and this helped to provide rigorous findings from head of departments. Moreover, it is a public funded university under the governance of the MoE which will assist not only in official access but also it can help enhance the focus. Being a research-led university, my study will contribute new knowledge in relation to middle leadership in a research-based university.

This university has been selected because I have been part of the academic community in this university for several years and shared experiences, opinions and perspectives with a few heads of departments from the selected faculties and departments. The heads of departments who are the participants of this study might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness (Kanuha, 2000). Also, I hope to follow disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection of head of departments from the eight selected faculties, with a close awareness of my own personal biases and perspectives.

Besides that, I did not select any private universities or colleges because those institutions apply different recruitment, management procedures and values which cannot support the findings. Private higher education institutions operate independently with minimal intervention from the Ministry of Education and the access for research purposes can be unfavourable.

### **3.5 Sampling of Research Participants and Recruitment**

The participants recruited for this research were middle leaders who started leading various discipline-based departments in the university since July 2015. As an initial participant recruitment, I referred to the university organisational structure (See Appendix J) through website search of faculties, academies and centre to identify heads of departments' contact details and their contributions. I chose heads of departments who were both seasoned and new to headship roles. In order to get rich data, I chose heads of departments who completed the probationary stage of their academic career but not yet nearing retirement. They were appointed by the university management to lead groups of staff who shared similar academic background and specialisation as others in the department. Most of these middle leaders who hold departmental leadership positions cover as much as 10-25 years of professional academic career including teaching subject-related courses, producing scholarship and publications, serving their institutions, disciplines, and society in a variety of expert roles. However, some of them were novice departmental leaders from the public university. After going through necessary background information about almost eighty total number of heads of departments in the university, I started the participant recruitment process. I emailed all of them using their university email addresses, I stated the aims of my research briefly and attached participant concern forms together with research approval letter from my supervisor and approval letters from the Malaysian research planning unit (See Appendix I).

There were no immediate replies from any heads of departments. However, only three participants replied to my email showing their interest to volunteer in

my study. I decided to use purposive sampling as suggested by Creswell (2012) using a homogeneous sampling strategy, therefore certain sites or people are selected since they possess a similar trait or characteristic. Purposive sampling was used for this study because participants are intentionally selected based on mixed groups of faculties and departments. I selected the participants who belong to a common group in the community.

Since the email invitations to volunteer in my study did not provide me enough participants, I decided to make random official phone calls to invite more participants. Thus, I decided to categorise them into six groups (Groups A-F) representing 36 departments (See Appendix B). I made phone calls to different heads of departments from the six group least. Within a couple of phone calls, I managed to recruit another four heads of departments to volunteer. Most participants whom I contacted admitted that they overlooked my emails because they receive many emails from everywhere due to their academic and leadership position. I managed to recruit only seven participants until my first day of arrival before data collection.

I targeted to interview at least ten participants from all six faculties for it was manageable to complete my data collection process within the expected time frame of 21 days in Malaysia. It allowed holistic findings from different departmental heads who can contribute rich evidences needed for this study. As another strategy to recruit three other participants, I randomly walked into the heads of departments' administrative office. Despite several cancellation and postponement of appointments, I managed to fix appointments to brief my participants of my research intention and successfully recruited the last three

participants. Besides, my previous working experience in the university assisted me to gain easy access to meet potential participants.

By chance, middle leaders who participated in this study were heads of departments particularly those who began to take up middle leadership roles after 2015 which coincides with the new higher education policy of the same year.

According to Creswell (2012), the quality of sample is more important than the number because my intention is not to generalize or represent a sample population but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. My sample size of ten heads of departments is small but the quality of data collection methods and data analysis will be prioritised. Due to ethical considerations, I have anonymised all their names and the departments they belong to. Thus, I have substituted their names using abbreviation and numerical forms such as Head of Department 1 is mentioned as HoD 1 and so forth as stated in Table 3.

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.6.1 Critical Incident Techniques (CIT)**

My attention was drawn to the critical incident technique explored by Flanagan (1954). The technique consists of obtaining a description of specific acts or episodes which seemed to make a particular kind of behaviour effective or ineffective. Flanagan's method was based on observation and the purpose was to assess the performance of personnel in coping with observed critical incidents. He used it as a performance management tool. However, I used critical incidents in my study based on personal recording and recollection of

critical incidents as turning points or learning experiences which links to the sociological approach. By doing so, I was able to collect a range of reasonably complete categories of positive and negative leadership challenges and these outcomes were used for a different phase of my study, the semi-structured interviews.

Critical incident technique was selected as one of the methods in this study because it helped to reveal how departmental leaders' critical incidents constructed and shaped by significant events. They were a rich source of the conscious reflections of informants regarding their feelings and perceptions of events which are personally meaningful and influential (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011, p.649). Departmental leaders' experiences have helped create meaning and a sense of purpose in their work, and I wished to find out how critical incidents throughout their lives have shaped their values (Holligan and Wilson, 2015, p.454) and aided in their leadership learning processes.

Less use has been made of critical incidents in educational situations although its potentialities are regarded to appear great (Mayhew 1956). Collections of critical incidents were considered valid and reliable because they provide realistic bases for further examination of this study.

I used these critical incidents as a source for the raw material out of which evaluation items can be constructed for interview questions and final findings. These critical occurrences that happened between the HoDs and those involved in the university linked to his or her leadership. These actual statements of incidents reflecting departmental leaders' desirable and undesirable work relations are crucial point of my study.

My research participants shared relevant leadership events, experiences or occurrences which happened to them at the departmental or university level as base to move on to the next phase of interviews.

### **3.6.2 Interview Face-to-face / Skype Interviews**

I chose interviews as one of the data collection methods particularly because interview data are seen not as reflections of underlying memory but as voices adopted by research participants in response to the researcher's prompts and questions (Block, 2000) which helped in co-construction of knowledge. I intended to interview heads of departments to obtain information related to their leadership challenges and changes as well as support they received without them knowing what I am after and attempting to find out in-depth. As an interviewer, I had the freedom to determine the time, initiate the interview, decide the topic, pose the questions and critically follow up on the answers and close the conversation (Kvale, 2006, p.5) in all my ten interviews with heads of departments.

Most significantly, interviews allowed me and my participants to formulate our ideas about middle leadership as a form of knowledge creation. Thus, I used semi-structured interviews. Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewees (Brinkmann, 2014, p.286).

Semi-structured interview was the second stage of the data collection method. Optional interviews were carried out in this study, either face-to-face or Skype

interviews depending on participants' availability. These options were provided to accommodate HoDs who were often occupied with tight schedules. With reference to the most salient critical incidents as responded by participants in phase 2, nine face-to-face and one Skype interviews were conducted. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in April 2017 as scheduled, however, the Skype interview was conducted almost one year later because one HoD volunteered to participate in the study in 2017 but due to sabbatical leave, the HoD requested to participate the following year. Table 4 illustrates the initial proposal of timeline and amendments were made accordingly during the actual data collection timeline (See Appendix F).

**Table 4 Data Collection Timeline**

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>
1	End of February 2017	One Skype interview for piloting
2	March 2017	Critical incident pro forma (Distribution and Collection)
3	April 2017	Interviews: Face to face interviews with participants
	April / May 2017	Interviews: Skype interviews with participants

Ten head of departments out of 36 total number of disciplines from the six groups of faculties were interviewed for this study simply because this is a small-scale study. One from each group was sufficient based on their voluntary participation in this interview. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational, with a view to encourage participants to speak freely

about their experiences. I used a set of open questions as an interview guide (See Appendix E). I also included casual prompts to help elicit or clarify information. The semi-structured interviews were carried out with nine departmental heads in their departmental office on the agreed time and day for interviews. One Skype interview was carried out in private office rooms of both researcher and the participant according to best suited time and date.

It was a semi-structured interview with the departmental heads individually to gather and examine their leadership capabilities in dealing with critical incidents in the past. These critical incidents may range from different aspects of their leadership roles. By questioning departmental heads about those incidents and how they dealt with those problems, it helped me to identify to what extent, departmental heads used in coping, managing and solving those problems.

Interview was a suitable choice of instrument in my study because as stated by Punch (2009), specific follow-up questions emerged as the interview unfolds, and the wording of those questions depended upon directions the interview takes. Open ended questions allowed my respondents to reply in whatever way they wish and this comfort was necessary for them to express their thoughts freely.

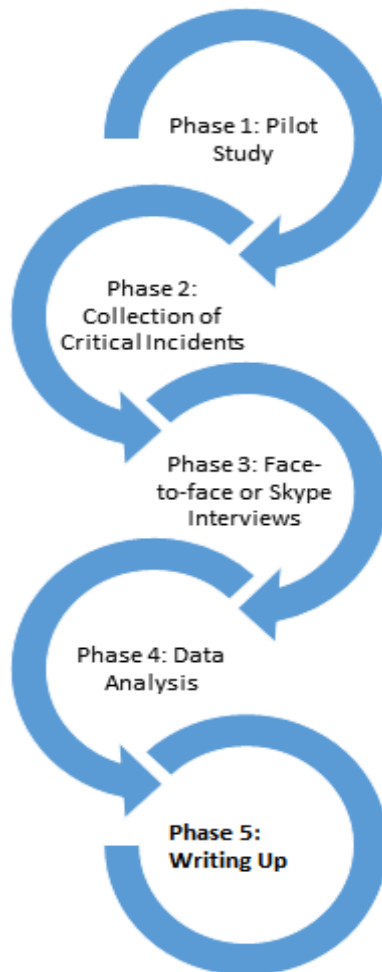
In accordance to the aims of the study, the choice of semi-structured interview was made. As mentioned by Thomas (2013), a semi-structured interview is like a conversation and it gives the best of both worlds as far as interviewing is concerned. I preferred a conversational tone for the interview so that I can have my interviewees to set the scene and let them tell me how they deal with



their leadership roles and responsibilities and probe questions related to my research questions in handling their roles as heads of departments. Along with responses to other questions, head of departments' descriptions of critical incidents and their perceived self-reflections of their characteristics were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Each interview was scheduled between 40 to 60 minutes, but two participants' interviews exceeded more than an hour. As highlighted by Opie (2004), such an interview format allows for what we have regarded as desirable for respondents to develop their own ideas, feelings, insights, expectations or attitudes. This provided relevant and possible interview questions to prompt HoDs during the interview according to the three research questions. Key interview questions were formulated to initiate and seek answers for the three research questions while subordinate questions are added to prompt more responses for the key questions.

### **3.7 Research Phases**

The study was conducted in five phases in order to meet the aims of the study. The scheduling from phase one until phase three was made based on the higher education academic year to ensure participants were available to commit in the required phases of research without any interruptions to their leadership duties. Phase four and five started immediately after phase 3 (See Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) and these phases were completed by 31 December 2018. The five phases of this study are illustrated in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4 Research Phases**

### **Phase 1: Pilot Study**

I carried out a pilot study to collect a preliminary data before proceeding to fieldwork. Pilot study enabled me to gather critical incidents experienced by one departmental head in the same university and the participant is from a different department from the other ten heads of departments. This was associated with leadership of the departmental head which contribute largely to the next phase during face-to-face and Skype interviews with heads of departments. It helped to uncover critical incidents in the past which have strongly affected the department, the departmental leader, staff and university management in terms of how those incidents where faced, encountered and solved by the leader.

I piloted a Skype interview on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 before collecting data from ten other heads of department. The aim was to trial the interview schedule and pre-validate questions for semi-structured interviews in phase 3. The pilot was very useful in developing my research skills especially in dealing with the research instruments and in adapting the initial interview process.

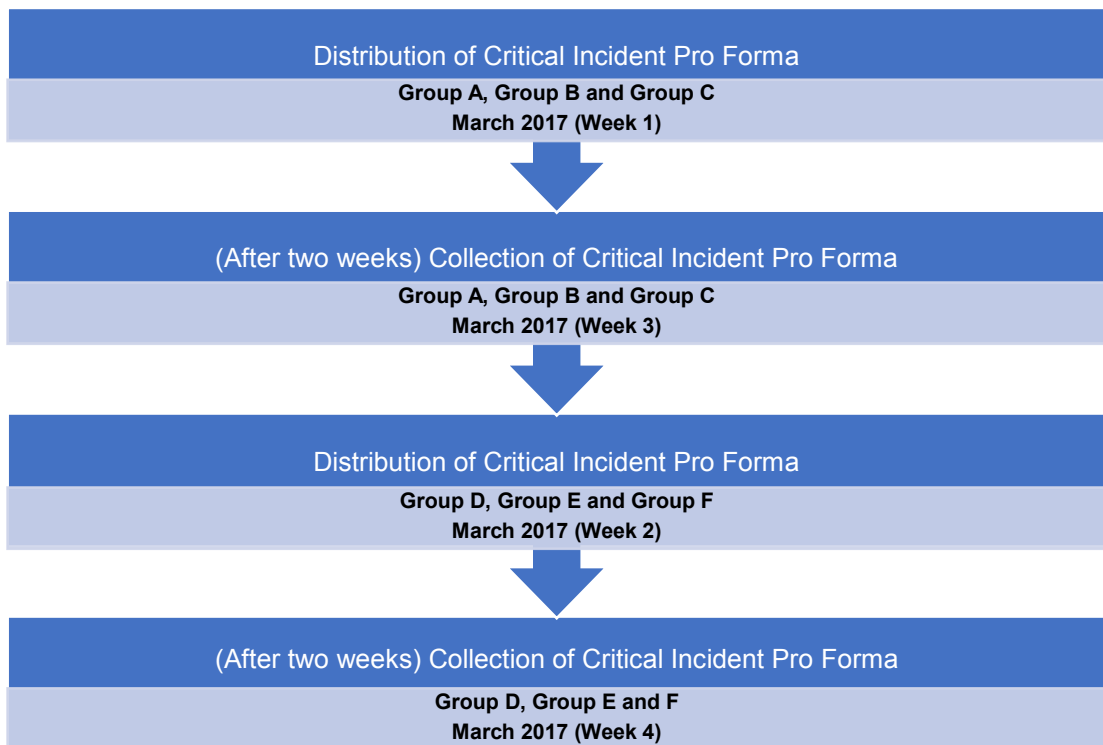
The interview was conducted for 28 minutes and 11 seconds via Skype call to find out on critical incidents and prepare appropriate interview questions for phase 3 and 4. The pilot helped me to identify potential practical problems in terms of ethical issues in the following phases of my study. I could also assess whether the research protocol is realistic and workable in my context of study through the pilot study.

At the end of the pilot study, I was able to prepare myself in terms of technical skills to use Skype without connection problems. Skype interview worked as an optional method for participants who ticked their participant concern forms as substitute for face-to-face interviews particularly to enable participants who were interested to participate in the study but due to tight schedules, Skype interview was chosen. Deakin and Wakefield posit that Skype provides (2013, p.5) 'an opportunity to talk to otherwise inaccessible participants'. Skype also gives participants themselves a greater freedom to participate in research if they want, without the need to travel (Lo lacono et.al. 2016). The pilot study gave me an opportunity to self-evaluate my capability to prepare good follow-up questions because I struggled during the pilot study without prompting the participant further. Besides, I reminded myself to uncover the ethical issues such as confidentiality and anonymity of the participants before starting the collection of critical incidents and semi-structured interviews.

The Skype call for pilot study trained me to respect the choice between audio or video call. My participant during the pilot study chose the video call option and it was conducted in the participant's office. These call options helped me to handle another Skype interview which was conducted with another participant who preferred an audio call for ethical reasons because the interview was conducted outside the university setting.

### **Phase 2: Collection of Critical Incidents**

Critical incident method was conducted for two months starting from March until April 2017 upon getting approval from research ethics team in the University of Leeds and Economic Planning Unit (EPU) in Malaysia. Figure 5 provides the schedule for CIT method which involved all six groups/faculties from 36 departments. Before meeting these departmental heads for CIT pro forma sheet collection, the sheet was emailed to the HoDs' university email addresses or distributed personally for those who preferred. An example of CIT pro forma sheet is attached in Appendix A. Each group of participants will be given two weeks to complete the CIT pro forma before they are collected. HoDs can choose to write either 2 or 3 critical incidents related to their leadership roles in the sheet provided. The critical incidents can be occurrences, event, issue, incident or process deemed by the HoDs as significant, positive or negative. The collection of critical incident from phase 2 was useful for phases 3. It enabled me to structure questions appropriately.



**Figure 5 Critical Incident Schedule**

### **Phase 3: Face- to-face or Skype Interviews**

Phase 2 was followed by face-to-face interviews or Skype interviews. They opted for the convenient type of interview. I conducted each interview between 40 to 60 minutes depending on the critical incidents they shared. Other questions related to their leadership roles and responsibilities were questioned in this phase too. I interviewed at least one head of department from each group. In order to manage this phase efficiently, each faculty was grouped from Group A until Group F according to departments and disciplines. (Appendix B)

### **Phase 4: Data Analysis**

My study is interpretative in nature and people make their own particular or personal interpretations of descriptions of events (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) states that there is no single accepted approach to analysing data, with the chosen approach instead being based on the

researcher's personal assessment. Therefore, I decided to adapt Creswell's (2012) approach to analyse data as shown in the following Table 5.

**Table 5 Process of Data Analysis**

Steps	The Process
1	<p><b><i>Organising and preparing data</i></b></p> <p>The first step of the data analysis, I organised and collated data gathered from critical incidents pro forma and interviews of all ten heads of departments. The common transcription method by listening to recorded audio directly and transcribing with frequent pauses was time consuming. Thus, I used a free transcription tool, the Google Docs voice and speech recognition. It is a tool used for transcriptions which saved my transcription time. It is an automatic speech recognition tool which saves my time. The tool typed out responses automatically when the audio is played on the Google documents. It was effective in recognising almost 90% of the participants' responses and I listened to the interviews several times to ensure correct words and spelling were transcribed overall before copying the transcriptions onto the Word document for coding.</p>

2	<p><b><i>Exploring and coding</i></b></p> <p>This step involved exploring the general sense of the data and coding. By “exploring”, Creswell (2012) means to read the transcript several times and write notes of any concepts, ideas or hunches that occur between the margins of the transcript. I wrote interpretative comments, themes and research questions on the margins next to the transcriptions (See Appendix K). Then, I started coding by segmenting and labelling broad themes in the data. While reading the transcriptions, I created 81 codes using one and two letters to simplify the next colour coding step. For instance, RC indicates role conflicts, JS for job stress, R for resilience and so forth (See Appendix L).</p>
3	<p><b><i>Using codes to build descriptions and themes</i></b></p> <p>This step consisted of answering the major research questions and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon. Using the 81 codes, I started to visualise certain themes and sub-themes. These were the core elements in the data analysis. I identified three overarching themes which are challenges, leadership values and leadership learning. I provided them three colour codes to present the overarching themes which highlighted similarities and differences between all the participants’ responses. For the same purpose, a summary of critical incidents (See Appendix G) was created to find patterns of themes and sub-themes. I analysed them manually and Nvivo was not used because of ten sampling of participants. The analysis was manageable.</p>

4	<p><b><i>Represent and report findings</i></b></p> <p>This step involved the use of tables, critical incident extracts, and responses from interview transcriptions gained from interviews. I reorganized the themes and sub-themes to maintain comprehensibility. Analysis were grouped according to similar themes based on the criticality of the incidents reported both through interviews and critical incident pro forma.</p>
5	<p><b><i>Interpret the larger meaning of the data</i></b></p> <p>For this step, I had to step back and form the larger meaning of the middle leadership phenomenon based on personal views, comparisons with the literature review, suggestions for future study and other identified limitations.</p>
6	<p><b><i>Validate accuracy of the findings</i></b></p> <p>The final step, I determined the accuracy and credibility of the study by triangulation, member checking and auditing.</p>

### **3.8 Ensuring Research Rigour**

Considering that this research used a qualitative methodology, the concepts of reliability and validity were problematic because reliability and validity have been used in a different way in qualitative research to assess its quality (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, I adopted Lincoln and Guba's (2000) concept of trustworthiness to consider in this study, which refers to how a researcher can make the case that the findings are worth considering (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). In my study, research trustworthiness was assessed through trustworthiness: transferability, credibility and confirmability.



### **3.8.1 Transferability**

Transferability is equivalent to external validity in quantitative research to the extent to which the research findings can be generalised to other contexts. I achieved this concept of applicability by providing 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1983) of my study such as its setting, sample, sample size, sample strategy, work experience and background of their education, inclusion and exclusion criteria, interview procedure and topics, changes in interview questions based on the iterative research process, and excerpts from the interview guide. These thick descriptions were included in my study so that readers of my study will be able to assess whether my findings are transferable to their own setting.

### **3.8.2 Credibility**

Credibility, similar to internal validity in quantitative research relates to the extent to which the results of the study are credible from the perspective of the participants. To establish credibility, I emailed all my ten participants to go through the completed transcriptions one month after the interviews to ensure that I made accurate representations of their perspectives. As elite interviewees, most of them also requested that I email their transcriptions to verify the contents. I brought along participants' critical incidents they verified on the day of interview to make sure the correct incidents are discussed during the semi-structured interview and avoid any mismatch of critical incidents.

In terms of collection of critical incidents pro forma, the distribution and collection of the pro forma was made within the expected time frame. However, for participants who were unable to provide written copy, I contacted

them few days before the interview and wrote the critical incidents that they narrated via telephone calls. The written pro forma I wrote on their behalf via telephone conversation were emailed for them to verify too before conducted the interviews and analysed the data.

In order to study the issue and corroborate findings in my study, I used method triangulation by combining two data collection methods to cross check data. I used critical incidents techniques and semi-structured interviews. This method of triangulation facilitated to find divergence of evidence between how my participants acted and reacted to critical incidents (critical incident techniques) and how they perceived their roles and responsibilities and how they learnt leadership (semi-structured interviews). This method of triangulation also facilitated to construct semi-structured interview questions and prompts which was conducted after the critical incident techniques. Both methods worked as complementarity of each other and helped to collect data which were at times missing from either one of the method. For example, some critical incident pro forma were incomplete so during semi-structured interviews, I was able to fill the missing parts of the incidents by prompting my participants.

### **3.8.3 Confirmability**

Considering that a researcher will always have his/her own perspective, there is a risk of bias. As highlighted by Van Heugten (2004), I tried to mitigate biasness using several tools the insider researcher may employ such as stream of consciousness writing, interviewing my participants; speaking with peer academics about the experience to create distance and deconstructing the familiar world. She emphasises that the insider researchers' subjectivity

must be “open to intensive scrutiny” and “challenged on an ongoing basis” (p. 208).

The concept of confirmability replaces the one of objectivity used in quantitative research and proposes that a research will be more trustworthy if the data has been confirmed by others. For this to be achieved I was transparent with my views and interpretations. I provided information about my axiological position and included quoted pieces of the interviews in my thesis, so I can show how I developed my analysis. To analyse the data and document an audit trail, I underlined and classified key phrases into different themes. I looked for repetitions of words, topics and ideas and made amendments to themes several times before deciding on three major themes which are professional lives of middle leaders, professional leadership learning and development. Using these themes, I used colour coding as illustrated on Appendix K.

### **3.9 Insider / Outsider Perspective**

In a research process, an insider is understood as a member of the researched group, while an outsider is a non-member (Merton, 1972). Being an insider has advantages related to the familiarity with the site, which places the researcher in a better position due to her knowledge of the patterns of social interaction needed to gain access and make meaning, as well as generating rapport with the participants (Mercer, 2007). But it has also disadvantages, because his/her previous knowledge may blind him/her to issues taken for granted and may also imply that participants have preconceptions about the researcher that limit their responses (Mercer, 2007).

I am in an intermediate position because I could be regarded as an insider due to my previous experience as student and employee at the university. I spent almost seven years in the research site as a student and employee. However, I also consider myself an outsider because I finished my working relationship with the institution more than five years ago before the new system was implemented. I did not work in all the six faculties chosen for this study apart from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. I think being in the intermediate position will contribute to a good balance for my position as a researcher: I have access to the site, trust from the management and understanding of the organisational culture; but the time that I have spent far from the research site and the fact that I do not have any contractual obligation with the institution will reduce the possibility that I would not pay attention to issues that I take for granted.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Since this study was conducted in the Malaysian higher education institution, I made an application to the Malaysian Economics Planning Unit (EPU) on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016 for permission to conduct the study and it was approved on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2017(See Appendix I). The official approval letter from the EPU is essential for me to gain total access to the various departments in the university. I applied to gain approval from the University of Leeds ethics committee (See Appendix H). Both EPU and ethical approval are needed to proceed with my fieldwork.

I prepared a consent letter to be distributed to the relevant departmental heads by the faculty administrators (Appendix D). During my meeting with the departmental heads for phase 2, I would also brief the departmental heads

what sort of questions will be posed in phase 3. This will give the HoDs opportunities to decide whether they wish to participate voluntarily as participants. The letter will clearly state that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

The participants in my study have various levels of academic and leadership experiences including various levels of their English language proficiency. Thus, I conducted my interviews primarily in English language and all the participants preferred English language and no personal request was made to conduct the interviews in Malay language or in bilingual by combining both English and Malay languages.

This study asks departmental heads to share their leadership performance which may be linked to government policy and practice, and therefore they need reassurance that nothing they may say will be divulged to the government and affect their careers. Therefore, to ensure the participants are protected, besides using pseudonyms, I ensured that the opinions, views, information or statements that they provide do not contain any markers of the participants' identity such as the department they belong to. This is to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants' identities. When it comes to names of head of departments, for example a head of department from A, I used general descriptions such as 'HoD 1' to avoid people from identifying the institution.

For confidentiality, no data was stored in flash drives or laptops. Personal data will be stored in a password protected secure network location at University of Leeds. A digital voice recorder was used to record interviews depending on the mode and type of interview preferred by participants.

Flanagan (1954) stressed the importance of informing the interviewees about the purpose of the study, the basis for participant recruitment and preservation of their anonymity. To minimize ambiguity and bias he also recommended careful wording of questions and the use of pilot interviews. Therefore, during the second phase of the study, I briefly rationalised my study to the participants before gaining their permission to be interviewed and participant complete and signed the participant consent form (Appendix D).

### **3.11 Summary**

The following two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings. Both of those chapters are followed by Chapter 6 which contains the discussion of the findings. The next chapter, Chapter 4 contains data gathered from the first part of the findings on professional lives of middle leaders regarding how they reacted as new appointees and what challenges they encountered in their headship roles.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings (1): Professional Lives of Middle Leaders**

#### **4. Introduction**

This study employs two core methods. One is the critical incident technique by gathering critical leadership incidents and semi-structured interviews conducted with ten heads of departments. The findings of the study are in two chapters, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 based on responses from both the core methods. In Chapter 4, the professional lives of middle leaders are presented by focusing on their reactions to headship appointment, what they were expected to do and to what extent they were prepared for their roles. This is followed by their experiences related to new and inherent challenges/changes associated with specific role functions. These are examined with both emotional and strategic dimensions of middle leaders' responses to challenges. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings including implications and identification of the emerging issues which will be taken up in Chapter 6, the Discussion. Chapter 5 focuses on another findings, Professional Leadership Learning and Development.

To make writing process manageable and adhering to ethical consideration, I used abbreviations and numbers to identify all the ten participants in the chronological order of interviews which I conducted for the purpose of anonymity.

#### **4.1 Becoming Middle Leaders**

It was important to find out how these heads of departments reacted initially after getting the headship offer to determine their readiness and/or motivation to lead. When I was offered to take up a leadership role without any form of

mental, emotional and training supports, my first reaction was to request for a role as an acting head of department instead of a head of department so that I can gradually learn from experienced heads of department. This negotiation was approved by the management until someone more suitable could fill the headship position. This was not the case with my participants.

The transition from predominantly teaching into leadership was perceived differently by all ten heads of departments. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to start off the interviews with some background information about all of them. It was more like a series of warm-up questions. They were sharing interesting information about themselves pleasantly until the next series of questions related directly to their leadership roles were asked. One of the questions was on how they felt or their first reaction when they received their middle leadership job offer. Their immediate responses were either a long sigh, seconds of silence, reduced smile or slight pause before they responded further. It was clear-cut that all ten heads of departments' interview responses to this question showed they were not entirely contented with the job offer. Their reactions were different depending on their past leadership experiences and the educational background before they were appointed as HoDs. Four out of ten participants were appointed within six months after completing their doctoral studies abroad and locally with less and no leadership experiences. Six were appointed according to their prior academic experiences in the respective departments as senior lecturers for at least ten years. Their actions and reactions to headship role had many commonalities.



#### **4.1.1 Reactions to Departmental Headship Appointment**

Out of ten participants, four novice heads of departments admitted their unwillingness to accept this role initially because they felt they were unsuitable for this role. HoD3, who worked as a senior tutor in the department assumed leadership role is suitable for senior staff and experienced staff and said that “I asked the dean why I was chosen. I’m not the senior in this place to fit the position”. She expressed her reservation because she had less confidence on her credibility in taking up this role. Two others considered this as an unforeseen offer because they considered themselves lacking leadership experiences. They were offered leadership roles within few months after completing their doctoral studies abroad. One of them explained:

The appointment as a head of department is a very shocking one for me. I had no clues or hints from anyone that I might be taking this position. When my dean gave the offer letter, I just went to the nearest prayer room. I just sat there for two hours...My feeling at that point of time was very confused and I didn’t know what strategy to use as a HoD and I didn’t know what the agenda behind this appointment was.  
**(HoD10)**

She felt compelled to accept this offer because she is a new academic in the department and completely inexperienced to leadership roles. Taking up a headship role without any career planning, “early warning” and experience was utterly surprising for her. This resonates with Rowley and Sherman’s (2003) idea which state leadership positions are often filled by academic staff who have limited experience in formal management or leadership roles and responsibilities. Thus, it appeared from the HoD’s response that she is uncomfortable of her new role and prospective headship responsibilities. These are strong emotions revealed by the all four novice heads of departments. Given that emotion in leadership was an issue highlighted by the

participants, emotions tend to show a connection with the wholeness of the individual leader and subsequently the entire organization she/he is leading (Yamamoto et.al, 2014). The authors asserted if leaders are ignoring or downplaying emotion as weak and to be controlled, this is a fallacy. Emotion has a role to play in decision-making and the authors added leader's ability to acknowledge, understand, and apply their emotion is an element for authentic leadership. This is possible to discover from their actions and reactions of leadership decisions they make.

Another novice head of department said she was reluctant to accept middle leadership role even before the appointment was offered to her. She was hinted by some colleagues regarding headship nominations being discussed by the higher management. However, when she received the opportunity to become a middle leader, she asserted that many senior and experienced member of staff refused to accept the role by giving personal and health reasons despite having the potential to lead the department effectively. She explained:

My reluctance started long ago before I took up the position. Later, I realised that if I don't do it, no one else will do it. Nobody is prepared 100% to take the position like this. I was quite resentful for being appointed as the head of department. Because I know in the department, there are many more seniors. They were given a chance to say no to this position. **(HoD8)**

Other than four novice heads of departments, initial reluctance was also expressed by another participant who doubted her leadership abilities because she intended to work as a teaching staff in the department and not as a middle leader. HoD1 argued that predecessors from her department volunteered to accept this role without any reluctance in the past. Thus, in this

circumstance, she was confident of making her way with her past experience, therefore accepted the role. She also felt the management entrusted her to carry out the middle leadership role and emphasised that “Personally, I didn’t volunteer to hold this post. However, due to the trust from the management, I took up this responsibility”. **(HoD1)**

Although these HoDs have the ability to acknowledge, understand, and apply their emotion as an element for authentic leadership (Yamamoto et.al, 2014), they were mostly having the impression that experience and seniority are essential requirements to become middle leaders. This was clearly the reason of their unwillingness to accept the new role. Heads of departments who are newcomers are assigned to research and teaching, therefore they were reluctant and confused to accept additional leadership roles. Therefore, many heads of faculties ‘sought actively to avoid taking the role’, suggesting that to be head of faculty was an ‘unwelcome interruption to research or teaching’ (Bolton, 2000, p.57).

Contradictorily, those with prior experience to ‘almost’ leadership roles and responsibilities such as acting heads of departments, programme coordinators or those who realised their potential and interest to lead reacted positively to the job appointment. One participant who claimed having thirty years of working experience in the department was not ready to take the opportunity to lead the department when she was approached few years ago. Her resistance changed when she felt ready to lead few years later.

I just didn’t take it on for years because I was not approached by the management. It was a relief that I was not approached. To me, now is the right time to take it on. I first resisted this because I know there is a lot of work involved being a head of department, so I took it up. **(HoD4)**

The lack of leadership role preparedness was shared as a reason for her reluctance. However, her leadership involvement outside the university gave her confidence to accept middle leadership post. She narrated:

Although I did not take up the leadership roles in the workplace, but I have done some leadership roles in my own community. I have taken care of many people events for years. I'm a church leader... I was the head prefect in the school and led many societies in the school. This is my ninth month as a head of department. I feel more confident in my role now **(HoD4)**.

Another participant, HoD5 accepted the role because he had many years of leadership experiences as an acting head of department. His middle leadership experiences for six years both before and after completing his doctoral studies, confidence to accept this role because he said, "This position gave me another opportunity to learn to become a better leader...Well in the last three years since I became a head of department, the department completed 75 activities".

One participant, HoD6 accepted to take on the leadership role due to her academic and strong leadership experiences in the past. She was reappointed as a head of department for the second time after having led the same department for four years continuously. She explained that her reappointment will carry on until potential HoDs are appointed for the role or in the case of not having any suitable leaders to replace the HoD among other academic staff members.

By and large, HoDs responses show contradicting levels of readiness and motivation to lead. The level of motivation seems low for HoD1, HoD2, HoD3, HoD9 and HoD10 as opposed to high motivation and self-efficacy recounted by the HoD4, HoD5, HoD6, HoD7 and HoD8. To reiterate, most experienced

HoDs took up the roles positively. However, those with less or no leadership experiences tend to accept the offer without much enthusiasm. For effective leadership, effective leaders are crucial because 'Effective leadership does require strong character and competency, but the effective leader must also initiate effective leadership moves (LeTellier, 2006, p.2). Therefore, having both enthusiastic and unenthusiastic participants and different levels of motivation, the question of what kind of roles and responsibilities are expected from these HoDs is worth examining.

#### **4.1.2 Expected Roles and Responsibilities**

The previous section highlighted on how HoDs reacted to their headship appointment. This section presents HoDs' perceptions on new and inherent roles and responsibilities.

One section of HoDs' offer letter stipulates that appointees are expected to execute specific roles and responsibilities for the department specifically and the university in general. Their roles and responsibilities are of two different levels; departmental and institutional. Participants' responses in relation to their headship roles and responsibilities have been synthesised and listed (See Table 6). The roles they carried are often multiple. When asked about roles and responsibilities they are expected to perform, three HoDs said they are expected to involve in multiple roles. This is clearly illustrated in the response by an experienced HoD:

I'm the head of this department. That encompasses quite a lot of roles... I'm also the coordinator of the programme...the advisor for the [discipline] society. I'm the principal investigator for several projects. I was appointed as a chair for the future direction programme **(HoD6)**.

Another head confirmed that multiple roles are intertwined in their leadership position. She elaborated:

They are multi-fold responsibilities. Obviously to manage not just the academic staff who are employees of this university but also the research staff. So, academic staff in this case tend to be clinicians or surgeons but I also manage staff who are primarily researchers in nature. I'm also responsible for house officers. That's all in the hospital side. I am responsible for [discipline] officers. Most of them are in the master's training programme, clinical masters' postgraduate studies. There is also smaller group of postgraduates and research students. They are not only doing masters but also PhD related to basic [discipline] department. So, that's in terms of manpower. As head of department, I look over things such as budgeting and planning manpower for future **(HoD8)**.

HoD5 is a more experienced leader and he provided similar comments. His multiple roles involve handling staff, student supervision, publication and student related activities are not very different from science related field. He said:

The letter of appointment stated a couple of duties and job specifications...I must take care of any departmental issues. Also, I must take care of the staff. In this department, I must handle and support academic staff... Besides teaching, I must do publication. I have so many roles. Apart from being a lecturer, I must supervise 15 masters and PhD students. I must be the head this department. On top of these main duties, I must be responsible for student activities **(HoD5)**.

The department led by HoD5 comprises ten staff whilst the department headed by HoD10 has four staff. These two departments have less member of staff while two other medical departments stated above have more than twenty staff members in each department. Moreover, medical departments with massive number of students, the HoDs have more responsibilities. Thus, more administrative and leadership duties are required from the HoDs.

The challenge of handling everyday roles and responsibilities entrusted on experienced and inexperienced HoDs impacted their leadership performance discretely.

Apart from teaching and leading the department, HoD10 commented on administrative tasks as part of her responsibility. She commented “I have to teach, and I have to write research papers and concentrate on the headship position and on top of that, I have to handle the administrative tasks”. It was indicative that HoDs are evaluated for their effective performance according to the key performance indicators (KPIs) which they have to fulfil. The purpose of KPIs is to evaluate and measure their achievements not only individually but together as a department. Both departmental and institutional levels of roles and responsibilities contribute to the performance of HoDs (See Table 6).

**Table 6: Core Roles and Responsibilities as Viewed by Heads of Departments**

<b>Departmental Level</b>	<b>Institutional Level</b>
support academic and non-academic staff	coordinate student activities
delegate duties	recruit staff
report on departmental activities	manage budget
provide academic leadership	promote academic standards
promote excellence in teaching and research	involve in research collaboration
engage in curriculum reform and review	assist academic peers in career

	development
counsel staff and students	represent the department in internal/external bodies
provide coaching	publish journal articles
mentoring	develop a vision for the department
share and generate ideas	recruit staff
make decisions involving departmental staff and students	evaluate documents
solve departmental problems	budget for departmental events
motivate staff and students	achieve university vision
attend courses and conferences	promote courses
assess staff performance	create local and international networks
supervise postgraduate students	coordinate courses
	teaching courses

In addition to the roles and responsibilities listed on the table above, HoDs stated more ad-hoc responsibilities were added depending on any rising issues in the department and the university. There seems to be not much



difference among ten HoDs from various disciplines and departments pertaining to roles and responsibilities. Although responsibilities are 'broadly similar across departments, the relative importance of each task varied in respect of the institution and disciplinary contexts in which the leaders worked' (Inman, 2007). From the HoDs' responses it was obvious that their roles and responsibilities are equally challenging despite their roles, responsibilities, leadership experiences, disciplines and the kind of issues they have to deal with in their departments. This seems to suggest all HoDs are expected to lead their departments effectively regardless of whether they have received adequate leadership support, job induction and training to face challenges in relation to their roles and responsibilities.

In addition, from all their responses, there seems to be overlaps between leadership and management roles and responsibilities. Both dimensions are viewed as vital by all ten HoDs because they are expected to be leaders and managers when required. Leadership and management have been given equal prominence to operate effectively in their departments. Although leading and managing are distinct, but both are deemed as important to meet the goals of the departments. As Bush (2003) links leadership to values or purpose while management relates to implementation or technical issues. Thus, it is clear participants stressed the importance of having to switch their leading and managing roles and responsibilities.

Based on their reactions to headship appointment and expected roles and responsibilities, it was crucial to examine how they responded to leadership challenges after accepting their headship offer.

## 4.2 Challenges and Responses in Professional Lives of Middle Leaders

From the data analysis, three thematically grouped categories of challenges emerged: role-associated, people-associated and departmental and operational associated challenges. These challenges are matched by equivalent responses either emotional or strategic responses. Table 7 provides three categories of middle leaders' new and inherent challenges as emerged from the data.

**Table 7: Challenges of Middle Leaders**

<b>Role Associated Challenges</b>	<b>People Associated Challenges</b>	<b>Departmental Operations Associated Challenges</b>
Role Complexity	Senior Academics	Strategic Developments
Increased Workload	Peer Academics	Administrative and Management Skills
Work-Life Balance	Non-Academics	Employment Contracts

### 4.2.1 Role Associated Challenges

Role complexity such as role conflicts, role ambiguity, role strain, role limitation and unforeseen roles were voiced out as role-associated challenges. Particularly, in the process of executing their roles, heads of departments asserted that they experience role conflicts. Role conflicts occur when they experience instability or inability to balance inconsistent expectations. This situation occurred to a head of department who complained not having the qualification to carry out translation duty, but she and other tutors were often pressured to translate documentation whenever required by the university. This affected her performance because she was unable to complete the translation

documents in a limited duration. HoD3 shared her resentment of having to carry out a duty without compulsory qualification caused role conflicts.

All ten HoDs asserted their roles and responsibilities are stipulated and expected to be delivered to benefit the department and the university. However, they had to go through certain degrees of role difficulty and unpreparedness due to role conflicts. HoD9 who has no leadership experience said “It was really a struggle for me to take up this position. It feels like I was thrown into the ocean”.

Another departmental head, HoD10 shared how incompetent she felt to handle this position after re-joining the department as a head instead of a teaching staff member. She recalled:

I can never forget the first three months because without any experience and preparation I have to handle this department. Being an ordinary lecturer in the past who would teach, and I was given instructions by my head of department but now the instructions will come from me. I think it was really hard the first three months. It was also an issue because I just don't know how to instruct people (**HoD10**).

HoD3 considered having extra roles as a challenge because she acknowledged how much she and other staff had to contribute for the department's success. She complained that she had done more than what is expected from her and she stressed “that is the problem with leadership” which requires her to contribute beyond her capabilities.

One participant commented that she anticipated a lot of responsibilities and she was reluctant to take up the leadership role when she was appointed as the head of department. However, she stated that this position gave many opportunities for her to learn leadership. She is now able to accept her

responsibilities positively and commented differently from another head of department:

Although I first resisted this, because I know there is a lot of work involved being a head of department. But when I took it on, I was learning a lot in terms of management, administration and dealing with member of staff **(HoD10)**.

Besides that, role ambiguity hindered HoDs their performance further. Middle leaders emphasised role ambiguity as a challenge to assess staff performance. They complained the lack of clarity in plans and goals, and uncertainty about the knowledge on how to perform assigned jobs. Assessing staff annually based on a scale system was perceived as the biggest challenge by a HoD. This often caused a great deal of stress for her. She opined using the scale system to measure staff performance could possibly incur inaccuracies, errors and biases. She added:

When it comes to key performance indicator marks, this is when it becomes a big issue. And every year during the evaluation time there is always a problem or an incident. So, I cannot assess them yet... I am just wondering how I can assess a person on politeness and communication skills especially on the 0 to 10 scale. And when I give someone on the scale of 4, they might try to question me **(HoD4)**.

Another head of department felt confused on why she was expected to perform more than what she was assigned to do in her headship role. Although she expressed her confidence that she achieved the objective of her role as a middle leader, yet she was given more responsibilities and new roles beyond what she has accomplished thus far.

The challenge I was given when I first took up this position is to make the [discipline] Unit visible. I think I have done that already. I am not only visible in the faculty, but I think I have gone beyond that. The [discipline] Unit is now even visible in terms of the university. I suddenly realised that I am not too sure why though I was given a lot of responsibilities...When I was offered the position, maybe the Dean did not come with these responsibilities in her mind I think **(HoD3)**.

HoD also viewed having role strain in terms of limited power and authority. This occurs when individual expectations are either contradicted or not shared with others (Bush and Middlewood, 2013). According to one head of department, despite being in a formal leadership position, she does not have the power to lead her department the way she desires because she is expected to lead the department according to the job scope stated in her appointment letter. The role constraint was evident when she could not use her position as a head of department to make independent decisions because the final decisions are influenced by those in the higher level of the management hierarchy. She uttered:

Sometimes, I just wish that I could do things my way. Just my way. But I can't because I am in an institution. If I can do it my way, then I prefer to do it my way but again I'm not sure if my way is the best way **(HoD4)**.

Responsibility without power caused her dissatisfaction to lead. She felt unhappy being a powerless head of department. Thus, this impacted her decision making. HoD9 shared the similar view of not having the freedom to carry out duties and decision in her favour. HoD9 perceived this as deprivation of middle leadership freedom. HoD9 also viewed teaching role provided her more freedom as opposed to her leadership role.

I think I had more freedom to do a lot of things being just a lecturer. Because as a lecturer I don't have the burden of running the department. I just prepare for my classes and teach. And probably attend meetings and I also become part of certain committees to give my input **(HoD9)**.

The same head of department further added role limitation which she had experienced as a hindering factor in her leadership practice. The flexibility she used to have as a lecturer has been removed since she became a middle

leader. It indicates how much her leadership roles confined her from leading effectively for the department and university.

... in this position I can only do or decide to certain extent. Beyond that I do not have that power. I am not really the top management. I represent the middle management. Sometimes, I do bring up issues to the top management, but I wouldn't know if the issue has been brought up by the management **(HoD9)**.

HoD2 highlighted one incident that caused role strain within the first day of her headship position (See Appendix M, Critical Incident 1). This incident indicates the idea of power over people rather than power through people in the department. The decision making of the dean in this incident without providing reasonable response shows the strong structural power (top-down) and ignoring HoD2 and the departmental staff's decision show the undesirable power relations which had hindered her confidence to act as a head of department confidently. This circumstance has strained the HoD2's role from the beginning of her appointment but taught her to control her emotions in decision making issues. With limited power and lack of support from the dean, the role strains for HoD2 increased.

Thus, as Jackson (1999) puts it "that there is a belief that leader-academics have "insufficient power to exercise the pressure required to bring the desired reward" (p.144). To bring the voice of the 'powerless' HoDs, the notion of collegiality can be used as a 'tool' to overcome lack of positional power experienced by HoDs especially in decision making. The perception of having insufficient power is transient if this challenge is transformed into opportunity by embracing collegiality. However, this was absent in these circumstances of the HoDs.

Shifting from previous roles and responsibilities into new leadership and managerial role was not perceived entirely as positive. Some viewed it as a challenge because heads of departments said unforeseen changes in their roles and responsibilities were disruptive for their middle leadership role. Several heads of department emphasised the shift to demanding and unexpected new roles and responsibilities specifically from lectureship to leadership as a challenge.

Therefore, four HoDs felt fortunate for not taking up leadership roles and responsibilities earlier in their academic career because they anticipated tremendous changes in middle leadership roles and responsibilities. The following comment from HoD4 illustrates the distinctions before and after taking up the middle leadership role from their perspectives.

I used to be a senior lecturer. I used to deal with few lecturers. I think there is a big leap between being a senior lecturer and a head of department. As a senior lecturer, I used to be a course coordinator. It was manageable because it was more task based. I had to handle one course with other lecturers in charge. It was just to deal with one matter as a course coordinator. **(Senior Lecturer)**

As the head, I am looking now at the overview, I am looking after all the courses and the course coordinators must report to me. I see myself as one who is able to see a bigger picture. I just didn't take on the leadership for years because I was not approached by the management. It was a relief that I was not approached. **(Head of Department)**

HoD4 perceived the transition moving from teaching to leadership commitments as an unanticipated move. It has been viewed as a challenge because the middle leaders' role differs from a lecturer's routine and responsibilities. Therefore, HoD4 commented on the two-opposing nature of jobs especially in terms of giving and receiving directives. HoD1 also made comparisons of two roles.

When I was a lecturer, I used to view everything from the bottom-up level. But in this position as HoD, I can see everything from the top level...As a lecturer I was only receiving instructions. I used to feel sometimes the directives from my previous HoD were unfair. But as a HoD now, I can understand that it was not the intention of HoDs in the past to give directives. I understand it was all the responsibilities of the HoDs in order to achieve the goal. **(HoD1)**

From HoD5's point of view, the unforeseen role is from publication work. He commented that research and publication work which is highly regarded as essential in recent years which was not the case when he started his career as a young lecturer in the same university.

About 20 years ago, when I joined the department, teaching was the main purpose, but publication was not. Most of the academics who are working in this department now are hired based on that criteria. So, most of us came to this job thinking that the demand was for teaching. However, besides teaching, at present we must do publication **(HoD5)**.

Likewise, three other heads of departments affirmed that research and publication work are compulsory in their leadership roles and their contribution to publication work help to increase their key performance indicators (KPI). One of them said "I'm taking extra miles to do publication work" and another two HoDs find it impossible to allocate time for this because they are unable to prioritise publication work due to the immense leadership responsibilities.

It is compulsory for us as an academic staff to apply for a grant. It is part of our key performance indicator and we are supposed to publish ISI papers. I find it difficult to do this because I don't have enough time to manage especially the administrative tasks...I'm not trying to be fussy but sometimes I must do the work of the administrative staff. **(HoD10)**

Based on the key performance indicators, 50% is the contribution for the department and another 50% is for my academic contribution. I find it sometimes impossible to achieve high KPI because it takes time to publish a journal. Indirectly, if my staff do not contribute in any publication, it also affects the department. Another thing is, I have a lot of PhD students to supervise **(HoD1)**.



Unforeseen roles are added responsibilities which take up most of their time compared to concentrating on leadership duties. Allocating additional time for unforeseen roles affects their leadership roles. A study by Ghasemy et.al (2018) focusing on Malaysian HE challenges, inefficiencies and shortages shows time management as one of the common challenges in the entire higher education system and its sectors.

Conversely, HoD4 viewed this differently. Research publication was viewed as not a prominent challenge. The HoD expressed her relief for not dealing with research and publication because it is not an important expectation of her leadership role and responsibility.

My staff must do research and publish papers. The dean is involved in research and development so usually they involve and help the staff. It goes multi-dimensional way. And I think that is good. Because I cannot handle that aspect on my own. So, when the Dean and her team step in to do that, I am very happy with that. So, in that case I'm not so pressured to deal with that **(HoD4)**.

#### **4.2.2 Increased Workload**

Clearly, increased workload was emphasised by all the participants as a setback. It was an extreme challenge experienced by HoDs which triggered job stress. Each head of department had to fulfil their tasks within deadlines. However, with an increased workload in their new role, they had to face job stress and often miss deadlines. This situation affected them at different points of time in their leadership routine. Four participants commented having to go through this experience emotionally after receiving the job offer as heads of department and four others said they were emotionally drained during their leadership performance. Two were appointed as middle leaders at an unanticipated moment while they were still carrying out their lectureship. Some

felt lack of preparedness in taking up the middle leadership position has affected them emotionally and contributed to the increase in workload. One HoD recounted her feelings:

To be honest, although I had been hinted for several months that I would be the head of department, when the role started I felt somewhat not very prepared. Prior to that, I was never given many opportunities, for example to be an acting head and overseeing some of the other responsibilities **(HoD8)**.

Workload increased tremendously for HoDs to meet standards of key performance indicators (KPIs). KPIs are used to measure the performance of staff throughout the university including HoDs in an annual basis. It is used as guidelines to evaluate and assess staff but also regarded as a major challenge by several heads of departments. All ten participants understood KPIs as pivotal guidelines to assess their leadership abilities. But, achieving high scores was mentioned as a relentless challenge. Poor departmental and leadership performances affect HoDs' pay, promotion prospects academic opportunities, scholarship to further studies and securing grants. Scoring low performance through key performance indicators (KPIs) is deemed as poor in terms of individual performance and lack of ability to support the department.

One HoD said the following about KPIs:

We are always trying to achieve the goals which we need to achieve. We must perform according to the key performance indicators. Every year we are assessed by that. When a staff is assessed by the KPI, if they do well and they contribute well to the department that will be my KPI. Then my KPI contributions will be the dean's KPI **(HoD 4)**.

HoDs also emphasised the impact of KPIs as a clear-cut challenge because there is no equal weightage for leadership, teaching and research publication in the KPIs. 80% is allocated for teaching and research publication and the remainder for leadership tasks. However, one HoD made a positive remark

that “It is good to understand the key performance indicators to achieve the targeted goals for the department”.

One HoD pointed out the following about the criteria of the KPIs for the middle leaders:

Based on the key performance indicators, 50 % is the contribution for the department and another 50% is for my academic contribution. I find it sometimes impossible to achieve high KPIs because it takes time to publish a journal article. Thus, if my staff don't contribute in any publication, it also affects the department **(HoD4)**.

KPI challenge was not only experienced in the initial stage of middle leadership but one HoD expressed how this annual performance review affected her throughout her headship journey. She said:

All my departmental staff could not perform 100% for the department. This sometimes causes some difficulties...I don't just choose those who can do work because I try to make everyone involved and have the sense of belonging to the department. When I have this kind of mission, I get tired emotionally **(HoD5)**.

In other words, key performance indicators are regarded encouraging and discouraging by HoDs in executing their roles and responsibilities effectively. They argued having high expectations and performance to meet through KPI assessment is an impossible task. They could not cope with this challenge constantly because it links to performativity and work-related emotions. Thus, this resulted in higher levels of stress (Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002) and an academic workforce of 'joyless', 'disillusioned and distressed individuals' (Davies & Petersen, 2005). HoDs are aware that managing personal and departmental staff performance to meet the vision and mission is vital but it is highly challenging because performance review is linked to staff' emotions and establishing a good rapport is significant.

### 4.2.3 Work-Life Balance

Middle leaders undertake various job-related pressures in the campus environment including work-life balance. Seven out of ten HoDs said they work beyond their formal working hours to meet deadlines and juggle to achieve the goals set by the senior management. They had to participate in events outside campus as well as community-based activities by forgoing their personal time with family and friends. By doing so, they experience work-life imbalance between time allocated for his/her work and other aspects of life is imbalance. One departmental head specifically complained:

The job as a head of department is not only at the departmental level, but the society is also expecting a lot from this department. The demand of the department outside is very high. I reached to a point that I could not take it anymore. I'm a human being and I need my family time **(HoD5)**.

Evidently, as Smith (2007) highlighted in his study, many middle leader's express discontentment as the consequence of "the heavy workload on their personal academic profiles and some reporting to work over 60 hours per week". The issue of work-life balance varies between new and experienced generation of middle leaders. An experienced head of department with two young children said he prefers to balance his work and family time equally, but this was impossible due to university deadlines and massive number of departmental activities. An opposing view was mentioned by a more senior HoD. She expressed "Actually, I don't find it stressful because my two children are grown up and working". She felt family was not a barrier in performing middle leadership responsibilities and this does not contribute any work-related stress for her.

### **4.3 People Associated Challenges**

This section presents two key challenges pertaining to managing senior academics, peer academics and non-academic staff by focusing on managing relations associated with senior academics and support system.

Managing peer academics, senior academics and non-academic staff were equally viewed as problematic by all ten participants. They perceived managing attitudes of staff without professionalism as a serious challenge in their leadership performance. HoDs also strongly indicated their experiences of having to go through adversity in managing people. They confronted considerably more unpleasant experiences and negative comments than positive experiences including some critical incidents shared by HoDs in their attempt to manage people in their departments.

#### **4.3.1 Managing Relations: Senior Academics**

Other than academic peers, two HoDs found dealing with senior academics a challenge. One of the HoDs struggled to manage relationship with senior academics who had been his former lecturers. He sensed ego and superiority complex had aggravated the dissatisfaction of senior academics towards him. The HoD's ideas to revamp a curriculum was trivialised by his former lecturers. Lack of mutual understanding and their unwillingness to accept him as a HoD gave rise to a critical incident which he shared. HoD5 expounded this incident clearly. (See Appendix M, Critical Incident 3).

As revealed by HoD5, this task consumed more time to complete because his superiors were sceptical about his abilities and he was underestimated. There was no shared vision among departmental staff in contrary to the unaccommodating attitude, the curriculum review was approved and fully

implemented in 2016. Despite having complicated relationship to deal with, the head of department used his far-sightedness in changing the department to meet the vision and mission denotes his readiness to meet the challenge of managing unenthusiastic senior member of staff. He seems to be clear about his roles and responsibilities as a middle leader regardless of the negative attitudes portrayed by others.

HoD7 also expressed similar thoughts of senior academics having ego and superiority. The HoD felt threatened of losing his headship position during the incident. He shared his critical incident (See Appendix M, Critical Incident 4). This incident clearly affected HoD7 emotionally due to the undesirable work relationship and unprofessional attitude showed by the senior academic. Although, the appointment of head of unit adhered to the protocol for selection of new head of unit. However, the HoD received support from his dean and director. Despite the strategic planning to appoint heads of units was ideal to solve a departmental problem, he was not appreciated due to his lower hierarchical ranking compared to his senior academic. This implies, from both the incidents, relationship between HoDs and senior staff were convoluted. Senior academics were not supportive in the leadership journey of junior member of staff particularly those holding headship position.

#### **4.3.2 Managing Relations: Peer Academics**

On the other hand, HoD10 had difficulty managing her peer academics. She had to deal with uncooperative peer academic staff. Critical incident 2 (See Appendix M) was shared by HoD10 which impacted her leadership. As a

result, she could not meet the deadlines and she struggled to complete the task. She also had to request for extension of time to complete the project.

Lack of cooperation among academic staff was experienced by another HoD. This was regarded as threats to the development of the department and positive relationship between middle leaders and staff was expected but there was none. This was also experienced by two other heads of departments. HoD4 felt hampered by the kind of staff who do not want to cooperate with her. This point was also elaborated by the HoD6 that “Some faculty members complain that they have a lot of teaching loads, but they only have a fraction of workload that we have in terms of hours”. It was also mentioned by HoD7 that “Many senior academics don’t respect junior academics, including HoD because they think they are superior in many ways”.

HoD4 and HoD8 also emphasised problems arose from academic staff who often failed to differentiate academic work and friendship. Thus, such attitudes were deemed difficult to manage among academic peers. HoD4 said, “I know many of them are my friends and I know it’s a difficult place because I have to handle spectrum of characters and personalities”. This indicates the challenge of balancing collegiality and friendship in the department.

In contrast, having academic peers with strong friendship helped some HoDs to perform better. For example, one HoD said she usually challenges her colleagues if they question her abilities. She said:

The people who are in the present management, we have been friends for a long time. I think I am very open to many people so when someone tells me I can’t do, I would question them why I can’t do it. Since they are my friends and I’ve been here for a long time, I have no qualms with my colleagues in terms of work relationship **(HoD3)**.

The element of friendship played a major role in managing potential issues for another HoD. As a wise move, she approached her department staff on the first day of meeting by drawing attention to friendship as a key feature in dealing with potential departmental conflicts. She explained:

When I conducted my first meeting with my staff, I said to them “I have been your friend for 30 years and many of you have come a long way with me”. I told them that I would like to see that as a working relationship and I told them if there are any things to talk up, we should talk it out **(HoD4)**

Though friendship is used as a key to solve some leadership problems, as the quote above, it can also be misused by both staff and middle leaders. HoD4 prefers to give opportunities and equal treatment to departmental staff but due to misinterpretation between friendship and leadership, this impeded her leadership roles. Understanding and balancing between professional ethics, work and friendship can be observed as HoDs’ challenges.

#### **4.3.3 Managing Relations: Non-Academics**

Apart from managing relations among academic staff, some perceived managing relations among non-academic staff as a challenge to them. Dealing with non-academic staff such as administrators and technicians were viewed by several HoDs more positively compared to other member of staff in the department. One HoD highlighted a critical incident involving a support staff. Critical incident 5 (See Appendix M) indicates how the HoD managed to deal with a clerk who was mistakenly blamed as inefficient by other departmental staff. Apart from the setter and vetter, the HoD described the problem she faced with the clerk from the critical incident she shared:

...she (the clerk) started to complain why she has to handle exam related papers. She said if anything goes wrong, it could be her responsibility. She said she doesn’t want to be involved anymore with exam papers. I have to tell the clerk she has to be involved because



she is the intermediary. Now this has created another issue with administration... People started blaming her that she didn't know what to do with the exam papers **(HoD4)**.

Though this incident created commotion between academic and non-academic staff, the HoD attempted to deal with the problem in a diplomatic way. HoD realised the need to solve the issue without further complication and supported the clerk by convincing her. She stated:

I had to make peace and I told her it started because of me. I also had to remind her that she still has to be involved because in the end she has to act as intermediary **(HoD4)**.

In addition, faculty members constantly complained to her about the clerk. She said "Some people do tell me that she's not doing her job well especially people who are out of my jurisdiction. A senior management staff told me that my clerk is not doing well". The incident impacted the HoD4 and she chose to have a good relationship as a strategy to manage her support staff in the future. She described how she tackled the issue by reflecting positively:

She has made mistakes in the past. I just tell her that it was wrong and reminded her to be careful next time but not in a strict tone. Sometimes I do question myself whether she has made the mistakes because of her level of training or because she was careless. She is teachable. And I believe the staff who are a level below us or our subordinate, they are our support **(HoD4)**.

The HoD's response to understand the administrator's situation and providing counselling as well as opportunity was a sensible decision. As a HoD, it is the responsibility of the middle leader to communicate formal matters confidentially yet with clarity to avoid miscommunication and mistakes. However, HoD3 perceived the aspect of managing relationship with non-academic staff positively. One feedback was given by a HoD on her work

relationship among non-academic staff and she highlighted how she managed her technical staff and benefited from their support:

I have always been good to the technical support people. So, getting them to do work for the unit has not been an issue and I also think I have a good reputation for being very friendly. When I need some last-minute help from the ICT people, I had no problem. I will just have to write an email and they will be so kind to get it done for me. **(HoD3)**

Similarly, another HoD recounted her positive experience of dealing with technical and other staff members particularly to work after office hours and night events:

For this final year project performance, we must cooperate with documentation units, technical staff and other units. So sometimes when my students want to do rehearsals at night, as a head of department, I must have a slow talk with the technical team to look after my students and help them during the rehearsals. It is not a one person show anymore because I need people around me to make things work successfully for this department. **(HoD10)**

HoD10 realised the significance of collegiality. Collegial relation is a process of informal experiential learning of the HoDs in managing difficult situations. This helped the HoD to reduce her work-stress by delegating job to other member of staff to accomplish the departmental project.

Another specific critical incident was shared by HoD8 which illustrated how she had to manage a problem in her department and her struggle to uplift the image of the department without much cooperation from her department staff (See Appendix G and Appendix M, Critical Incident 8). Some staff in the department could not accept her as HoD because she studied as an undergraduate student in the same department. Her leadership skills were not received by many who knew her as a former student despite having a middle leadership role at present. She stated:

Someone who knew me as a [discipline] student before said, you were the kid I used to know before. When I try to exert some strong stand

and show them that I mean business, people don't really take me seriously. I find this as a challenge. **(HoD8)**

HoD added that managing attitudes of staff were difficult to cope because if they dislike a HoD, they will not heed to any leadership instructions. She expressed her frustration "The person who don't like you, is the first person who will go against you. For whatever reasons, they will find some excuses not to follow your lead".

This challenge has influenced her to change her leadership style from a friendly approach to a firm decision maker regardless of how staff perceive her. In less than six months of middle leadership experience, she demonstrated the need to manage departmental staff firmly in response to the need to solve a departmental problem. Even though her firmness aided to change the image of the department, she felt it was not well received by all member of staff. Understanding the difficulties to manage people, the HoD dealt with every person and problem differently.

#### **4.4 Departmental Operations Associated Challenges**

This section provides challenges faced by HoDs linked to departmental operations such as strategic developments, lack of management skills, funding and employment contract.

##### **4.4.1 Strategic Developments**

HoD9 revealed how she worked on reviewing the curriculum to increase student enrolment for [discipline-related] studies as well as employ full-time academics according to the need of the new course. Her effort largely contributed in terms of increasing in student enrolment and attracted more students from different parts of the country. She shared her strategy to employ

more academic staff by recalling a critical incident which turned out successfully (See Appendix M, Critical Incident 7)

On the other hand, HoD6 moved a step forward in her strategic planning by giving recognition of her departmental work in an international status. She collaborated with local and selected Asian universities by organising conferences and official visits to learn from participants and universities to improve the department in terms of becoming visible. This visionary plan for the department resulted in various success and profit. She stated:

I am instrumental in a way to drive this. I pushed for the national level society. During the inauguration of the conference, we launched our society. From the profit of the conference, we used the money to get life membership for the society. By doing so we have gathered members. So, the money is well-used, and it has been materialised. Slowly we plan to move on to the formation of council. **(HoD6)**

Other than the two HoDs stated above, eight other HoDs appeared to share minimal strategic plans and aspirations for their departments. They seemed to have unsupportive staff members to collaboratively plan the future of the departments. Strategic plans are visions to effectively develop the department and staff in the department. Without a pull toward some goal which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of the status quo can be overwhelming because vision establishes the overarching goal (Senge,1993). Having strategic plans could enhance team work between middle leaders and member of staff. It involves collegial relations across departments that will support collective development of programme offerings, teaching and research within the department, and the development of the service component of academic work within and beyond the university (Branson, 2016).

One other HoD8 recalled an incident (See Appendix M, Critical Incident 8) which impacted her and the department positively due to her strategic plan to change the negative image of the department to positive with some drastic move.

#### **4.4.2 Administrative and Management Skills**

Administrative duties were considered as a challenge by two HoDs. HoD9 complained that handling administrative duties takes up most of her time and she struggled to balance teaching and leadership responsibilities.

This is a tiring job. Sometimes when task is given back to back, this makes me feel like quitting from this job. I feel it's just too much to handle... I find it difficult to do this because I don't have enough time to manage especially the administrative tasks. If there is one thing that I really want to complain in this position is the administration... So, in other words, I have to teach, critical and I have to be writing research papers and the headship position and on top of that the administrative tasks. This is tough to handle **(HoD9)**.

Another HoD regarded role uncertainty in her administrative tasks appear when she deals with matters related to managing human resources issues.

I lack the skills or knowledge to handle some complex issues. Sometimes, it is beyond [discipline]. I am lacking in terms of handling managerial roles and budgeting. I can't get my head around it. That is one impeding factor **(HoD8)**.

Another challenge faced by one HoD linked to the e-Management system. The need to manage departmental related documents through e-management system was highlighted. She explained how the lack of e-management knowledge and unfamiliarity to online system operations have interfered her leadership duties.

So, we (HoDs) not only have to answer to the faculty but also to the university. So, each of these bodies have got their own protocols online and things to login so here I was thinking I'll be okay because everything is related to the university and it should all be the same in the system **(HoD8)**.

This indicates the need to provide mandatory induction for new HoDs which can enable them to adapt to their new roles effectively. Without induction, the HoD managed to learn through accidental and experiential learning in many occasions related to online matters.

#### **4.4.3 Employment Contract**

As a visionary leader, the HoD9 added another challenge related to the unsecured status of her employment in this department. Since August 2013, she was appointed as a contract staff despite having to lead department and reappointed as a head of department twice. She spoke out that having the status as a contract staff impedes her roles and responsibilities. Thus, it has impacted her leadership position to certain extent.

After four years, I am still a contract staff and I am the head of department here. My renewal of contract is every year. I seriously don't agree with the contract staff position. It seems like the future is so uncertain. Initially I was told that if I meet the publication criteria, I can be converted into permanent position. So being a contract staff gives me a lot of limitations. I feel that I cannot do things just like any other permanent staff. For example, I cannot be the principal investigator for main grants **(HoD9)**.

Employment contracts vary for senior and junior academic staff. The temporary job status of one-year contract for this junior staff is considered a barrier for her to involve in many strategic planning tasks compared to three years of tenure period for senior and experienced HoDs. This affects HoD's motivation to contribute effectively and achieve the vision and mission for the department and university. This also disrupts her strategic departmental planning effort which requires more than a year to implement and execute successfully.

#### **4.5 Summary of the Key Findings**

Departmental heads experienced two different types of challenges; positive and negative challenges handled differently in their middle leadership. Both positive and negative challenges helped to problematise their leadership experience as part of their learning process and aided to make strategic planning to lead effectively. All ten HoDs commented their roles and responsibilities as multi folded. The roles range from lecturers, middle leaders, research publishers, student advisors, postgraduate supervisors, research collaborators, community representatives, discipline-based committee members and so forth. In terms of challenges, HoDs who are new to leadership were struggling to adapt their roles and responsibilities. They were also mostly emphasising their apprehension of meeting the requirement of key performance indicators (KPIs) for themselves and their departments. They expressed research and publication work as significant for their career development, but it is time consuming to dedicate time for publication work. Their middle leadership roles and responsibilities hampered their publication duties and caused imbalanced work-life.

The unexpected appointment of middle leadership role was criticised because they were unprepared and reluctant to handle this role because they enjoyed teaching more than leading the departments. They perceived role conflicts, role ambiguity and role strain as factors affecting their leadership performance at varying degrees. They also perceived having role limitations and managing various attitudes of staff as a challenge yet HoDs successfully managed to overcome the problem. As a whole, there were lack of role certainty, role confidence and role support among new heads of department while those with

limited and more leadership experiences had a smooth transition into their headship position.

In addition, lack of induction and relevant trainings were among other challenges voiced out by the HoDs. There is a crucial need to introduce or reintroduce both formal and informal trainings to provide continuous support for emerging middle leaders and existing middle leaders through tailor-made departmental leadership programmes.

To some extent, HoDs were emotionally affected without having strong support system to share problems and ideas relevant to critical leadership challenges yet, incidents which were either deemed positive or negative, big or small unexpectedly contributed remarkable leadership impacts and significant contributions to the HoDs. Most importantly, the rendering of these critical incidents entails interpretation of what events constituted turning points, changed the group conversations, or uncovered something that had already been going on without detection or acknowledgement (Angelides, 2001). Some obvious contributions impacted their perceptions immensely. The ability to manage people gave them sense of responsibilities, adaptability, and awareness of relationship, emotional management, varying levels of confidence, satisfaction, self-management and new approach to leadership styles. By and large, the new challenges they experienced have mutually contributed to their leadership in effective and ineffective manner. Therefore, they could reflect leadership incidents from positive and negative perspectives hoping to overcome the challenges through positive leadership changes and outcomes to benefit them and their departments. Overall, these challenges



and critical incidents guided them to learn to lead with different relational expectations.

The following Chapter 5 discusses some issues emerging from key findings in relation to heads of departments' professional leadership learning and development to respond to the second research question of this study.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings (2): Professional Leadership Learning and Development**

#### **5. Introduction**

This chapter explores what heads of departments have learnt and how have they learnt and, adapted during the process of responding to middle leadership challenges. The first part will explore what they have learnt through leadership learning experiences and leadership values inculcated including professional leadership engagement and behavioural changes. The second part is linked to how they have learnt to lead and develop their roles as heads of departments in terms of professional developments. Each theme is concluded with a summary of the key findings and identification of the emerging issues which will be discussed in the Discussion chapter.

#### **5.1 Middle Leaders' Leadership Learning Experiences**

When asked what they have learnt after taking up the new role as middle leaders, all ten heads of departments responded specific skills but in different perspectives such as new skills, knowledge and leadership values through their professional leadership engagement and they also admitted learning to lead by changing their behaviours, adapting and understanding behaviours of others as part of their middle leadership experiences. Professional leadership engagement appeared to reinforce their leadership learning experiences through their active involvement regardless of their years of experiences as middle leaders. The engagement was in various forms such as voluntary activities, community leadership, departmental and university-level of networking and collaboration. Contradictorily, disengagement was also

obvious among newly appointed heads of departments who struggled to adapt to their roles and responsibilities and least involved in networking and collaboration to enhance their leadership learning.

#### **5.1.1 Professional Leadership Learning: Networking and Collaboration**

Only two heads of departments shared their professional engagement experiences through networking and collaboration with other universities and organisations as a significant form of learning leadership. One of them, HoD5 proudly highlighted that under his supervision, the department was able to accomplish 74 departmental activities by the second year of his middle leadership through active networking. He asserted the department completed the highest number of activities so far in the university among many other departments. Among these activities, the HoD also led various committees for international projects involving 524 schools in Malaysia and one international conference which was hosted by the department. He said, 'it would not be possible to work without networking' and regarded networking and involvement in international projects as forms of support and trainings.

In addition, HoD6 said she managed to enhance her leadership learning by collaborating with three universities in Thailand and two other public universities in Malaysia. It was viewed as a commendable effort by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia to work with five different universities to establish Asian International [discipline-based] Consortium. Her past collaboration efforts enhanced international networking and she added 'that is when we (all five Asian leaders) conceived the idea of a [discipline-related] science consortium. I'm proud to say that in a way my contribution was in

terms of leading because I made the right decision at the right time. I think it is still a big achievement'. Developing learning networks has enabled the leaders to gain the first of knowledge, namely 'control knowledge' (Knight and Trowler, 2001).

Two of the same heads of departments were actively engaged in external as well as internal networking and collaboration at national and international levels involving student bodies, conference organisation and formation of research network to help generate profits for their departments and university. They also regarded this form of networking helped to build their confidence as middle leaders. It is evident eight other heads of departments were totally disengaged from all these networking and collaboration experiences since they took up their middle leadership roles.

### **5.1.2 Self-Engagement**

Other than professional leadership engagement through networking and collaboration, HoD4, HoD5 and HoD6 shared how their self-engagement in voluntary activities and early age leadership experiences supported them to learn and adapt their leadership roles skilfully at present. One HoD who worked as a senior lecturer for the past thirty years in the department commented:

Although I did not take up the leadership roles in the workplace, but I have done some leadership roles in my own community. I have taken care many things related to people events for years. I am in the church. I am the church leader. I lead many aspects of church life **(HoD4)**.

Apart from her involvement in church activities as a leader, she also mentioned her early leadership experiences when she was in high school. She stated 'From young, I have been the head prefect in the school. I was

also heading a lot of societies in the school. I think I have come to this position with the lot of leadership abilities'. As an implication, her previous engagement in school and community activities provided opportunity for self-understanding and that of others when faced with leadership challenges. Also, she said this opportunity helped her understand how she learnt to lead when she first took up this role and apply learning experience to lead in present and future.

Another head of department, HoD5 realised his middle leadership responsibilities are beyond departmental level. It was evident that his role has 'stretched' his responsibilities to reach the society outside of the university environment due to his middle leadership role. He said:

The job as a head of department is not only departmental level but the society is also expecting a lot from this department and my contribution... My child is in Year 3 now. I became the chairman of the parents and teachers' association in his school. The school was in a very bad shape because it's a very old primary school. There are so many things to handle in the school and I must compromise a lot to be engaged in that work. **(HoD5)**

It was apparent in his position as a head of department, he was able to balance his leadership role in the department as well as a community leader to help those in need especially the underprivileged. He has acquired a tacit knowledge by joining in the community of practice which made his middle leadership skills more effective. The HoD also gained recognition of achievement which was granted within the department and outside the university. His leadership and recognition clearly show his potential to exercise 'intellectual leadership'. He has learnt to become a strong middle leader by promoting the university to gain prestige and reputation and learnt to contribute as a community practitioner.

### 5.1.3 Leadership Value: Power in Middle Leadership

The notion of understanding, changing and adapting leadership values are evident from the findings which largely contributed to their learning and development as middle leaders. As middle leaders, all ten heads of departments are differently positioned amidst structural, power and professional relations. They interact with those they are positioned formally to lead, those they are positioned to act as leaders 'for', and those they are positioned alongside as fellow middle leaders (Branson et.al, 2016). The actions of one head of department indicated how she learnt to exercise her power rationally to deal with the situation by writing a disciplinary report against a staff. She pointed out:

I began to realise that some incidences were not my fault. Sometimes one of my staff would have made the mistake in in that situation I have to defend. I also must give justification. I also feel I should not get the person into trouble. Sometimes I feel sorry for them because some of my staff are in a lower level of educational background and position. I also realise if I highlighted their mistakes they will be punished severely. Sometimes I spend time thinking of wise ways of reporting these matters to the management. I must submit a report by providing facts. I should not lie in my reports. At the same time, it is very important the way I word it. I always try not to get that person into trouble. It is actually very easy to spread out the points and get the person into trouble. Wording the report carefully is also something that I have learnt as a leader **(HoD6)**.

This view resonates with Busher's (2003, p.3) view that leaders' awareness of self is constructed through their interactions with other people, developing a changing awareness of other people's needs and of themselves as other people perceive them. This is a good example of sense of collective efficacy and sense of meaningfulness to her work commitment as a transformational leader and she learnt to understand and endure the consequences of behaviours. Particularly, she restated that she tries not to get anyone in trouble.

The HoD4 felt being considerate in terms of assigning tasks after office hours as an important duty of a middle leader. As a woman leader, she learnt to be fair by understanding the circumstances of her staff. She considered this as an essential awareness and helps to maintain positive power relationship among her departmental staff. She explains:

The way one handles the department with men and the way it is handled with women is different. Women come with family matters, having kids, raising kids and running a home. They are more pressured. And this I can also relate to another critical incident when I had to find someone to go for an event at night. In this case I must consider because I know everyone, and I know who has a family to look after. This includes those with young children. I also need to see who stays where in terms of the distance. I need to find someone who lives near enough to attend the event. I also must make sure that they live very near to the campus and they don't have your children **(HoD4)**.

This gives an impression of the departmental or even the university culture. It shows her concerns for her staff and department by fostering organizational cultures that are hospitable and conducive to solve problems. She also portrays individually as a considerate leader who participate in more acculturation activities compared to other heads of departments which is exemplary in the higher educational institutions that should encourage more employment for women despite their family commitments. This is one of the best leadership learnings shared by this head of department as experienced during her headship through solving, risk-taking and experimentation.

#### **5.1.4 Leadership Value: Respect and Integrity**

Integrity was highlighted as a value learnt in the role as a head of department by one of them. The critical incident she indicated below shows how much she

valued integrity pertaining to departmental issues after she experienced the negative incident for revealing an issue. As a result, she learnt to respect and changed herself as a good listener and communicator (See Appendix G for Summary of Critical Incidents).

**Extract from Critical Incident 9: Final Year Student Project (HoD10)**

When I make any decision, as a head of department and learnt how to be unbiased in making decisions. I learnt to be diplomatic person. And I also learnt how to say no. Usually I am a kind of person who will not say no, and I accept everything. I learnt to say no these days. Listen to my staff first without telling anything immediately and then I present my point of view and finally I decide whether it's a yes or a no. I learnt to be a good listener. Another thing I learnt is to respect your staff in terms of any kind of confidential matters. I learnt to hold the trust that they have towards me. I think now I learnt how to do it. I also feel that gossiping is not healthy especially anything related to work.

The critical incident shared by this HoD has contributed abundantly to her leadership learning experience. She learnt that integrity is the key for middle leaders to be able to filter information without causing any tension or turbulence among departmental staff. She changed herself to become a good listener and bold leader by voicing out her disagreement which she was unable to do in the past.

**5.1.5 Leadership Learning: Self-Reflections**

Self-reflections were mentioned as an important 'tool' used to learn by rethinking of their actions taken in the past and future decision makings. These adaptations made through self-reflections have given positive



outcomes and three HoDs mentioned self-reflections as a helpful learning process. One head of department described her view:

I learn new things every day. I do reflections every day when I wake up. For the first three months after becoming the head of department, it was very crazy for me especially in this position. I have to learn to adapt everything. I didn't know anything. I used to tell most of my staff not to give up on me. They really understand my position and they became very supportive. After three months, when I made any mistakes, all the staff used to advise me by saying I am a new staff so never mind and they advised me to just try my best. After three months, I told myself that I am not a new head of department anymore. I stopped to seek for sympathy from people around me. I told myself that three months is enough for me as a training to become a head for this department. After three months, I decided to prove something in this position. I decided to carry out everything as professional as I can. Every day, when I wake up in the morning I tell myself to work with confidence and I didn't want people to look at me as though I am incapable of doing this job. I took that as a challenge for myself. This is how I motivate myself to become a better leader **(HoD10)**.

By reflecting upon her strengths and weaknesses, she was able to confidently perform her leadership roles and responsibilities. Her self-reflections were used as an inspiration and motivation for her to lead effectively and she continuously uses this method to learn, unlearn and relearn the role of successful middle leaders.

Another head of department shared the idea of self-reflections helped her to understand middle leadership roles and responsibilities better. Through her reflections she understood confrontation as the best way to identify a critical situation and this also helps to solve a problem without much delay. Critical incident 10 was recounted by HoD4 (See Appendix M). She stated the following thoughts on what she learnt:

One of the things that I know about myself is I do a lot of reflective matters knowing life because I am 57 this year. This makes me a more confident leader. So, I will tell my departmental staff to meet me personally. But initially when I was younger I never like to confront people. Now as a leader, I'm learning to confront. I still find it a bit uneasy sometimes but when I did the confrontation, it turned out quite

well. I like confrontation, but I think many people don't like confrontation **(HoD4)**

After this incident, the HoD was able to deduce her mistakes and learnt how important confrontation is to solve problems related to managing staffs' attitudes and not to rely on technology such as emails and mobile phones. From a staff who avoided confrontation in the past, now as a head of department she described how she learnt to confront. In relation to the critical incident she mentioned, she reacted harshly, and she changed her behaviour immediately after reflecting on her negative action. She said 'in such situations I need to calm down first. After the weekend, I came back to work on a Monday and I confronted staff B in the office. I am one of those who need to talk to people. I used to hate confrontation. This has been a good experience for me to learn to confront. I take this as part of my learning journey'.

One head of department shared how much she learnt from her PhD supervisors who inspired her and instilled initial leadership values by reflecting her good practices when she was pursuing her research degree. She stated:

I tend to recall my PhD days with my supervisor. I used to have guidance especially when I'm writing a paper for publication and now I am mostly on my own without much guidance. Sometimes, I remember how my supervisors guided me. I remember how my supervisors used to advise me. And I also learnt to let go when necessary. I think I have the stronghold which sort of help me handle this kind of situation as a leader. **(HoD6)**

It is evident from the quote above that she learnt to reflect on her past experiences as a PhD student as one of her learning curves to perform her leadership better in every situation.

Similarly, HoD10 also learnt to change her behaviour by using confrontation as a mean to manage people's negative attitudes. By incorporating this behaviour, she sensed that she had become a communicative leader. She intended to experiment the 'art' of confrontation to solve misunderstanding related to managing people.

#### **5.1.6 Leadership Learning Value: Job Delegation**

The question of delegation was stressed as an important value learnt during the leadership journey by two head of departments. They expressed how much they learnt from other staff when major tasks were delegated among other staff members. HoD9 said she learnt time and people management when duties were delegated fairly. In the same way, HoD10 mentioned:

In fact, I would let the department know that I would like to discuss issues about academic support staff and sometimes delegate the jobs. In this situation, I still supervise and see how they progress and I don't fully let go. Sometimes in my busy schedule I cannot do everything, so I delegate the job to another academic staff and they will be helped by support staff **(HoD4)**.

HoD9 shared similar views in relation to job delegation. She explained her reluctance to delegate tasks among departmental staff had caused her too much of job stress and often felt her administrative tasks were unbearable. She learnt that job delegation gave her more time to concentrate on other leadership responsibilities and these delegations gave others opportunity to learn together. This contributes to learning and learning relations with one another. Two heads of departments realised that they are equally responsible in seeking to enhance their own learning and that of their staff through job delegation. This is how one of the heads described her practice of job delegation:

I usually do a lot of administrative duties myself and I kind of feel reluctant to delegate these jobs to others. I know as a leader you must delegate. Now I have gradually started to delegate because it has started to take too much of my time. When I have so much of administrative work, whatever I can delegate I will try to delegate but not everything. I can't delegate to others some highly confidential duties **(HoD10)**.

### **5.1.7 Learning Leadership Value: Resilience**

HoD6 pointed out a specific critical incident which showed how she learnt to incorporate the leadership value of resilience. This incident was shared because she felt ill-treated by a fellow researcher who worked in a research project. She shared this incident which happened eight years ago when she was a new head of department. At present, she holds her current headship role as a head of department for the second tenure period (See Appendix M, Critical Incident 10 for complete incident).

#### **Extract from Critical Incident 10: Research Project (HoD6)**

After this incident, that's when I decided I know that I am much junior, so I began to spread my wings and started to collaborate with local scientists and researchers. I started to collaborate with a senior from the science faculty. She is a researcher in mushroom studies. I felt it was mutually beneficial to collaborate with her. I took this incident in a positive manner. I didn't want to have any kind of open war. I felt uneasy about this incident but eventually I took it positively and later established myself and got promoted. But before she retired, I was able to forgive her.

As an implication of the critical incident she experienced, the HoD was offended by the behaviour of the research collaborator. However, she was

able to overcome her sense of disappointment and developed resilience to double her research contribution. She carried out her research work actively with other researchers. She started collaborating with local and international research collaborators in [discipline-related] field. Eventually she established herself and got promoted. Resilience was identified as her key to success in both leadership and her research work.

### **5.1.8 Leadership Learning Value: Collegiality**

Collegiality is considered as one of the competing expectations inherent in the middle leader's role. This was evident explicitly among all ten heads of departments. This value has helped to navigate, negotiate and maintain relationships in the workplace. Heads of departments understand their collegial role to direct, guide and support departmental staff when necessary.

One of them commented:

I don't believe in dictatorship, so I always discuss with my academics. I always prefer to work as a group. I always try to discuss with my colleagues and work as a team. Sometimes I tell my staff that one day they will be taking over my position as a head. I encourage them to work together with me so when they take over the role as a head of department, they can perform better than what I have been doing **(HoD5)**.

This links to the ideas of middle leaders who are expected to show leadership in the development of collegial relations across departments that will support collective development of programme offerings, teaching and research within the department, and the development of the service component of academic work within and beyond the university (Branson et.al, 2016). This also indicates mutual trust and respect for colleagues.

HoD1 mentioned that having supportive colleagues had made her leadership performance better every year. She could cope with leadership problems by getting colleagues to support and that has helped to deal many departmental problems. Their mutual understanding between them contributed to conduct many successful events for the department and university. Because of their support, the head said she was willing to sacrifice her time to motivate her colleagues in the department to obtain a doctoral degree. Understanding colleagues' needs is an important leadership learning curve to meet the departmental goals collectively. This was implied as a 'formula' of success to run the department without depending heavily on the head of department but also give colleagues gradual opportunity to involve in shared leadership.

## **5.2 Engaging with Professional Leadership Development**

I can design the curriculum which I think is workable. In fact, coming up with this master's programme curriculum with zero knowledge, I think that has been a great training. I don't think I will be able to get this sort of training outside. And apart from that, sitting in this position allows me to obtain a lot of courses. From that, I learnt so much. And I also know these leadership courses are very expensive. Even public relations and courses relating to designing curriculum courses are very expensive.  
**(HoD10)**

As the above quote notes, professional leadership development is sorted highly by both experienced and aspiring heads of departments. All ten participants are aware of the transitions after participating in professional leadership courses. However, they viewed existing formal training courses are less relevant to their leadership needs. Besides, informal training is equally sought-after to equip themselves as effective middle leaders.

Based on heads of departments' reactions and responses to middle leadership appointment, job preparation/induction and expected roles and

responsibilities in Chapter 4, examining heads of departments' engagement in professional leadership development elucidated to what extent professional leadership development helped middle leaders to respond to more challenges and changes. From the findings, each head of department either took the initiative to develop themselves through self-development or he or she was instructed by the management to attend selected training sessions as 'in-service' leadership preparation after taking up their new role as head of department in place of getting 'pre-service' leadership preparation before holding this position. Participants shared two ways; formal and informal training which appeared to help them cope potential leadership challenges at the departmental and university levels.

### **5.2.1 Formal Training**

Nine out of ten participants attempted to access formal trainings as their choice of professional development. It was interesting to note that all ten participants value the opportunities to participate in formal leadership trainings although it is not mandatory for middle leaders in this institution despite their busy schedules. This is because they did not receive any formal leadership training prior to their appointment as HoDs. One HoD attended a training and commented:

Yes, I attended very short courses. They were internal courses in the university. I have learnt a lot from these courses, but I think I still need more. I have attended one for a week. And another one was for a month but with intervals in between the courses. These courses are offered by the Academic Enhancement and Leadership Development Centre (ADEC). I am a kind of person who prefer to go for both formal and informal training but. **(HoD10)**

HoD4 stated she has been attending many leadership courses in the past on her own through community work and she had to pay for attending one course

in Singapore without any financial support from the department or university. This shows lack of funding and allocation for professional development as such.

One of them highlighted specific training needs. She took up the leadership appointment without any formal training and said:

Personally, I think sometimes I lack the skills or knowledge to handle some complex issues. Sometimes, it is beyond medicine. I am lacking in terms of handling managerial roles, and budgeting. I can't get my head around it. That is one impeding factor. If I can improve myself in those skills, I would find my job much easier. **(HoD8)**

Two specific training needs were expressed by two HoDs. One suggested for training related to preparing and managing departmental budgets and another HoD pointed out the need to understanding human resources policies.

HoD1 explained regarding leadership training which are not exclusively for heads of departments, but such courses are offered for other senior management members too. Even though these training are designed for the senior management team, the HoD gained some knowledge from the training.

When I first took up the position in 2014, there was no specific training provided. Now, from time to time, I am invited to attend leadership training...These training courses are usually participated by a mixed group of people such as deputy deans and heads of departments in the university. It involves auditing and recruitment information. I think these training courses are good enough. **(HoD1)**

None of the participants perceived formal training courses as irrelevant. HoDs who are unfamiliar with the middle leadership roles and responsibilities find formal training courses supporting their leadership performance. According to one head of department, leadership training courses offered in the university are targeted for deans and deputy deans and no specific trainings are designed to meet the needs of the middle leaders.



Some courses are made compulsory and other courses are attended willingly by heads of departments. For example:

I think this leadership course really taught me how to be a good leader because I didn't know anything about leadership in the beginning. Some of these courses we don't go voluntarily but we go because we want it. Some of the courses, we are forced to go. I think it has worked out quite well for me. For example, I learnt how I can manage my work, how to be a good supervisor and how to design curriculum so I think it really worked. **(HoD9)**

By personal choice, the HoD4 admitted her preference to attend external training courses to develop her leadership skills. She took the initiative to attend training courses abroad without getting any fund from the university. She wanted to seek leadership knowledge without relying on university-based trainings. She said 'I have been attending many leadership courses in the past on my own through community work and I remember attending one course in Singapore. I paid my own money'. Though training courses promote personal, departmental and university growth, the HoD4 was not supported financially to participate in formal trainings.

Clearly, attending formal training was not only considered to benefit self-improvement but HoD5 said it engenders collaborative learning among members of the faculty. The comments from the HoD also indicated the benefits for other departmental members especially through knowledge sharing. He enthusiastically said:

If you have seen my curriculum vitae, you would have noticed that I am one of the lecturers who attended a lot of courses. After I came back from the UK, I noticed a lot of changes coming. So, I used these opportunities to learn from courses especially in terms of IT and latest teaching methodologies. I think it's important to adapt to the changes. I know some of my colleagues don't attend these courses, so I will attend and share my knowledge with them. **(HoD5)**

Attendance is not compulsory for workshops and short-term trainings for middle leaders. A newly appointed HoD was eager to involve in trainings as part of her professional development. However, she assumed leadership courses were only available for people in senior management and those courses are unsuitable for middle leaders.

I'm not sure if there is any form of seminar workshop or courses for someone who's in my position but I know there are courses for the deans. I'm not sure if the university has any allocation for people in my position to attend course. If the university has something for me I'll be glad to attend. At least with some formal background, I may know how to approach it differently. I would think that anyone in my position should go through a formal training. At least a short programme and I think the most difficult will be to handle the human resource related issues. **(HoD3)**

One head of department was dissatisfied with the way she struggled to lead her department due to lack of formal training offered to her from the initial stage of her middle leadership role. She said:

Looking back, I never really was prepared. I was not sent for management courses or guided on how things are done. That is probably the most important thing for a head. Other peoples' input is fine but when previous heads were leading, situations were different from what they are now. I think it would have been better to prepare me in this position by sending me for courses or training. **(HoD8)**

From HoDs' views, evidently the university management has not made any formal training courses customised for new HoDs as mandatory to attend. HoDs can choose any internal or external courses they wish to attend to prepare them to deal with their roles and responsibilities. Initially, four HoDs were unenthusiastic in taking up this role as discussed previously but all ten of them showed their willingness to be trained formally if the courses can meet their expectations and needs.

The finding is striking because a formal leadership training was highlighted by HoD5. He mentioned that he received invitation to attend a training course offered by the government and it was organised by an academy of leadership. However, this was not raised by the nine other heads of departments. Although all ten heads of department are from the university, only one head of department attended the one-week formal training organised by the Ministry of Higher Education through the Higher Education Leadership Academy in Malaysia also known as Akademi Kepimpinan Pendidikan Tinggi (AKEPT). It is important to note that middle leaders who participated in this study are nurturing to lead towards a shared goal and mission for the university. However, not all the ten participants are aware or invited to attend specific training courses to equally develop their leadership skills collectively.

### **5.2.2 Informal Training**

Despite attending formal training courses, three out of ten HoDs sought out for alternative preferences since there were no mandatory and relevant training courses to prepare them for the role. They sought for informal training to develop their leadership skills through hands-on and practical problem-solving skills. The following is an example of perception related to informal training needs:

In my opinion, the practical situations are more important than trainings. It is personal practice and how we fine tune with staff in the department. As a head of department, I need to know the knowledge related to policies and administration, however the personal experiences at workplace with the staff is more important for me than the formal trainings. **(HoD2)**

The idea of learning from leadership mistakes was reflected by one respondent. She emphasised the significance of learning accidentally and

incidentally from leadership routine. The HoD10 stated 'I'm a kind of person who prefer to go for both formal and informal trainings. But, I prefer informal more. This is because I think, the trial and error are always the best way to learn'. Informal trainings such as learning from predecessors and academic peers were highly regarded as effective by three other HoDs. They are expecting to improvise leadership skills through mentorship trainings. Particularly, HoD8 commented "My leadership learning was based on ad hoc and finding out from friends and other heads of departments on how to deal with certain matters". She admitted:

I do ask around. I ask from prior head, the infection control team and office staff. The secretary in my department has been working here for more than thirty years and she knows her role as the secretary for the head of department. Certain things she would be the best person for me to ask". **(HoD8)**

HoDs are expected to fulfil the mission and goals of the department. Therefore, not having formal training was seen positively by the HoD10. She considered this informal training as a learning curve. She claimed 'In fact, coming up with this master's programme with zero knowledge has been a great training. I don't think I will be able to get this sort of training outside...And I also know these leadership courses are very expensive'. Adding to that, she perceives her experience has provided opportunities to perform effectively. She also stated her willingness to pass on her experience to her successors by becoming a mentor.

One needs to have experience. The person must be familiar with what the department deals with. It was really a struggle for me to take up this position. I started the role without any experience. It felt like I was thrown into the ocean. I'm sitting in this position with a lot of guidance now. I am willing to guide my successors in terms of documentation and what is required by the department. **(HoD9)**

Clearly, mentoring was considered as a means of gaining people knowledge (Knight and Trowler, 2001) as mentioned by HoD5. He believes mentorship can help to advocate and develop leadership. In contrast, HoD6 had to go through self-induction failing to get any mentoring support from her predecessor which gave her the opportunity to learn incidentally and accidentally from critical leadership experiences. Notably, predecessors have undergone similar or more complex leadership challenges during their leadership and they could strongly relate and understand leadership problems faced by the aspiring middle leaders. These present heads of departments are expecting to benefit from predecessors to some extent through guidance and support.

One head of department shared her bitter experience when she approached her predecessor for assistance. She said:

I didn't get any form of support or help from my previous head of department because he was also surprised when I was appointed as a head. I can see that in the first month after I was appointed as a head, we did not communicate well. Before the previous head of department left there was still and finished work. So, when I had to finish where he stopped, and I asked him for help. All he told was "You are the new head now and you can finish it". This has made our relationship slightly bitter. I decided to get it done by myself. **(HoD10)**

Although the support from predecessors can foster collegiality and help to set clear directions for the department through strategic and succession planning by working collaboratively, only two of the respondents mentioned support from predecessors which are HoD7 and HoD9. The other eight were left to 'sink or swim' throughout their department leadership role.

As an outcome, no one out of the ten heads of departments shared positive responses when asked what kind of training and development they received

for their current role. Most typical responses received were regarding informal training and development they were involved in learning during the process of 'leading on job'. One head of department echoed:

I can design the curriculum which I think is workable. In fact, coming up with this master's programme curriculum with zero knowledge, I think that has been a great training. I don't think I will be able to get this sort of training outside. And apart from that, sitting in this position allows me to obtain a lot of courses. From that, I learnt so much. And I also know these leadership courses are very expensive. Even public relations and courses relating to designing curriculum courses are very expensive.  
**(HoD9)**

As the above quote notes, professional leadership development is sorted highly by both experienced and aspiring heads of departments. However, the courses are regarded as unaffordable and mostly not paid by the university. All ten participants are aware of the positive outcome of participating in professional courses. Yet, informal trainings are equally sought-after to equip themselves as effective middle leaders which suits their affordability and time preference.

The significance of involving in both informal and formal trainings were clearly mentioned by the participants according to their preferences. One important element not mentioned by any participant is the process of induction. There appears to be no induction for newly appointed HoDs despite it enables a newcomer to become a fully effective member of an organisation as quickly and as easily as possible (Trethowan and Smith, 1989, p.1). Without such provision such as training courses and induction to learn about the 'culture' of the place of work and people, heads of departments are left to deal with all leadership challenges by learning 'on the job'.

### **5.3 Summary of the Key Findings**

This chapter provided the findings of ten heads of departments in a university through semi-structured interviews and critical incidents of their choices to find out what they have learnt in this leadership journey and how their engagement in various leadership learning and development impacted their career as middle leaders. From the evidence, it is evident all heads of department learnt and developed themselves in a conventional way. With various background and experiences, all of them learnt leadership at different phases in their career. It was interesting to note, how these heads of departments had to adapt themselves to self-induction without much introduction given by the university to help them cope with their new roles and work culture.

Overall, all ten heads of departments felt undergoing specific formal training to master leadership skills would be an added advantage, but formal training was not considered mandatory. They understand the importance of having a mentor or predecessors to guide them in the 'infancy' stage of their leadership. Thus, heads of department were not receiving internal and external support to the fullest to ensure effective leadership from the university. Mentoring was highlighted in the findings as essential for new heads of departments to help them orientate and adapt themselves to the role. These are part of efforts to implement strategic planning for each department by the university to prepare effective leadership to meet the mission and vision of the university.

They also viewed learning leadership through trial and error or accidental learning and incidental learning gave them more room not only to reflect but also improve their leadership actions as opposed to attending formal trainings.

At present, most heads of departments are also learning leadership through the positive and negative outcomes they gained based on the critical incidents they face in a daily basis. Many critical incidents which they shared during the data collection phase and those occurred in the past have transformed themselves into better leaders. The interviewing approach by getting the participants to recall and share their actions and reactions through critical incidents, gave them opportunities to understand their past actions and reactions to the challenges they faced through self-reflections, adapting to positive values and changing their leadership thoughts.

The various roles and responsibilities entrusted on the heads of departments demanded them to work in a collegial environment, but collegiality was not strong. They tend to struggle when they work independently. Shared responsibilities among colleagues were regarded as effective. By doing so, job delegation was an alternative to reduce the high demand of work particularly for newly appointed heads of departments who struggle to adapt to their roles.

By and large, there seems to be lacking in support system particularly by not having a strong network of support within other departmental heads. A higher ranked leader as a 'critical friend' or 'mentor' in the university was absent in this context. Heads of departments indicated implicitly that they work independently without having any work-related support to deal with the challenges as highlighted in Chapter 4.

The following Chapter 6 discusses key issues which emerged from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 in relation to relevant literature by adapting a conceptual framework of this study.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion**

#### **6. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the final output of data collection and analysis. The discussion of findings is presented by examining new and inherent challenges experienced by participants and their leadership learning developments which underpins on the relational approach. The multi-directional and multi-faceted middle leaders' relationships and relations are used to theorise and understand leadership challenges and expected changes by synthesising the findings with emergent themes from the data.

The key emergent themes from the findings in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 resulted in several commonalities and differences among participants from the relational lens. These commonalities and differences will be discussed in three parts which are 1) structural and power relations, 2) trust-credibility relations and 3) learning relations between heads of departments and 'receivers' of these relations such as senior academics, peer academics and non-academics. This is a conceptual framework adapted from Branson et al., (2016) in their study and I used it to fit relational approach in my context of study to understand the complexity of middle leadership from a relational lens.

#### **6.1 Structural, Power Relationship and Relational Expectations**

The findings of my study show that middle leaders' role in this study is fundamentally and unquestionably relational (Branson et al., 2016) and participants are collectively attempting to balance their complex roles as subordinates (non-academics), an equal (peers) and a superior (senior

academics) based on situationally specific experiences in the department. Relationship is undeniably the heart of middle leaders' roles and responsibilities which can aid to understand the complexity in depth. Thus, with reference to the three kinds of challenges; roles, people, departmental and operations as revealed in Chapter 4 and leadership learning and development in Chapter 5, HoDs' relationship with senior academics, peer academics and non-academics illuminated valuable insights in this study.

### **6.1.1 Heads of Departments and Senior Academics**

Heads of departments are answerable and responsible to senior academics such as dean and deputy dean of their departments. They are grouped among senior management staff and one of their important tasks is to implement policies which are often directives from senior management and the university's central administration and management teams. This is an upward structural relation and heads of departments play their roles as the 'agent of communication' between those from upward and downward positions. It is evident from the findings of this study that middle leaders' relationship is multi-directional. Although, participants experienced many challenging situations, this study shows that they were hesitated to draw senior academics' attention to seek for solutions. The upward hierarchy which positioned deans and deputy deans above the position of a head of department seems to restrict heads of departments to share and solve departmental problems collectively. It was clear from the study that priority to seek support during turbulent times was not strong between the heads of departments and the senior academics in this study such as HoD5, HoD8 and HoD10. Meetings between middle leaders and senior academic leaders could help resolve many departmental

issues but this was absent among the participants. Having taken the new leadership responsibilities, the heads of departments (HoD5, HoD8 and HoD10) and they did not get the guidance from senior management to ensure they are adapting well in their new roles. The dean is more or less a gatekeeper for the departmental heads getting up to speed (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992) and as a gatekeeper, the dean or deputy dean could guide the newly appointed head of department initially so that heads of departments can gradually adapt their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, role certainty can emerge and aid newcomers to develop strategies to build trust with their deans and deputy deans to avoid role complexity as presented in Chapter 4 (See Section 4.3.1). In other words, the structural power and relationship between heads of departments and senior academics indicate a barrier in working relationship. Clearly, responses from HoD5, HoD8 and HoD10 show their attempt to seek for guidance from senior academics at the initial stage of their leadership but no support received from deans and deputy deans. HoD2 and HoD7's negative experiences suggest HoDs failed to receive any form of support and guidance from senior academics when HoDs were desperate in decision making. Due to the structural hierarchy, both decisions made by HoDs were misconceived and declined. In terms of decision making, although middle leaders are a source of leadership, they are institutionally powerless as found by Blackmore and Sachs (2000). Relational expectations from senior academics such as deans and deputy deans are highly expected by heads of departments but requires strengthening to provide chairs and deans with specialized professional development (Boyko and Jones, 2010).

### **6.1.2 Heads of Departments and Peer Academics**

The structural dimension between heads of departments and his/her peer academics is entirely different compared to the senior academics. It works as a horizontal or parallel dimension between both parties. They execute 'peer leadership' roles to their peer academics in terms of other shared responsibilities such as teaching and publishing research work. As revealed through few critical incidents mentioned by heads of departments (HoD2, HoD4, HoD5, HoD7, HoD8 and HoD10) managing subversive peers has caused disenchantment between heads of departments and peer academics. One interesting point in this study is many of the academic peers of the heads of departments had taken up middle leadership roles in the past, yet in some circumstances, academic peers failed to guide and support the present heads of departments (HoD5, HoD7, HoD8 and HoD10) similar to the experiences they encountered with senior academics. This weak relationship has caused imposition between heads of department and peer academics.

In order to legitimise "positional powers of the leaders", heads of departments require support from academic peers and superiors. There is an overall unanimity from all ten participants that good relationship is the key to congenial department climate. Thus, this sentiment aligns with the sentiments of those in Hellowell and Hancock's study (2001), that establishing good relationships with members of staff was seen as a priority. Without good relationship, many participants viewed themselves as powerless head of department.

Many participants spoke on the relationship between their positional power and how it affected their sense of agency particularly among their peers. It

was rather clear that heads of departments had considerable 'personal' power at their disposal because they were dealing with academic peers who were in the same career trajectories. This was determined by both Busher (2003) and Usher (1995) in their studies who observed power relation is directly related to heads of departments' sense of self because they were strongly aware that they could not use their power if they were to remain successful leaders and to be perceived as credible by their colleagues. This is in line with Middlehurst's (1993) view that the influence, authority and power of the head of faculty comes from a variety of sources.

This relationship is closely linked to the concept of collegiality which was explained by heads of departments. As mentioned by Knight and Trowler (2001, p.45), 'Good leading at departmental level is naturally distributed across the workgroup' as opposed to being formally dispersed. There was no plurality of responses among my participants with regards to strong collegial relationship although past studies suggest most leaders sought to win the hearts and minds of staff through collegiality (Hellawell and Hancock, 2001; Knight and Trowler, 2001; Muijs, et al., 2006; Rhodes et al., 2007).

The findings also show that one of the significant leadership roles was decision making. Participants dealt with many departmental levels of decision making and it was found that decisions were often made by the discretion of the heads without the influence of collegiality or 'distributed' leadership. The findings were inconsistent with MacBeath and MacDonald (2000) who argued that by involving staff in decision making, social cohesion and collegiality are promoted. Thus, without strong collegial relationship, heads of departments' progress and personal power are deemed ineffective. It is crucial to nurture

the collegial culture in the department to ensure departmental leadership tasks are successfully carried out.

Evidence from the findings clearly indicates that collegiality works best if relationships between peer academics are built in meetings, discussions, departmental projects, events and research collaboration works. It is important for morale that collegial processes should be retained wherever possible' (Bolton, 2000, p.10). By doing so, leaders know their constituents well and that they understand how to both manage their day-to-day needs as well as lead them to ensure that the institution can achieve its goals (Denholm, 2015). Yet, this study points out the limited collegial relationship between peer academics and heads of departments.

### **6.1.3 Head of Department and Non-Academics**

The structural dimension between heads of department and non-academics such as clerical, administrative and technical staff is top-down. Heads of departments often deal with a lot of administrative tasks and non-academic staff assist them particularly to meet the demand of online management system, departmental administrative and paperwork-related tasks. Findings from this study shows non-academics and heads of departments were challenged to navigate and negotiate their relationships.

### **6.2 Trust-Credibility Relationship and Relational Expectations**

Personal credibility is founded upon mutual integrity because others must be able to trust you, and you must be able to trust them (Bauman,1992 and Branson, 2009). The findings revealed trust-credibility relationship was not

entirely strong among all ten heads of departments with others in the department.

### **6.2.1 Trust-Credibility between New and Former Heads of Departments**

One interesting point came through transparently in terms of lack of trust and credibility between the new and former heads of departments. The official role 'take over' procedure from the former to new heads of departments was a neglected process as described by all ten heads of departments. There seem to be an absence of handover meeting. There was no meeting with the incoming heads of departments, except HoD7 to officially handover and highlight important documents or actions to pass on the learning process from former heads of departments to the newly appointed heads of departments. On one hand, it was evident that five out of ten predecessors of HoD1, HoD5, HoD8, HoD9 and HoD10 failed to offer guidance and training for the newly appointed HoDs as soon as their tenure period ended despite good relationship between them. Also, on the other hand, newly HoDs did not request to be trained from their predecessors as soon as they took over the headship roles although they emphasised they need to have mentoring support (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2 Informal Training).

The official handover sessions could be an effective action in learning from the predecessors which would help heads of departments to fit into middle leadership roles with ease by understanding what they need to know about the complexity of this job. From participants' interview responses, there was no presence of shared learning relationship between former and present heads of department. Shared learning can hone middle leaders' skills and prepare them to face the "unexpected circumstances" without much frustration to lead the

departments. In contrast, former heads of departments lost trust on new heads of departments due to their lack of experience, less educational qualifications and avoided guiding the newcomers as mentioned by a few participants due to ego clashes.

Many heads of departments recalled both positive and negative experiences of how they were treated by former heads of departments, which both encouraged and discouraged present heads of departments at the initial stage of their leadership careers. Participants felt they were able to adapt middle leadership well with the support of former heads of department because it resulted in changing their ineffective leadership practices and they claimed to modify their thinking. They clearly admitted having the respect and encouragement to proceed with their leadership positions driven by extra motivation.

Participants also indicated their admiration for former heads of departments whose attributes were recognised as exemplary and they admitted that they often contacted their former heads of departments when they needed solution for critical problems. This was very well illustrated in an interview with one head of department who spoke about his former head of department whom he considered a role model and gained a lot of leadership knowledge before he retired from his academic post. Notably, in this study, former heads of departments are only referred to solve critical problems for short-term assistance but not as a continuous point of contact by heads of departments in many circumstances.



## **6.2.2 Trust-Credibility between Head of Department and Deans/Deputy Deans**

As indicated in Chapter 4, (See Section 4.4.1) participants viewed ego and superiority complex have escalated among senior academics which gives a clue that senior academics have less or no trust on their successors. In middle leadership trust between heads and departments and deans is a fundamental value. As Middlehurst (1993) quoted 'Leadership means having the authority and status to impose one's views on the department and know that the department accepts you as a leader because you are who you are....' In terms of middle leadership recruitment process, deans and/or deputy deans are among important interview panels who initially nominate middle leaders for their respective departments. Ideally, trust into heads of departments is expected to be established since the process of nomination and expected to continue albeit confirmation of recruitment until their role is terminated. The findings from this study prove heads of departments were not entirely supported by deans/deputy deans during their turbulent times.

There was a form of detachment after heads of departments were appointed and lack of continuous feedback from their superiors to guide them from time to time. Hancock and Hellawell (2003) found that the middle managers they interviewed agreed, performing effectively demanded an awareness of how the administrative level above them thought about situations. This notion is also agreed in a previous study that determined the significance of new hires requiring information from supervisors in order to figure out their organizations and themselves (Louis, 1980; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Therefore, relationship of superiors can support heads of departments in reducing

ambiguity, and 'generally making things easier' for newcomers (Pinder & Schroeder, 1987, p.340).

Thus, leaders' developmental feedback as found in the work of Klein, Fan, and Preacher (2006) would support in addressing major role challenges found in my such as role conflicts and role ambiguities. This will ensure how well heads of departments are doing in their job and supports Katz's (1980) perspective that newcomers require ongoing information to construct a view of their new employment situation and how they are to operate within it.

Moreover, key people within organizations hold vast influence on how newcomers come to figure out their role (Louis,1980). Therefore, having credible leaders' developmental feedback from key players such as deans and deputy deans to increase the level of trust-credibility relationship between them is vital. Thus, frequent leaders' developmental feedback addressing ambiguity among new department chairs is purposeful and useful (Lurie & Swaminathan, 2009). This feedback is equally necessary for seasoned heads of department.

Regardless of new or experienced heads of department, their level of supports may vary. Therefore, deans/deputy deans can prioritise feedback for newcomers to give more room for cognitive space so that role uncertainties do not take root among new heads of departments. In other words, new heads of departments can develop better leadership skills through feedback for building trust with their superiors to shore up their successors.

### **6.2.3 Trust-Credibility between Head of Department and Peer Academics**

A lateral or horizontal relationship did not strongly influence the heads of departments in my study due to the problem of managing peer academics as stated in Chapter 4 (See Section 4.4.2). Although it is a strong form of support which can provide collective support between fellow heads of department from different departments and disciplines, this is also an effective strategic development to support collegiality among different departments within the university as a support system. The findings show sense of scepticism or lack of trust in delegating departmental tasks among peer academics. Moreover, without delegating and trusting a fellow academic with task completion, adds up increased workload for heads of department. Having trust-credibility among departmental peer academics, various disciplines and even those from external organisations holding similar middle leadership roles can share their expertise and enhance the work quality to meet the vision, mission of the departmental explicitly and the university's aspirations collectively. This is in close accordance with Busher's (2003) view that leaders' awareness is constructed through their interaction with other people and through conscious reflection they can develop a changing awareness of other people's needs.

### **6.2.4 Trust-Credibility between Head of Department and Non-Academics**

#### **6.2.4.1 Administrative and Technical Staff**

One similar point highlighted by all ten respondents in my study was regarding their administrative and technical assistance. Although many heads of departments mentioned that they had relationship issues with senior member of staff in the previous sections of this chapter, 9 out of 10 HoDs had no complaints in terms of working relationship with non-academic staff. These

were shared through positive responses and critical incidents (See Section 4.4.3).

Support staff were often considered as unofficial mentors by heads of departments who guided them with administrative tasks when heads of departments were 'drowning' to manage the unfamiliar tasks because they failed to receive trust from senior and peer academics. Occasionally, the heads of departments felt as if they were 'shadowing' experts in the field of administration and management who shared their valuable knowledge. Thus, heads of departments felt having knowledgeable and dedicated administrative staff is one of the strengths for running the department successfully without any leadership mishaps. Hence, relationship and relational expectations among non-academics were stronger as opposed to those on the upward (senior academics) and parallel (peer academics) structural relations.

#### **6.2.4.2 Family Members and Friends**

Evidently, family members such as spouse and brothers and friends were often consulted by my participants to share their leadership problems before findings their peer academics to either solve problems or ask for suggestions. They were consulted for emotional support. Although heads of departments are more inclined to consult friends and family members when they face any leadership challenges as found in this study, participants also recognise the limitation of this family and friends network support. Participants were aware that this is not an ideal friendship which can help them to learn or perform leadership effectively because family members and friends are not academics or middle leaders. Limited information and informal advice are given to heads of departments by family members and friends. The findings from Podolny and

Baron's (1997) study does not suggest family members and friends outside the academic settings, but they highlighted ideal friendship network within academic settings. This friendship network can provide social support and a sense of identity and belonging and participants in my study have no dense network of strong relationships in the academic settings although such a network is likely to convey consistent social cues.

On one hand, participants were depending on family members and friends for emotional support but on the other hand, it was notable that the friendship network among newcomers and their peers in the department within their similar age groups were gradually developing stronger social network.

### **6.3 Learning Relationship and Relational Expectations**

A study by Floyd and Dimmock (2011, p.396) described three types of heads of department. A 'jugglers' tend to enjoy being head of department, with some even aspiring to higher and more senior level leadership and management positions in future. The 'copers' were determined to remain in the role and did not appear to particularly enjoy being in the position while the 'strugglers' felt the heads of departments' experience was too challenging, even unfulfilling and negative they were consequently considering a change in job and role, or even a change in career. The findings of my study also found three types of heads of departments and interestingly, all three types of heads of departments showed keen interest in learning to become better leaders. Individually, heads of departments could evaluate themselves as 'strugglers' and/or 'jugglers' and/or 'copers' that promotes learning relationship and relations predominantly. Through active learning relationships, heads of

departments can utilise the opportunity to learn from and with others who are positioned in a top, bottom or equal levels.

A study by Lave and Wenger's (1991) confirms the significance of learning relationship by introducing the notion of legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice. The notion refers to a relational model of learning which benefits novice middle leaders who are privy to the practices of more experienced middle leaders and to the artefacts/culture of the faculty. Through continuous participation in those practices and use of the artefacts/culture, heads of departments are expected to become more expert themselves. The idea of learning from colleagues as a resource was also found discussed by Luckin, (2008) who stated all heads of departments can become 'ecology of resources' to learn for self-improvement as well as develop others in learning relations.

### **6.3.1 Learning to Develop Oneself**

From the findings of my study, motivation among novice heads of departments was lower compared to more experienced heads of department. Lack of self-preparatory was one of the contributing factors which challenged them negatively. More experienced heads of departments (HoD3, HoD4, HoD5, HoD6 and HoD7) managed to cope critical incidents effectively as opposed to newcomers (HoD1, HoD2, HoD8, HoD9 and HoD10) because experienced heads of departments initiated to learn. The initiation to prepare and learn to meet convoluted challenges is paramount so it was clear that less effort was taken by novice heads of departments for this reason. Also emphasised by Schön (1983) and Day (2003) who suggest that the experience happens first and then the learner reflects on it. This came through clearly in my findings

that five experienced heads of departments were often evaluating their leadership actions and reactions through self-reflections to ensure they were leading effectively.

Although the presence of 'self-actualisation' was mainly apparent among five heads of department, others were involved in different forms of learning relation through collaboration, networking, short training courses and volunteered for departmental related activities. Examples of responses and critical incidents are provided in Chapter 5 (See Section 5.1.5). Thus, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action identified by Schön (1983) are aiding in the process of leadership learning to develop oneself.

It is apparent that few heads of departments go through some form of initiation and development phases in the learning process, but these involvements are wholly their willingness for self-development. With such involvements, they would be able to overcome disorientation and unforeseen roles in their leadership practices.

Apart from that, the findings of my study also proved that individual heads of departments started their self-learning even before they were appointed in the headship position. A few heads of departments were acting heads of department, programme coordinators and programme leaders for their departments. According to Knight and Trowler (2001), they referred to this form of self-learning as 'on the job' learning. This clearly resonates with the responses from few leaders in my study who equipped themselves to lead earlier on in their career such without having formal leadership roles.

### **6.3.2 Learning to Develop Others**

The learning relations work two ways for heads of departments with considerable amount of 'self-knowledge'. They tend to can work effectively with others. All ten middle leaders in this study were consciously aware of the impact of how they had learnt to modify their behaviour in order to create productive working relationships with their peers and subordinates. Some shared instances of supporting their colleagues to complete doctoral studies with constant feedback and guidance and others were giving opportunities by extending part-time employment contract to develop their colleagues' teaching skills. It is notable that some heads of departments allocated after office-hours to work on cultural projects, marketing and promotion, and facilitated departmental staff by organising international and local student activities and conferences.

This has allowed heads of departments to appreciate the collaborative work, the context, the team and their personal strengths and weaknesses as a communicator. Moreover, 'successful leaders manage relationships by knowing when to empathize or get personal and when to step back to keep people focused on the organization's goals' (Goffee & Jones, 2009, p.3). From a relational leadership perspective, this leadership learning is a knowledge as socially constructed and socially distributed, not accumulated or stored by individuals and certain understanding of leadership emerges (Uhl-Bien, 2005).

This encouraging work relation provides heads of departments a combination of experiences, practice, coaching, reflection and conversation informs self-knowledge as suggested by O'Mahoney and Matthews (2003) and Johnson



(2002) and nurture their colleagues and to maintain their departments' effectiveness.

A few heads of departments expected to learn from senior staff and predecessors by on-going mentorship as part of their induction. It was indicated by Knight and Trowler (2001) mentoring as a means of gaining people knowledge. In this research, which concurs with Johnson's (2002) findings, my participants spoke of 'subject method expert' who can act as mentors due to their invaluable advice and sharing of experiences. It was also something that most leaders spoke of wanting more of and is consistent with Smith's (2007) findings.

As the middle leaders in my study develop their leadership skills, mentors take on a more significant role in influencing and shaping the leaders (Coleman et.al, 2002). Mentors are expected to play different roles in the learning process of middle leaders such as 'coaches', 'counselling' and 'critical friends. Participants in my study highlighted significant people whom they met before they took up middle leadership roles. They had given encouragement to take on higher roles and in HoDs overall development of subject expertise and leadership development. However, as Coleman (2002) found in her study, only a handful claimed to have someone they formally refer as a mentor while their early career mentors were mostly senior colleagues (not from leadership background), PhD supervisors and administrative staff.

Similarly, Johnson's (2002) findings provided confirmatory evidence of the importance of these mentors. One of his participants shared his experience when he was expected to be a mentor for newly appointed leaders. It was evident that of the newcomers would have liked a mentor and mentors were

valued for sharing their knowledge and experience. Thus, it is essential for participants in my study to be supported by mentors as part of their learning support needs which is highly relational.

### **6.3.3 Departmental and Institutional Learning**

Institutional learning is the implication of how middle leaders utilised the learning relationship by developing themselves and others. Institution or organisation can utilise and support HoDs through professional development groups. My study revealed that experienced heads of departments were willing to share their knowledge and enhance their skills by attending external courses. However, courses directly relevant to heads of departments were not offered by the university. The sense of awareness of collective potential, bringing generative discrepancies, dissonance and critique (Branson et al.,2016, p.140) to gain a shared knowledge through a professional community of heads of departments was not practised by my participants. It links to the idea of working out of the relational support from other community of academics. The potential of 'subject method expert' in middle leadership remained untapped in this study.

Therefore, the institutional learning is an important relation to support heads of departments with preparatory and mandatory developmental training apart from what they can receive from self-learning and collegial relationships. This environment for learning and serendipitous sharing of information, (Peetigrew, 1991, p.811) was not created by the university to give heads of departments exchange similar challenges they face and learn from each other's leadership problems. This would be considered as a mutually supportive group that

allows heads of department to experience significant information sharing from which they can benefit “along physical, social, affective and cognitive dimensions” (Fisher et. al, 2007).

This mutual support group is a powerful learning relationship which can strengthen their relationship, create awareness of roles and responsibilities of middle leaders and draw on new knowledge by sharing leadership stories and critical leadership incidents’ in a more informal way at departmental level or in a more formal way if the university leadership centre can organise as mandatory monthly meetings.

On one hand, many heads of departments preferred informal trainings which is ‘learning while leading’ through trial and errors on day-to-day basis. This concurs with Marsick and Watkins’ (1992, p.7) accidental and incidental learning processes preferred by participants of my study. (See Chapter 2, Section 2.5).

However, heads of departments in my study emphasised the need and willingness to attend formal middle leadership training which the university has not offered a course exclusively for heads of departments. Having different challenges and job expectations to meet, most participants commented that they had to attend courses with irrelevant course contents and the courses were mainly aimed at deans and deputy deans.

The similar responses were echoed by participants in Knight and Trowler’s (2001) study. Middle leader’s specific needs should be taken into account for the training to be appropriate and acceptable to them (Knight and Trowler (2001), Aziz et al. (2005) and Johnson’s (2002).

Underpinning the relational lens to scrutinise both research questions; research question one which attempted to examine HoDs' perceptions on their roles and responsibilities while research question two was to examine their leadership learning needs and preparation. As an outcome of this attempt, three new findings emerged clearly apart from what have been discussed above. The new findings of this study are (1) support system (2) ego conflicts and superiority complex and (3) building and sustaining emotional resilience.

Firstly, support system in terms of training needs specifically tailored for heads of departments were not designed such as induction, mentoring, succession planning and continuous professional development courses. Although specific courses for heads of departments can increase role certainty and role confidence among newly appointed heads of departments, such training were not designed to meet their managerial and leadership responsibilities. The need for mentoring middle leaders is crucial because they felt 'like thrown into the ocean' and found themselves either 'sinking' and 'swimming' to perform their routine of middle leadership roles and responsibilities.

All ten HoDs spoke about challenges linked to roles, people and departmental and operations. From both critical incidents and interviews, it was notable that support system within the department and university members was not strong. The possible solutions of handling their leadership challenges are through a strong support system as their reference point. Three HoDs pointed out that their 'shoulders to cry on' are mostly their friends, siblings, spouse and people outside the university parameters during the interviews. This group of support system outside the university were deemed less effective since they were unaware of leadership 'grievances'. Three of them shared their special

bonding with academic colleagues who are not fellow HoDs in the interview and one other HoD highlighted an incident reflecting her supportive action by making a decision which was fair for all staff. Critical incident 6 (See Appendix M) illustrates the significance of support system between departmental colleagues through a critical incident.

From their responses, a strong support system from the university management was absent but HoDs attempted to support peer academics to create better work relations. HoD1 influenced her departmental staff by supporting them to initiate and complete their doctoral studies. It was clear that the support given to departmental staff was well-received and the outcome was effective from the critical incident shared by the HoD. (See Appendix G).

Four HoDs suggested having a mentor who can guide them whenever they are faced with critical leadership problem. However, the relational connectivity between peer academics and other departmental HoDs were not mentioned positively when the question “who has supported you in your middle leadership journey so far was raised?” Lack of support from peer departmental leaders and the senior academics added on more work stress since they were not guided, ‘shadowed’, given proper counselling from predecessors who have experienced similar and/or different challenges faced by them. Their ‘isolation’ without support system requires networking with peer academics, peer leaders and former leaders who can offer solutions and advice for effective leadership. Without this support, participants in this study were experiencing difficulties in making decisions and working independently without collaborating in team effort and share their knowledge in middle leadership.

Besides, the findings imply, support system is not only needed during turbulent times of middle leadership, but a network of support system is essential to identify and groom the 'new broom'. Thus, succession planning can help to support overall institutional alignment (Wallin, Cameron & Sharples, 2005) particularly if it helps the potential or developing leader to better understand the requirements and potential drawbacks of the leadership positions they may be considering. Consequently, the lack of support system has led to self-induction among heads of departments and contributed increased workload, role conflicts and role ambiguity. A strong relationship between seniors and predecessors in the initial stage of leadership is essential but such relationship was not obvious. The stronger the support system, the more confident HoDs with their roles and responsibilities.

The second and third findings relate to emotions and attitudes. The second finding pointed out the presence of ego conflicts and superiority complex from senior academics and former heads of departments. These elements are purely stumbling blocks which impeded good relation and leadership performance of HoDs. High ego between HoDs and senior academics and superiority complex among senior academics due to their positional power are barriers for social influence relationship as well as promoting leadership change (Bryman, 1996).

Thus, it proves these negative emotions have affected the mutual understanding in working to achieve shared knowledge and collegiality. Leadership as proposed by Shackleton (1995, p.2) and Bolden et al, (2012) is the process in which an individual influences other group member towards the attainment of group or organizational goals. Conversely, having ego conflicts

and superiority complex hampered the process of influence and social construction of knowledge between senior academics and newly appointed HoDs who wants to contribute positively as middle leaders.

With the hierarchical structure of positional power, it was evident that building relationship helps to reduce overwhelming nature of the role, huge responsibility and little power, reacting to events, and feeling isolated and leading others (Pepper and Giles, 2015). Despite sensing ego conflicts and superiority complex among senior academics, HoDs are willing to cooperate and learn from experiences of the senior academics and predecessors. Clearly, there is no critical leadership policy implemented in place to encourage networking among 'critical' buddies and heads of departments to work collaboratively to meet the shared vision of the department and the university. The unwelcoming ego and superiority complex have 'crippled' the working relationship, motivation and eagerness to learn and lead effectively. In other words, the presence of ego and superiority complex has contributed a domino effect in middle leadership. It started affecting HoDs' roles, followed by people associated in the roles and finally affects the departments.

Thirdly, resilience among all ten heads of departments to 'recover' from negative challenges and experiences in the professional lives of middle leaders were evident. The study identified more negative challenges as opposed to positive such as role complexity, increased workload, imbalanced work-life and people management as stated in Chapter 4. This notion is associated as the power stress in leadership (Boyatzis, Smith, and Blaize, 2006) and adversely affects the leader's ability to sustain him or herself over time. To cope with prolonged pressure and volume of work, it is significant to

build and sustain emotional resilience by reflecting on what was happening to them through critical leadership incidents. It is a form of self-management to deal with stress and leadership demands. Evidently, all ten participants in this study have the 'ability to withstand and bounce back from shocks that test their ability for continuous profitable functioning', adding that 'it is essential to invest in resilience' (Barrett, 2010, p.399). Through their stories of leadership experiences, emotional resilience had/have helped them by persisting in the face of difficulty; maintaining hope against the odds; being optimistic; being courageous; having inner resourcefulness; showing the capacity to recover quickly from setbacks; having moral purpose (Flintham, 2003, p.22). Otherwise, the ten participants in my study would have given up on middle leadership and declined their job offers from the day they were offered the position.

To maintain good working relationship among departmental staff, all heads of departments were able to overcome relational issues by controlling their emotions. The emotional resilience has aided heads of departments in solving problems and making decisions effectively. They also learned to recognise strategies to handle emotions through past leadership actions and reactions. Thus, building and sustaining emotional resilience is a paramount strategy required by HoDs to solve most leadership challenges faced by them particularly dealing with people. Whilst, three of these new findings from this study can contribute to improve middle leadership in higher education environment.



For the next final chapter, I will present the contributions of the study, draws its limitations and recommendations for future research. I will also conclude the chapter with final thoughts on the research process.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **7. Study Perspective**

This final chapter concludes by assessing both the knowledge contributions of the study and its limitations. This is followed by a consideration of the implications of the findings for further research and for Malaysian higher education policy and professional practice. The chapter comes to a close with my final thoughts on the research doctoral experience.

#### **7.1 Contributions of the Study**

Although middle leadership and the specific roles of heads of department in universities have attracted considerable research interest, most studies have been based on Western higher education settings. This research has focused on a far Eastern context and contributed specifically to a deeper understanding of middle leadership in Malaysian higher education, which has been under researched. The in-depth focus on the lived experiences of Malaysian university middle leaders in coping with recent multi-faceted changes to their leadership roles has provided deeper insights into the externally-driven challenges they face; the level of support they have received in adapting to those challenges; their resourcefulness, resilience and ingenuity in finding effective coping strategies; and how their experiences have contributed to their leadership learning. The overall significance of these perspectives cannot be overestimated. In the words of Lucas (2000, p.3): “The department is where the rubber meets the road. It is where change is generated, where change initiatives from above are transformed into what is good – and realistic – for the discipline”.

Within this general perspective, the research has contributed to two specific areas of knowledge: theoretical and methodological. Each of these can be assessed in turn.

### **7.1.1 Theoretical Contribution**

In terms of theoretical contribution, the findings of this study indicate how heads of departments view challenges and changes to their new roles and responsibilities, with particular implications for an understanding of perceptions of role identity during a process of change. Particularly significant is how this role identity has been shaped within a framework of Relational Leadership Theory (RLT). This moves away from a traditional and structuralist approach which sees leadership as essentially heroic and individualistic. Heads of departments have a unique mediating position between senior university leaders and frontline university staff, requiring the development of leadership and management skills that can harness the support of both superiors and subordinate staff. A relational theoretical perspective seems to have a universal significance, but seems particularly relevant to societies like Malaysia, characterised by collectivist cultures. However, the research highlights not only the significance of this perspective, but also how the ideals of Relational Leadership Theory are not fully operating in practice, partly owing to the need for more pre-service training for middle leaders for their new leadership role; partly owing to a lack of ongoing in-service support once taking on the role.

Another theoretical contribution is in the field of leadership learning. This was revealed as a key generator of role confidence among heads of departments irrespective of their qualifications, age and professional experience. Although findings show that learning from others, within a 'relational' framework were preferred, through both formal and informal training learning to lead through self-help, self-actualisation, self-management and self-reflection played a key role throughout their leadership journey. This adds importance to the concepts of learning in-action, learning on-action and learning for-action as motivators in professional learning: of the importance of individual agency as well as structure. The research provides evidence to consolidate the theory: of behaviours that indicate relationships being at the heart of leadership, for example, in heads of departments refraining from leading singly but instead delegating which has been found to strengthen collegial relationships and develop trust and credibility.

This study hopes to influence aspiring and present heads of departments to have better role certainty, role clarity and people and departmental operation skills in order to overcome role complexity and people managing difficulties.

### **7.1.2 Methodological Contribution**

While it cannot be said that new qualitative methods were employed in this study, an original contribution was made in how they were combined in bringing together the insights drawn from in-depth semi-structured interviews of lived experience with the narratives of critical incidents (key turning points) in the professional lives of the participants, by way of both illustration and data enrichment. Some participants realised the impact on changes in their

leadership approaches brought about by critical reflection on critical incidents in their professional lives as middle leaders, contributing to their effective leadership practices in many ways. Participants reflected on their strengths and weaknesses in a process of self-actualisation, developing realisations of how people and environment issues can be dealt differently by learning to control their emotions and by learning to be resilient. Sharing their experience of critical incidents also enabled them to reflect critically on the need for a better support system and a willingness to learn new skills such as improving communication skills and in managing confrontation and conflict more effectively.

This interpretative approach allowed me to explore the thoughts and feelings of each middle leader and how they learnt to lead through reflection on both discussing and writing about their experiences. A richness of data was therefore gained by taking the qualitative approach that would otherwise have not been possible. As a result, I was able to understand middle leaders' perceptions of challenges, their learning, how they reacted to their appointments, their strengths and weaknesses as middle leaders in coping leadership conflicts, and the nature and influence of their relational expectations and workings with others

## **7.2 Limitations of the Study**

This study is subject to several limitations which need to be highlighted. Firstly, the design of this study cannot be generalised in a statistical sense because it was carried out based on only ten heads of departments in a single university case study. Nevertheless, from the perspective of naturalistic generalisation, case study method which I adopted is useful in the study of

human affairs because they are down-to-earth and attention-holding, but they are not a suitable basis for generalisation. In this study, I claim that case studies may be “epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization” (Stake, 1978, p.5). Thus, readers from a similar context should be able to relate the experiences to their own and therefore reflect critically on their own situation from the insights of the study.

Secondly, time limitation resulted in some compromise to the initial research design. Despite prior interview appointments being made some participants either requested to cancel or postpone the appointment dates. This has affected an initial plan of conducting focus group interviews with peer academics and a small group of leadership trainers. As a result, the whole data collection process was carried out in twenty-one days in Malaysia.

Thirdly, given that heads of departments are busy academics in the university, getting all targeted 48 participants to complete critical incidents pro-forma as scheduled initially within two weeks to facilitate the next phase of semi-structured interviews was not possible. Heads of departments were mostly working on a tight schedule and therefore, they had limited time to decide and write the critical pro forma. Some participants narrated their critical interviews while I wrote them on the critical incident pro forma. This could have caused certain degree of hesitation for them to reveal exact incidents and limited or filtered extensively. Perhaps, potential participants might have opted out from the study despite their interest to participate because it required more time for them to write and new heads of departments refused to share their ‘voices’ as

they are sceptical about their new roles. Besides, at some point during data collection process, participants could have manipulated the interview and critical incident responses by putting up a 'good face' in terms of only choosing what to say and what to avoid. Therefore, in the process of data collection and data analysis, it was difficult to avoid taking sides as an insider and outsider. Potentially, there were opportunities for biasness to creep into my interpretation.

Finally, reactivity occurred in many occasions after conducting interviews which possibly affected the data collection process as planned. Participants, especially new heads of departments, felt more comfortable sharing their thoughts freely without being audio recorded. Due to ethical considerations, as a researcher, I could not jot down what they were saying during the reactivity process although they provided useful responses. This is because during reactivity, few participants disallowed audio recording and as a researcher I had to adhere to their request. This can also affect the validity of the research.

### **7.3 Recommendations for Policy and Professional Practice**

The research findings have the potential to inform future policy and professional practice relating to supporting university heads of departments in their new leadership roles to ensure that the proposed aspirations in the Malaysian Blueprint are achieved successfully by 2025 (See Chapter 1).

First, for policy makers and training providers the findings can aid the higher education leadership academies in Malaysia such as Higher Education Leadership Academy Malaysia, also known as Akademi Kepimpinan Pendidikan Tinggi (AKEPT) and the Academic Enhancement and Leadership

Development Centre (ADeC) in modifying the irrelevant contents of formal training programmes and adopt a suitable model of middle leadership training by consulting aspiring and new heads of departments on their perceived training and support needs. This is deemed necessary, as the research indicates that support is currently perceived as inadequate. Such improved training and support will also broaden middle leaders' knowledge and understanding of relational influences, experiences and attitudes and how best to understand types of role transitional issues faced from teaching to leading in a department. Identifying potential heads of departments for leadership training would enhance their preparedness for leadership responsibility, thus both contributing to a strategy for succession planning and addressing current weaknesses identified in the research findings. Such pre-training could include a 'critical buddy' system and other such mentoring schemes.

Secondly, the findings indicate the need to create awareness among aspiring middle leaders to the complexity of this role in advance before taking up middle leadership roles and direct them towards best methods to attain required experience, knowledge and understanding to become effective middle leaders. The findings of this study suggest that there is need for the management to have a critical policy for the leadership development of new heads of departments. For example, the types of specific training needs required by heads of departments such as mentoring, networking, mutual headship supports system and bespoke middle leadership training courses.

Thirdly, the findings should be of professional interest in emphasising the significance of collegiality, distributed and shared leadership to achieve the department's mission and vision and change from the traditional to relational



leadership approach. University and department-based training to help middle leaders manage this transition in leadership style should therefore be of potential benefit.

#### **7.4 Recommendation for Future Research**

There are three recommendations for further research that would help to address some of the limitations in this study:

First, in order to address the limited scope of a single case study institution and a limited number of only ten participants, further research could be carried out by replicating this research in more departments and university contexts in Malaysia in order to help verify the validity of the research findings of this study by way of analytic generalisation.

Secondly, further research could be conducted on the same issues covered in this research that could be regarded as complementary, by using alternative perspectives and/or data collection methods, including an ethnography including observations of the leadership behaviour of heads of departments combined with the use of institutional policy documents, to see how far policies for change are being implemented in practice.

Thirdly, the research questions of this study could be extended to cover new but closely related issues to carry forward our growing understanding of the role of Malaysian university heads of departments, including the appointment and recruitment of middle leaders; human resource management issues related to career enhancement opportunities and professional growth.

## **7.5 Final Thoughts**

This study has given me invaluable understanding of middle leadership, more than what I experienced as a middle leader several years before I started this study. While I explored each participant's professional life as a middle leader, I reflected upon many critical incidents I faced in the past to deal with leadership issues. In the words of van Manen (2014, p.365): "to write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one's own depth", in essence helping me to come to a sense of my own strengths and weaknesses as a middle leader.

When I left my middle leadership role in 2014 to seek answers to questions that I faced as an acting head of department, I had the impression that middle leadership is all about managing people and the department. Having dedicated my time and effort on this project, I realised how much I disregarded the key terms 'change' and 'relationship'. I could recall all the critical incidents myself during my tenure period, but I failed to understand change is necessary to become a better leader and working with highly relational people and organisation make the changes possible. I have discovered my ways to lead effectively by listening and understanding to my participants' 'grievances' and appreciation in middle leadership.

Through my EdD journey, I have equipped myself with some theoretical and professional knowledge and am now ready to move one step ahead to meet more 'challenges' in my leadership journey and further improve my practical knowledge as a head of department. Above all, this study made me a stronger individual because I almost gave up due to a change of supervisor half way

through my studies, coupled with financial pressures as a self-funded student. Indeed, I consider it was a blessing in disguise to have gone through the unpleasant circumstances. I was fortunate to get financial help from an educational research organisation on my final year of study and grateful beyond words to be supported by my new supervisor.

Finally, I had the opportunity to present in university-led and international conferences throughout my four-year of doctoral journey (See Appendix N). My active participations in these conferences helped me to develop my research skills in data collection, data analysis and writing up of my thesis. The constructive feedback and experiences I gained from the conferences increased my self-confidence and expanded my network with other doctoral students. Most significantly, this study had profoundly instigated my interest to seek more knowledge by publishing journal papers on middle leadership.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MOHE</b>	Ministry of Higher Education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HLI</b>	Higher Learning Institution
<b>HoD/HoDs</b>	Head of Department/ Heads of Departments
<b>HELA</b>	Higher Education Leadership Academy
<b>CIT</b>	Critical Incident Technique
<b>EPU</b>	Economics Planning Unit

## Appendix A

### Critical Incident Pro Forma Sheet

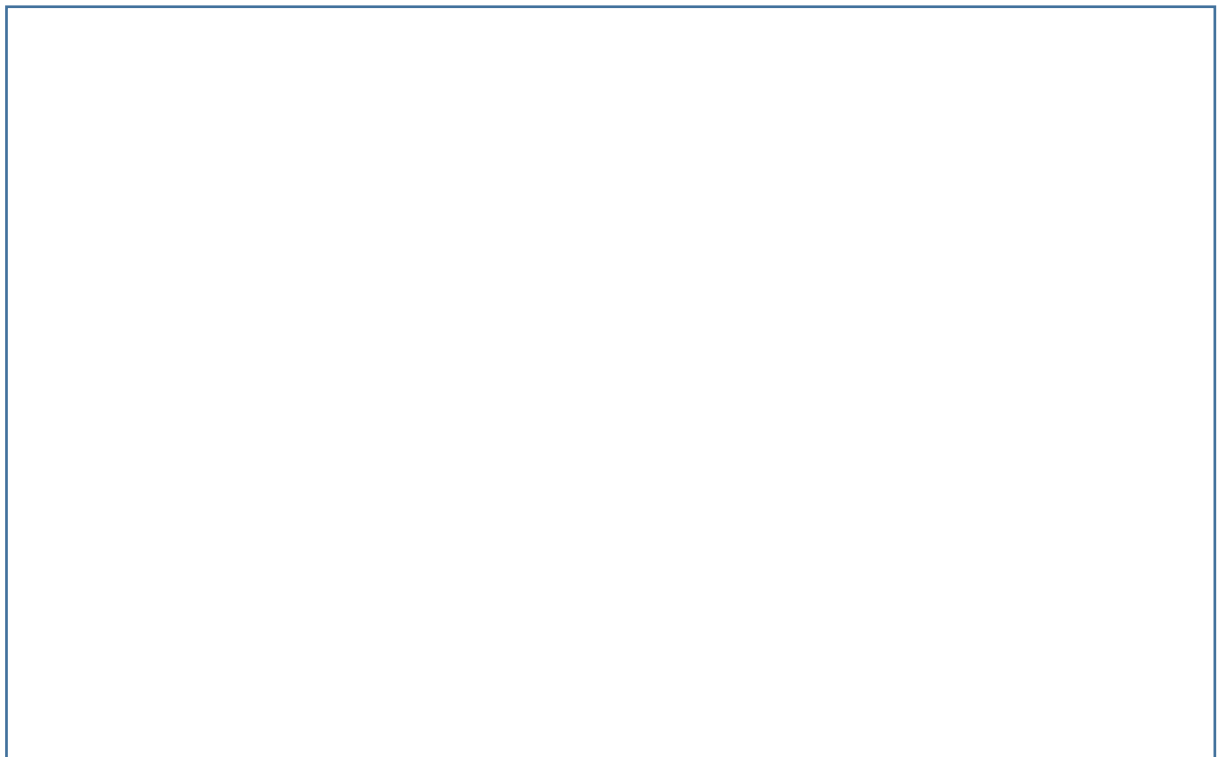
Please recall any critical incidents which have been relevant to your leadership as a head of department. For your information:

1. A critical incident can be related as occurrence such as event, incident, process or issue identified by yourself. These incidents may have positive or negative impacts and significant effects on your leadership roles and responsibilities
2. The aim of this research technique is to shed light on real leadership experiences and situations confronting heads of departments which heads of department themselves identify.
3. No individual person, department or faculty will be identified in the research study. Confidentiality is highly guaranteed.
4. In the space provided for each critical incident, please comment briefly in not more than 150 words on:
  - a) How the situation arose: Was it generated from you, others, within the department or from outside?
  - b) How was the issue managed: Was there your contribution or others contributed (e.g. the dean, academic colleague, committee members, etc)
  - c) Did you or others face any difficulties, constraints or conflicts?
  - d) The outcomes: were they positive, negative, effective, ineffective, successful or unsuccessful? Please provide reasons.

**Critical Incident 1**



**Critical Incident 2**



I would like to participate in an interview to contribute further for the purpose of this research.

YES

NO

If you wish to be interviewed, please choose **one** of the following options which is convenient for you.

Face - to - face interview

Skype interview

## Appendix B

### Grouping of Participants and Departments

Group	Faculty/Academies/ Centre	Department / Discipline
<b>A</b>	Faculty of Economics & Administration	Department of Economics
		Department of Administrative Studies and Politics
		Department of Development Studies
		Department of Applied Statistics
<b>B</b>	Faculty of Computer Science	Department of Artificial Intelligence
		Department of Information System
		Department of Software Engineering
		Department of Computer System & Technology
		Department of Library and Information Science
<b>C</b>	Faculty of Language and Linguistics	Department of Asian & European Languages
		Department of English Language
		Department of Language & Linguistics
		Department of Arabic & Middle Eastern Languages
		Department of General Language Studies
<b>D</b>	Faculty of Arts	Department of Indian Studies

	&Science	Department of Chinese Studies
		Department of East Asian Studies
		Department of English
		Department of Geography
		Department of History
		Department of International & Strategic Studies
		Department of Media Studies
		Department of Social Administration & Justice
		Department of South East Asian Studies
		Department of Anthropology & Sociology
E	Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry	Department of Clinical
		Department of Para-clinical
		Department of Pre-clinical
		Department of Medical Education
		Department of Restorative Dentistry
		Department of Oral Clinical Sciences
		Department of Paediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics
		Department of Community Oral Health
F	Faculty of Arts and Performance	Department of Drama
		Department of Music
		Department of Dance
		Department of Visual Art

## Appendix C

### Participant Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

#### **Research Title: The Impact of Externally- Driven Change on Middle Leadership in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to participate or not it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If anything is not clear or you would like further information, please contact me, Uma Malar M Maniam ([edumma@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edumma@leeds.ac.uk)).

#### **Who is the researcher?**

Uma Malar M Maniam, an EdD candidate from the School of Education, University of Leeds, United Kingdom.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore leadership perspectives and performance of heads of departments with regards to facing critical situations and measures to overcome their leadership problems from a relational approach. The primary focus will be on university departmental heads from eight different faculties in the University of Malaya.

The main aims of the study are:

- To explore how departmental heads from various departments in a university perform leadership when dealing with critical situations.
- To investigate to what extent critical situations from the past impacted departmental leaders' to address problems, resolve problems and strengthen their leadership
- To find out why departmental heads struggle to encounter critical situations when they lead. It can involve various types of training formal and informal trainings

#### **Why have you been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are one of the heads of department from University of Malaya who will be the main participant in this study.



**Do I have to take part?**

You have the right to choose whether to take part or not. If you do decide to take part please contact me via email ([edumma@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edumma@leeds.ac.uk)) and you will be given this information sheet and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you agree to take part, you remain free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

**When does the research start and end?**

The study will be conducted in three phases:

PHASE	TIME	ACTIVITIES
1	Early March 2017	One Skype Interview for Piloting
2	March 2017	Critical Incident Pro Forma Sheet (Distribution and Collection)
3	April 2017	Interviews: Face to face interviews with participants
	May 2017	Interviews: Skype interviews with participants
4	April 2017	Focus Group Interview

**What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?**

There are no known risks involved in the process of this study. In terms of benefits, participants will have an opportunity to share your experiences with other participants during the focus group interviews and/or I will provide opportunities for exchange ideas after the focus group is completed. These meetings provide a forum for exchanging ideas on challenges faced as a departmental leader and for offering each other support/suggestions on how to cope with challenges that you face.

**Will the information I provide be kept confidential?**

All information collected during the research process will be kept strictly confidential. All the data in interviews will be made anonymous. Only the researcher will have access to the data before it is anonymised. Your name and your department will not appear in any reports or publications. The data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The findings of the research study will be part of my EdD thesis for the University of Leeds. The research will also be used for presentations at local and international education conferences and publications in international journals.

**Contact details**

If you would like to take part in the research study and/or you have any questions about the study, please contact: Uma Malar at [edumma@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edumma@leeds.ac.uk).

**Appendix D  
Participant Consent Form**

**Research Title: The Impact of Externally- Driven Change on Middle Leadership in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution**

	<i>Please put your initials next to the statements you agree with</i>
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated, 1 April 2017 explaining the above research study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it.	
I understand that my participation is voluntarily, and I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without there being any problem. I also understand that I can decline if I do not wish to answer any particular question(s).	
I agree to take part in the following research activities:	<b>1.</b>
1. Critical Incident Pro forma	<b>2.</b>
2. Face – to – face interview	<b>3.</b>
3. Skype interview	
I give permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded.	
I understand that my name and my contributions to the research study will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report(s) that result from the research.	
I agree for the anonymised data collected from me to be used in EdD thesis, presentations, future reports or publications.	
I agree to take part in the above research activities and will inform Uma Malar ( <a href="mailto:edumma@leeds.ac.uk">edumma@leeds.ac.uk</a> ) should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Researcher	Uma Malar M Maniam
Signature	
Date*	

\*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions and Suggested Prompts

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p><b>RQ1</b> How middle leaders perceive external change in their leadership roles and practices?</p>	<p><b>Key Interview Questions:</b></p> <p>Tell me about your roles as a department leader. When did you were appointed and how did you react to the appointment?</p> <p>How much as your role / roles changed since you started leading this department?</p> <p>In what way, has your roles and responsibilities changed? Are your roles causing any difficulties? If yes, why?</p> <p>Talk to me about the critical incident(s) that you have had to face as a departmental leader</p> <p><i>Departmental leaders are invited to choose one challenging situation to discuss in detail.</i></p> <p><b>Prompts</b></p> <p>Why did you choose this one?</p> <p>How did you deal with this situation? (<i>Probe</i>)</p> <p>What strategies were used?</p> <p>What supported / guided you during this time?</p> <p>What helped you to cope with the critical situation?</p> <p>How did you feel? (during / after)</p> <p>Why do you think that was? (based on the previous question)</p>

<p><b>RQ 2</b> What have they learned and how have they learned during the process of responding to the new challenges and adapting to their new leadership roles?</p>	<p><b>Key Interview Questions:</b></p> <p>What did you learn from dealing with the challenging situations?</p> <p>Was there any specific leadership learning you felt as effective?</p> <p>What kind of leadership learning is important for you?</p> <p>Have the critical leadership situations helped you in any form?</p> <p>What can HoDs do to lead effectively?</p> <p>What support your leadership roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>To what extent previous support and trainings helped you?</p> <p>What support / guidance have you (departmental leaders) received?</p> <p>Who are responsible to train / support you?</p> <p>What support your leadership roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>What impede your leadership roles and responsibilities?</p>
--	---

**Prompts**

How do you think this learning has helped you deal with other similar situations?

Why do you struggle when faced by critical situations?

To what extent previous support and trainings helped you?

What support / guidance have you (departmental leaders) received?

Who are responsible to train / support you?

What support your leadership roles and responsibilities?

What impede your leadership roles and responsibilities?

## Appendix F

### Data Collection Timeline

PHASES	TIME	METHODS	PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
1	February 2017	Pilot Study (Skype Interview)	Head of Department (outside of Groups A-F)	1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical incident pro forma was emailed and received one week before the interview</li> </ul>
2	March	Critical Incident Pro Forma Sheet (Distribution and Collection)	Heads of Departments (from groups A-F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distributed to 48 heads of department</li> <li>Collected 9 fully and partially completed critical incident pro forma</li> </ul>
3	April 2017	Face-to-face Interview	Heads of Departments (from groups A-F)	9
	April 2018 (a year later)	Skype Interview	Head of Department (between groups A-F)	1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed critical incident pro forma was received a week before the Skype interview</li> </ul>

## Appendix G

### Summary of Critical Incidents

HoDs	Type of Activity	Aim of the activity	The Situation (who, where & what)	HoDs' Action/Reaction	The Outcome/s (positive, negative, ineffective, neutral, successful or unsuccessful)
Critical Incident of HoD1	PhD initiation support	To encourage and support academic staff to complete PhD studies.	<p>Who: Senior staff and HoD</p> <p>Where: Every personal meeting</p> <p>What: The university made it compulsory for all academic staff to complete PhD studies. It was a challenge for both parties to handle this situation. HoD was in the process of adapting herself into the role as a leader. As one of the youngest staff, she was not prepared to guide senior staff members. As a junior member of staff, many staff were not in agreement with the HoD. With varying personalities, many senior staff took advantage of her diplomatic style and often argued with the HoD. She realised, apart from PhD completion, senior staff members were expected to publish research work and perform other academic duties. She was pressurised by the senior management to convince her staff to complete doctoral degree.</p>	HoD took this as a leadership challenge. She spent the first six months to observe and study personalities of her department staff. The second six months, she delegated duties fairly to everyone so that potential PhD staff can concentrate on their preparation for studies. She had several personal meetings and consultation sessions with potential senior staff who are capable to pursue PhD studies. She had to sacrifice her family time and spent time giving motivation to the staff. She constantly monitored their performance and supported them to obtain doctoral degrees.	Almost successful and effective outcome. Three senior staff decided to pursue their doctoral studies. One of them chose the HoD as her potential supervisor because she feels confident and comfortable to work with the HoD.
Critical Incident of HoD2	Inter-department staff transfer	To appoint a new staff before the approval of the transfer is made	<p>Who? HoD and other management team including the Dean of the faculty.</p> <p>What? It was the first week of duty for the newly appointed HoD. She was still</p>	The HoD was new to this post and she decided to investigate the reason behind the rejection of the request by the previous HoD. She also asked opinions from her peer academics regarding this request and realised there were a lot of grudge between the previous head of department and the staff. She spoke to the management and received negative feedback about the staff. Therefore, the HoD could not make any	It was considered as unsuccessful by the HoD because she could not find any new staff to fill the vacant position immediately. The Dean backed up the staff and



			<p>trying to adapt to the environment, job expectations and people in the department. A request was made by a lecturer to transfer her to another department in the same faculty/school. However, she received many different views about the lecturer who requested for the transfer. She was aware from other staff that the request was rejected by the previous HoD.</p> <p>Where? During a monthly departmental meeting</p>	<p>decision immediately. She felt pressured because on one hand, the staff was urging to get a transfer on the other hand, the department which was requested by the staff was led by the Dean. So, the HoD was hoping to make the right decision. The Dean was backing up the staff most of the time. The HoD was wondering whether the Dean would support the decision of the department or would she support the staff in this matter. She understood that at the end of the day the Dean gets to decide. She felt very disappointed with the outcome. Her suggestion of appointing a new staff before approving the staff transfer was ignored. She felt very disappointed when the Dean did not make any consideration for her decision. She expressed her anger and dissatisfaction in this situation. She learnt that she should have thought of a different way instead of keeping the staff in her department. She said she should have thought of getting a replacement staff. From this incident she learnt that she should not get emotional.</p>	<p>the Dean announced in the meeting that Dean has decided to change the staff to another department without giving any reasons and not responding to her suggestions. With the transfer approval, it has caused more work on the part of other staff who had to fill in the duties until a new staff. HoD felt her decision was not respected and her first task as a HoD was not received positively by the management team during the departmental meeting.</p>
Critical Incident of HoD3	Out of office hour event	To represent the department for a convocation ceremony	<p>Who: 7 tutors and the HoD</p> <p>Where: 8.30pm at the university convocation hall</p> <p>What: Many tutors refused to attend after office hour events especially given a short notice period and having family commitments. Those who have attended other events in the past were unwilling to attend the event.</p>	<p>HoD thought through the best way to avoid any misunderstanding with her staff. Instead of sending emails, for instant communication purpose, HoD created a group Whatsapp chat. She informed all her departmental tutors regarding the ceremony. She gave exemption to those who have attended other events in the past. Without much delay, six tutors who have never attended any events in the past agreed to participate.</p>	<p>Positive outcome because there was no disagreement. Both departmental staff and HoD viewed this as a fair decision.</p>
Critical Incident of HoD4	Final exam paper submission	To complete the process of setting, vetting and submission of exam paper before deadline	<p>Who: An exam paper setter, a vetter, an administrative staff and the HoD.</p> <p>What: The final exam paper was not submitted to the HoD as scheduled and the exam paper was missing. The setter and vetter had previous issues that they avoided to meet each other to complete the setting and vetting procedures together. The vetter left the</p>	<p>HoD was having her tutorial session with her students in the evening between 6 to 8pm. She was unaware of the incident until she was contacted by the setter. Both the setter and HoD were feeling stressful since the setter had to catch a flight the next morning. The HoD managed to contact the vetter late in the evening. It took some time for the vetter to resend the exam paper since it was missing. The setter had to make corrections until late night and submitted the exam paper before leaving for her vacation.</p>	<p>A positive outcome since the paper was submitted for printing. But, it aggravated relationship issues among the three people.</p>

			<p>confidential exam paper unattended on an administrative staff's table. The setter had to make necessary correction within 24 hours before she could travel abroad for a holiday. The vetter could not be reached through phone calls during the critical period.</p> <p>Where: HoD's department</p>		
Critical Incident of HoD5	Curriculum revamp	To create more opportunities and job market for students in the department for future by revamping the curriculum	<p>Who: Senior lecturers and the HoD</p> <p>Where: During a curriculum review discussion</p> <p>What: A few senior lecturers who used to be former lecturers of the HoD from the same department were against the idea of curriculum review. A lecturer commented that the HoD is being unrealistic and too ambitious in this matter. It took twelve months for the lecturers to come to an agreement with regards to the curriculum review.</p>	HoD realised that most students who completed their studies from the department ended up as teachers. He decided to make a big alteration in terms of curriculum review despite receiving negative remarks from a few senior lecturers. He minimised the language and literature portion to 30%, 30% be allocated for media studies and 60% for creative writing and journalism. He hopes the next batch of students will not fully rely solely on teaching job.	It was a positive outcome because the curriculum review has been approved and the implementation of the new curriculum commenced from the cohort of students in 2015/2016.
Critical Incident of HoD6	Research project collaboration	To involve in a research collaboration to fulfil the annual research publication	<p>What: A research collaborator and the HoD</p> <p>Where: University conference</p> <p>What: The HoD was collaborating with a researcher from a similar field of research. After several discussions in relation to the research, she realised the research collaborator avoided and excluded her from future discussions. Few months later, she attended a conference and from an informal discussion, she was informed that the samples of the study were not directed to her, but it was passed to another researcher without her knowledge by the research collaborator. HoD</p>	HoD was offended by the behaviour of the research collaborator. However, she was able to understand the situation and developed resilience. She carried out her research work actively with other researchers. She started collaborating with local and international research collaborators in medical field. Eventually she established herself and got promoted.	HoD considers this as a positive outcome. She was able to solve the problem by ignoring what had happened. As a colleague, before the retirement of the research collaborator, she made peace and forgave the collaborator. HoD was emotionally changed yet she opted to accept the incident as a learning experience.

			suspects this incident could have happened out of jealousy because the HoD never fails to publish research work annually.		
Critical Incident of HoD7	Appointment of Head of Unit	To replace unofficial staff with heads of units in the department	<p>Who? The unofficial staff, HoD and management team of the faculty</p> <p>What? The department consisted of 13 specialities and the HoD proposed to appoint a few head of units to support the departmental heads. The selection process was conducted formally through interviews and received approval from the higher authority. One member of staff was unhappy with the selection of the new head of unit because he used to be the unofficial staff who was dealing with the matters related to the unit. He was disappointed for not getting the post as the head of unit.</p> <p>Where? During an ad-hoc meeting in the department</p>	An ad-hoc meeting was called by the unofficial staff who felt dissatisfied with the selection of the new head of unit. During the meeting, the HoD was surprised that the higher authority created a new position for the unofficial staff. This position never existed before. This was done so that the staff could have some authority to the unit. This created some conflicts. The HoD supposed to deal with one head of unit but due to the creation of the new position, he had to handle two heads of unit. It was a much-tensed meeting. There was racial accusation brought up in the meeting because he was accused by the unofficial staff that the HoD selected a new head of unit who belongs to the same race. The HoD felt it was a challenge for him to handle this situation during the meeting and he felt it is difficult to be a HoD for senior member of staff because senior staff think they are superior in many ways.	It was a neutral outcome. The management team remained the head of unit selected by the HoD and created another new post for head of unit for the same department. This decision made the unofficial staff satisfied, however, the HoD had to lead an additional head of unit. From this incident, the HoD was able to appreciate the kind of support he received from both the dean and the director. Both agreed to his choice of candidate for the position as the head of unit. They also disagreed with the unofficial staff member who called for this meeting.
Critical Incident of HoD8	Strategic plan for hand hygiene compliance	To help create awareness among departmental staff to become aware of the problem and improve compliance.	<p>Who: Clinical staff in the department and the HoD</p> <p>Where: HoD's department</p> <p>What: The statistics for hand hygiene compliance in the department was very poor. The department was in the bottom ranking and always falls in the critical five below the KPI for hand hygiene compliance.</p>	HoD made a drastic move. Her first action was to give a briefing together with the infection control team. The second action was to remind all the departmental staff to see improvement. Her third action was to get the list of staff who are compliant and who are not. Some staff were unhappy regarding the 'naming and shaming' strategy.	The action was viewed negatively by some staff, but the outcome was successful. It created some form of awareness by getting the infection control team to give briefing about what exactly is the problem. Most effectively, the latest statistics seem to suggest that the

					department was not in the bottom ten anymore for hand hygiene compliance.
Critical Incident of HoD9	An acceptance of headship appointment	To oblige a colleague's request by accepting headship position temporarily	<p>Who: Former HoD and the present HoD</p> <p>Where: HoD's department</p> <p>What: The former HoD left the leadership post to complete his PhD studies because the university made it mandatory for HoDs to hold PhD qualification. The present HoD accepted the post as a temporary arrangement. She was not keen in leadership, but she was interested in teaching particularly upon completing her PhD studies abroad. The former HoD decided to quit from his studies due to some complications he faced with his supervisor.</p>	The HoD was disappointed that she had to remain in this leadership position longer than expected since the former HoD quit his PhD studies and left his job for greener pastures. She decided to lead the department because the dean had confidence in her leadership despite joining the department in less than six months. She accepted the job half-heartedly. She struggled with less staff, uncertain managerial and leadership responsibilities. Gradually, she involved in strategic departmental planning duties and successfully materialised ideas for the development of the department.	Successful and positive outcomes took place. Many strategic plans were structured and most of them were implemented without much negotiations. New staff were recruited and active promotion for student enrolment also administered.
Critical Incident of HoD10	Final year student project	To get all departmental staff to involve in a project initiated by the department.	<p>Who: All department staff and the HoD</p> <p>Where: During a monthly departmental meeting</p> <p>What: HoD explained regarding a new project involving the department and work had to be completed within a tight deadline. Most senior staff refuse to cooperate, and they felt it was not the job of the senior lecturers. They ignored directives from the HoD.</p>	HoD tried to seek assistance from all the departmental staff to involve in a project. However, her colleagues refused to cooperate. In her point of view, colleagues refused to assist because they are senior staff members and due to superiority, they ignored her instructions. Due to time constraints, she had to complete the task assigned for the project all by herself.	Ineffective to manage people because the HoD could not meet the deadlines and she struggled to complete the task. She also had to request for extension of time to complete the project.

**Summary of Critical Incidents**

## Appendix H

Research and Innovation Service  
Level 11, Worsley Building  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9NL  
Tel: 0113 343 4873  
Email: [ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk)

## Research Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Uma Malar Maniam  
School of Education  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT

### ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee University of Leeds

22 March 2017

Dear Uma

**Title of study:** The Impact of Externally-Driven Change on Middle Leadership in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution  
**Ethics reference:** AREA 16-106

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and following receipt of your response to the Committee's initial comments, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
AREA 16-106 Ethical Review Form (amended).docx	2	19.03.2017
AREA 16-106 Participant Consent Form (Amended).docx	2	19.03.2017
AREA 16-106 FIELDWORK RISK ASSESSMENT (Uma).docx	1	17.02.2017
AREA 16-106 participation consent and information sheet.docx	1	17.02.2017
AREA 16-106 Ethical Review Form(Feb 2017).docx	1	17.02.2017

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment>.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits>.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to [ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

Victoria Butterworth  
Research Ethics Administrator, Research & Innovation Service  
On behalf of Dr Kahryn Hughes, Chair, [AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee](#)  
CC: Student's supervisor(s)

## Appendix I

### Approval Letter: Economics Planning Unit (EPU), Malaysia



UNIT PERANCANG EKONOMI  
Jabatan Perdana Menteri  
Blok 85 & 86  
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan  
Persekutuan  
PUTRAJAYA  
MALAYSIA

Tel: 603-8000 8000

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Laman web: [www.epu.gov.my](http://www.epu.gov.my)

Our Ref: UPE 40/200/19/3402

Date: 7 April 2017

Ms. Uma Malar A/P M. Maniam  
20 Holborn Terrace  
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Leeds, West Yorkshire  
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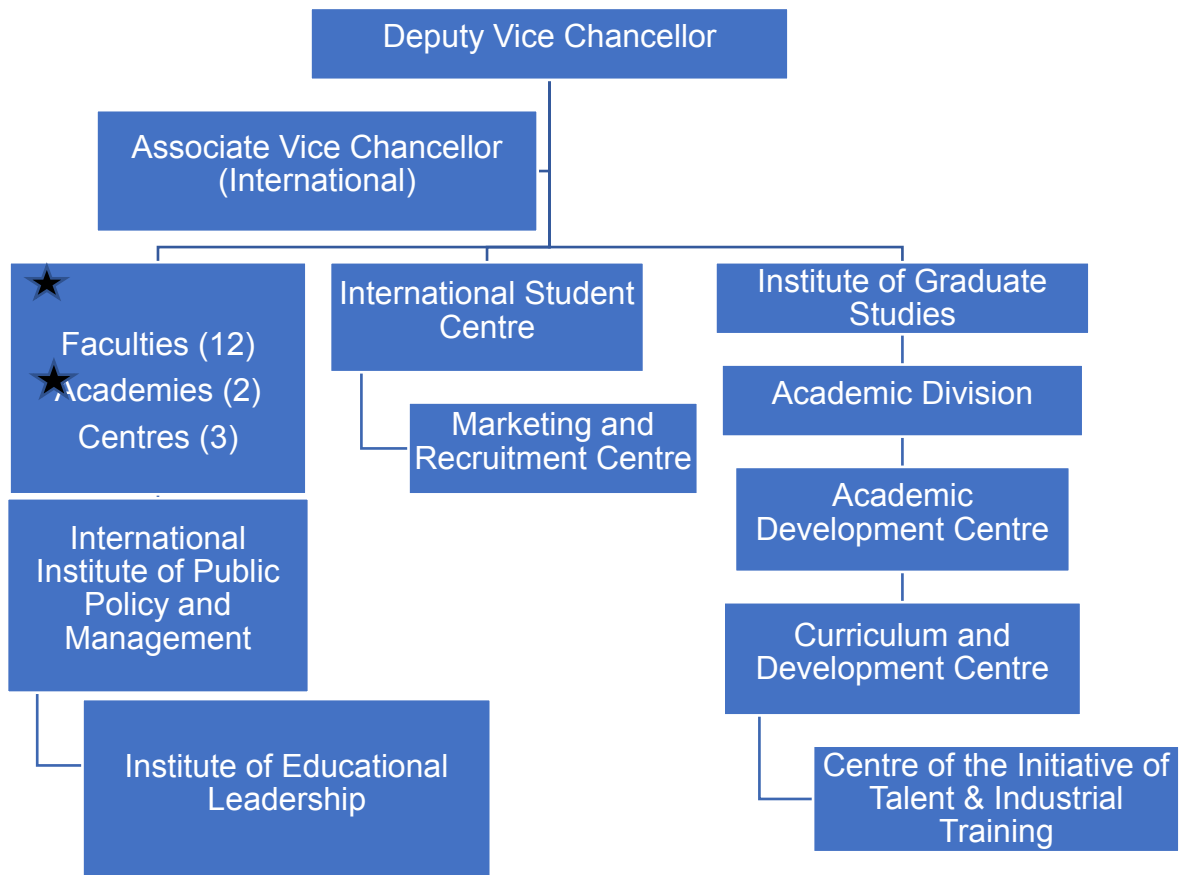
#### APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

With reference to your application, I am pleased to inform that your application to conduct research in Malaysia has been approved by the Research Promotion and Co-ordination Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department. The details of the approval are as follows:

Researcher's name	UMA MALAR A/P M. MANIAM
Passport / Identity No	760818-14-5604
Nationality	MALAYSIAN
Title of Research	"THE IMPACT OF EXTERNALLY-DRIVEN CHANGE ON MIDDLE LEADERSHIP IN A MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION"
Period of Research Approved	3 years (7.4.2017 - 31.12.2019)

2. Please take note that the study should avoid sensitive issues pertaining to local values and norms as well as political elements. At all time, please adhere to the conditions stated by the code of conduct for researchers as attached.

**Appendix J**  
**University Organisation Structure**



## Appendix K

### Initial Theming and Descriptive Coding

Participant: HoD 1			
Question: Can you tell me your roles and responsibilities as a head of department?			
Transcriptions	Interpretative Comments	Themes/ Codes	Research Questions
<p>When I first took the position, I thought I was responsible for the university elective courses. That means the running of the courses, the coordinating of the programme and anything related to the courses. The other role I thought I would have to do is the role of handling a lot of exchange students who would take these courses. So, the exchange students will be coming for a semester and sometimes they come in for two semesters. The maximum is they come here for a year. So, that was what I thought I was getting into when I actually took the position. And in less than a month after I took the position, I suddenly realised that I am not too sure why though I was given a lot of responsibilities. <b>(RA &amp; RC)</b> When I was offered the position, it did not come with these responsibilities in dean's mind I think.</p>	<p>There are role conflicts and role ambiguities. Both can be dysfunctional resulting in negative assumption and destructive act in leadership. These are job stress that can affect job satisfaction. HoD is experiencing role conflicts because she has two roles to play at the same time. Role conflicts as a head of department and translator.</p>	<p>RC- Role Conflicts</p> <p>RA- Role Ambiguities</p> <p>JS- Job Stress</p> <p>X T- No Training and Induction</p> <p>EA – Emotional Anxiety</p>	<p>Q1 &amp; Q2</p>



## Appendix L

### Colour Coded Themes

Job Stress	Mentoring	Family Support
Human Resources Management	Strategic Planning	Superiority
Managing People	Team Work	Attitudes
Succession Planning	Social Networking	Role Uncertainty
Resilience	Formal Training	In-Service Training
No Induction	Informal Training	Miscommunication
Academic Buddy	Pairing Peer Academic	Extrovert
Unpreparedness	Job Challenges	Introvert
Job Delegation	Coping Strategies	Power Relation
Administrative Duties	Collegiality	Design Curriculum
Collaboration	Group Decision Making	Management support
Individual Decision Making	Recruitment Procedure	Language Barrier
Key Performance Indicators	Openness	Friendship
Good Rapport	National International Collaboration	Sufficient Funding
Flexibility	Sense of Belonging	Departmental Policy Change
Excessive Working Hours	Reluctant	Time Constraints
Research and Publication	Role Shift	No Funding
Firmness	Fairness	Role Conflicts
Punctuality	Administrative Staff	Community Engagement
High Expectation	Meeting Deadlines	Adaptation
Initiation	Research Culture	No Training
Staff Performance assessment and Review	Staff Recruitment procedure	Role Ambiguities
Willingness to Training	Drastic Decision Making	Self-Awareness
Ethical Leadership	Subversive Staff	Time management
Inquisitive	Integrity	Responsibilities
Lack of Cooperation	Trustworthy	Transparency
Visible	Emotional anxiety	
Emotional Influence	Willingness to Train Successors	

	<b>Challenges</b>
	<b>Leadership Values</b>
	<b>Leadership Learning</b>

## Appendix M

Critical Incidents	Participants' Critical Incidents
<b>1</b>	<p>One of the lecturers wanted to change the department. This happened on the first day when I reported as a head of department. I was not even thinking as a head of department on the first day of my job. I received a letter from this staff stating that she would like to change the department. At that point I could not make head or tail on what was happening. But I got to know that this has been happening for the past six or seven months.</p> <p>This was a difficult issue for me because it started from the previous head of department. I had to ask the previous HoD what had happened. I had to investigate the issue first. The staff's first attempt to change the department was rejected just before I became the head of the department. When I became the head of department she resubmitted the request to change the department. So, I decided to investigate why it was rejected initially. When I referred to the management regarding this, it sounded like there were a lot of grudge between the previous head of department and the staff. I decided at one point not to refer from the previous management. The management was giving me a lot of negative feedback about the staff who requested for a change of department. So, at that point I could not make any decision. At the same time there was another issue where the department requested by the staff was led by the dean.</p> <p>So, the dean was backing up the staff most of the time. I was wondering whether the dean would support the decision of the department or would she support the staff in this matter. I also understood that at the end of the day, the dean gets to decide. I was pressured a lot in this incident.</p> <p>I was very disappointed with the outcome. At the end of the department meeting, I informed the dean about the department's stand on this issue, I suggested once the department finds a new staff, then she can change to a different department. I felt very disappointed when the dean announced in the meeting that she has decided to change the staff to another department without giving any reasons and not responding to our suggestions. I felt that my decision was ignored as a HoD and no consideration was made. I felt emotional when I heard this on the first day of my management meeting with the dean, deputy deans and other heads of department. This is because it was my first meeting and it was the first issue that I was handling. I showed slight anger and dissatisfaction. I have learnt that I should have thought of a different way instead of keeping the staff in my department. I should have thought of getting a replacement staff. From this incident I learnt that I should not be emotional.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>I find the most difficult incident to manage for me was when my colleagues refused to cooperate. Maybe he or she thinks that they are much more senior than I am. They feel superior and sometimes when I give instructions, they ignore and finally I had</p>

	<p>to do the task. This incident happened before a departmental project. I tried to seek assistance from all the departmental staff to involve them in a project. However, my colleagues refused to cooperate. In my point of view, my colleagues refused to assist because they are senior staff members and due to their superiority, they ignored my instructions. Due to time constraints, I had to complete the task assigned for the project all by myself.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p>I am one of the youngest lecturers in this department. Except for one new lecturer, the rest of them have taught me here when I was a student. This has put me in a delicate situation. This is the time for them to listen to their student. It is equally tough for me and them.</p> <p>I realised that most students who completed their studies from the department ended up as teachers. So, I decided to make a big alteration in terms of curriculum review despite receiving negative remarks from a few senior lecturers. I minimised the language and literature teaching in the new curriculum to 20%, 30% to be allocated for media studies and 50% for creative writing and journalism. I am hoping the next batch of students will not fully rely on teaching job.</p> <p>It took me nearly twelve months to convince everybody in the department. Firstly, I tried to convince the lecturers in my department. It was a big challenge. One of lecturers said that I'm flying by the seat of my pants. He said I should be practical and not too ambitious.</p> <p>I can remember when I took over this position I started to think that it's about time for the department to move in the right direction. This is a task given to me. If there is a chance for me to establish a good relationship, I let it happen. There should be no 'fighting'. I can see if someone have a talent, I will utilise it for the department and work along.</p>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p>One incident stands out. Under the [discipline] school, there are 13 specialities. (HoD listed the specialities). Officially, these units have no HoD. So, as the Head of Department, I'm in charge of these units. This is too large to handle. I conducted an interview with the potential head of units together with other interview panels. This was agreed by the dean of the School and existing unofficial staff were replaced with the new head of units officially. I appointed heads of units for these specialities.</p> <p>I reported to the director of the hospital for clinical duties and also the dean of the school for teaching duties. So, I got the approval from them to appoint the head of units. They supported me with this idea. In one the units, my choice of candidate I appointed was not well-received by an existing staff who led the unit previously.</p> <p>The unofficial staff was a senior faculty member and he was unhappy with this decision. One of the problems here is it is difficult to be a HoD for junior member of staff and not for senior member of staff. It depends on the person. Some will respect the HoD regardless of age differences. But in my opinion, many don't respect HoDs because they think they are</p>

	<p>superior in many ways. The unhappy senior staff member complained to the higher authority. To my surprise, the higher authority created a new position for him. This position never existed before. This was done so that the staff could have some authority to the unit. This created some conflicts. I'm supposed to deal with one head of unit but now this unit has two heads of unit.</p> <p>Due to this, I was called up for a meeting with the dean, the director and the particular staff member. It was a much-tensed meeting. Sadly, there was racial accusation brought up in the meeting. It was a challenge for me. What made the difference in that meeting was that I had the support of both the dean and the di-rector. In other words, both of them agreed with my choice of candidate for the position as the head of unit. They also disagreed with the unofficial staff member who called for this meeting. The unofficial senior member of staff contributed a lot for the School. I think in Malaysia, there's a lot of respect for the senior person and they don't go by book like other countries such as Singapore. To some extent I think it's not wrong to appreciate a senior staff member who has contributed a lot.</p>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p>This incident created a bit of tension. To give you an example of the incident, this involved myself and two other staff members. This was an exam matter, and it is always top priority. Staff A set an exam paper and that exam paper was vetted by staff B. Upon vetting the exam paper, there were many comments and the paper required many amendments. The procedure is for staff B to give it to the coordinator of the course. The course coordinator will then give the paper to staff A to make changes. After changes are made, staff A will return the exam papers to the coordinator. The coordinator will recheck, approve and pass it to the head of department. When I check it, I must refer directly to staff who set the paper. That is the process.</p> <p>Maybe it was also my mistake. Being a new head, I didn't check the procedures and I could not contact the course coordinator who was on leave. The timeline was tight, so I was trying to solve the issue fast. I felt as a professional step, I told the vetter to look at what my comments before returning the paper to staff A. The purpose was for the vetter to know what kind of changes have been made by the setter. If the setter has changed it, I would like to see what she has done. I gave the paper to staff B (the vetter) and I told her to have a look at the paper to see what staff A has changed. She doesn't have to redo the vetting for the entire paper because the coordinator and head of department have seen it previously. Staff B said I may not have enough time because you have only given me one day. But I told her to phone staff A to give the paper directly to her. This would give her time to make all the changes and submit the next day due to timeline. Staff B left my room. The next morning, she left the paper in a file on my clerk's table when my clerk was away. It was a serious issue because an exam paper should not be left unattended on someone else's table. Staff B wrote a message for my clerk on the file saying please contact staff B to collect the exam paper.</p> <p>All these were oblivious to me because I was busy. I was not in the office. I was conducting lectures. At 4 pm, staff A sent</p>

	<p>me a text message asking for her exam paper and I almost freaked out. Staff A had to submit the paper on that day because the next day she was going abroad. As a head, my job was to find out where was the paper. I was having a lecture, but the good thing is I could text her a message. I sent a text message to staff B. Staff B said I have given the paper to your clerk at 10 a.m. this morning. I said to her "Didn't I tell you to directly contact staff A? But staff B told me that she informed my clerk to contact staff A. My clerk found the paper on the table and her normal reaction was to put in on my office drawer. The clerk was not informed what was going on, so she locked it safely in the drawer. I realised I started the problem.</p> <p>The baseline is the two staff already had issues between them earlier. I knew they could not get along earlier but I didn't expect it to be up to this extend. I was disappointed with staff B. Anyway, I acknowledged, and I took the blame. I gave staff B more grooming, coaching and mentoring. If it was my family I would have just told them off but in a work environment I must choose my words. After this incident, I felt very angry with myself and with the staff.</p> <p>One of the things that I know about myself is I do a lot of reflective matters knowing life because I am 57 this year. This makes me a more confident leader. So, I will tell my departmental staff to meet me personally. But initially when I was younger I never like to confront people. Now as a leader, I'm learning to confront. I still find it a bit uneasy sometimes but when I did the confrontation, it turned out quite well. I like confrontation, but I think many people don't like confrontation.</p>
6	<p>One incident was when the university organised a special convocation for the crown prince of Japan. Earlier in February, we had a special convocation for King Salman for honorary doctorate. So far, I had arm-twisted some people to attend the first ceremony because it was a formal ceremony. It was not really the most exciting ceremony, so I thought asking people to come out of office hour events. It was a working day. I know if I've put it on an email, nobody would want to come because it starts at 8:30 and some of the tutors would be still have classes at that time. I arm twisted some people and I also attended it. There were six of us, including myself it was seven. The unit was supposed to send six people anyway.</p> <p>But when other six-people had to attend the second ceremony, I had to put this on a WhatsApp message. I stated that I needed six people and those who have attended King Salman ceremony they will be exempted. I also mentioned that those who have officially taken leave, they will also be exempted from the ceremony. After I sent the WhatsApp message I immediately received a message from a teacher whom I arm- twisted and already attended the first ceremony. She said I have thought through the best way in advance.</p>
7	<p>The centre has not been getting good number of students for the past few years. I thought a curriculum review can change this problem. I'm not just planning to bring in the number but I'm also looking at what can be done for the department by whom. The new master's programme is structured in such a way that there are three specialisations. Students can either go</p>

	<p>on to (discipline) research, pedagogy or performance. Now I am strategizing in this way because we recently did a road show.</p> <p>I think, this centre should now try to highlight more and pedagogy and performance because there seem to be more interest these days... I think when it comes to coursework many students can complete but not research work. We realised that many students in the centre were not graduating on time. When we met the panels at the curriculum review, the panels themselves suggested that it is best to drop the research-based work and maintain the course work instead. We have now successfully structured the new master's programme which is fully coursework. Students with only spend 3 semesters on their coursework and they seem to be very interested. I can see enrolments and applications for the course have increased.</p>
<p><b>8</b></p>	<p>I think there are many incidents. But I think one that I really took to my heart. It started out negative but turned out to be positive. When I first started for example the statistics for hand hygiene compliance in the hospital with regards to orthopaedic surgery was very poor. We were consistently in the bottom. I would say the bottom 10. It was always in the critical five that falls below the KPI for hand hygiene compliance. At least one is an orthopaedic ward, if not two.</p> <p>I could just remind everyone to do something about it and then just forget about it. I think in March if I'm not mistaken, I decided to do something drastic. This was my own decision but of course it was in consultation with the infection control team about how else we can improve compliance. So, we came up with few strategies. One of course we are not used to do a proper briefing on what exactly is non- hygiene compliance. We did earlier this month or rather the infection control. We did for our department earlier this month.</p> <p>One thing that I decided and needed to do which I guess some people said it is not nice. But the infection control team when they audit for compliance, they do take down the names of who are compliant and those who are not. Despite for three to four months from November I repeated reminded to do better, I didn't see any change. So, then I decided to ask for names who are compliance and those who are not. And I will inform them if they are compliant or not. It was informed within the group in the department. I guess some people will call it naming and shaming. It makes people realise number one, they were being watched and they have to be careful. Number two, it makes them realise certain things they thought they need not do, that was why they were getting caught. In a way I felt good because I created some form of awareness by getting the infection control team to give briefing about what exactly is the problem. This helps to create awareness among those who are at fault to become aware of the problem.</p> <p>With all that, it looks like things are slowly improving. The latest statistics seem to suggest that we are not in the bottom ten anymore. Like I said, it stated to look negative but it starting to turn into a positive incident. I considered this as a negative in the beginning because this does not look good on the department. And I felt it was my responsibility to correct that. I know that in many instances, we are okay. Some they were not intentionally wrong, but they were not doing things correctly. So</p>

	sometimes there were non-performers.
<b>9</b>	I remember disclosing a confidential matter to another academic during a project. I shared one confidential matter that supposed to be kept as a secret. And the person I shared this information had spread the information to others without keeping it to herself. And that is one of the major things that I learnt as a head of department and I learnt to keep confidential matters to myself. I also realised being in this position I should not side anybody. Especially I should not be bias. When I make any decision, as a head of department and learnt how to be unbiased in making decisions. I learnt to be diplomatic person. And I also learnt how to say no. Usually I am a kind of person who will not say no, and I accept everything. I learnt to say no these days. Listen to my staff first without telling anything immediately and then I present my point of view and finally I decide whether it's a yes or a no. I learnt to be a good listener. Another thing I learnt is to respect your staff in terms of any kind of confidential matters. I learnt to hold the trust that they have towards me. I think now I learnt how to do it. I also feel that gossiping is not healthy especially anything related to work.
<b>10</b>	I never had any bad incidents to be considered critical, but I can say there was a turning point. Well, I can recall one time when I felt hurt. It was research related. Someone whom I have been collaborating and trusting, then I realise the person was jealous of me. She has left the university now and I made peace before she left. It was an incident that I could remember. It was obvious because the person removed me from the research group which we were working together. Without my knowledge, the person contacted the other collaborating research group. The other group was not aware of what was happening in they contacted me instead of this person who cut me off from the group. The next thing I realised what I met this person in a conference and I got to know that all the samples of the study was not directed to me, but it went to my research buddy without my knowledge. Then, I realised we have mutual students so the students in an indirect way highlighted to me about what had happened. At that point I was quite hurt. I wanted to help the person. The person was so much senior than I am. I wanted to make sure that my research work is not disrupted by this incident. After this incident, that's when I decided I know that I am much junior, so I began to spread my wings and started to collaborate with local scientists and researchers. I started to collaborate with a senior from the science faculty. She is a researcher in mushroom studies. I felt it was mutually beneficial to collaborate with her. I took this incident in a positive manner. I didn't want to have any kind of open war. I felt uneasy about this incident but eventually I took it positively and later established myself and got promoted. But before she retired, I was able to forgive her.

## Appendix N

### Seminars/Conference Presentations

No.	Seminars/Conferences	Date
1.	<p>9<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Learning, Teaching &amp; Educational Leadership</p> <p>Venue: Quality Hotel Rouge et Noir Congress Center, Rome, Italy</p> <p>Title: Walking on a Tightrope: Voices of Malaysian Higher Education Middle Leaders</p>	26-28 <sup>th</sup> October 2018
2.	<p>International Conference on Research in Teaching, Education &amp; Learning (ICRTEL 2019)</p> <p>Venue: Flora Grand Hotel, Dubai, United Arab Emirates</p> <p>Title: Malaysian Higher Education Middle Leaders: From Struggling to Coping</p>	24-25 <sup>th</sup> February 2019
3.	<p>The Fifth Research Student Conference</p> <p>Venue: School of Education, University of Sheffield</p> <p>Title: Exploring Middle Leadership in Malaysia</p>	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2017
4.	<p>The 11<sup>th</sup> Research Students' Education Conference 2017</p> <p>Venue: School of Education, University of Leeds</p> <p>Title: Departmental Leaders in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution: Are they Copers? Strugglers? or Jugglers?</p>	17 <sup>th</sup> May 2017
5.	<p>British Educational Leadership and Educational Research Society (BELMAS), Annual Conference 2017</p> <p>Venue: Ettington Chase, Stratford-upon-Avon</p> <p>Title: Exploring Middle Leadership as Relational Leadership in Malaysia</p>	7-9 <sup>th</sup> July 2017
6.	<p>Education, Social Science and Law, Graduate School Conference</p> <p>Venue: Edward Boyle Library, University of Leeds</p> <p>Title: Experiences of Middle Leaders: Challenges and Changes</p>	13 <sup>th</sup> April 2015
7.	<p>White Rose DTC 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference</p> <p>Venue: University of Sheffield</p>	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2017



	Title: Exploring Middle Leadership: The Relational Perspective	
8.	<p>Qualitative Research in Management and Organization (QRM) Conference 2018</p> <p>Venue: Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA</p> <p>Title: "We are juggling, struggling &amp; coping in middle leadership": Voices of Departmental Leaders in the Malaysian Higher Education</p>	<p>27-29<sup>th</sup> March 2018</p>
9.	<p>8<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership (WCLTA-2017)</p> <p>Venue: Universidade Aberta, Lisbon, Portugal</p> <p>Title: Middle Leaders in Malaysian Higher Education: Walking on a Tightrope</p>	<p>26-28<sup>th</sup> October 2017</p>