

## TRENDS, POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES OF HLI'S LEADERSHIP DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** *The outbreak COVID-19 pandemic plays a significant impact on the functional of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) globally. This is especially true in the area of leadership. But what exactly are the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on HLI's leadership? To understand the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on HLI's leadership, exploring the trends, potentials and the challenges associated with the issue is immensely valuable. Accordingly, by applying a qualitative approach through the examination of information gathered from various sources such as books, journals and media reports, the paper presents a discussion on trends, potential and challenges of Higher Learning Institution's (HLI) Leadership during Covid-19 pandemic. The paper is expected to contribute in the understanding of trends, potential and challenges of Higher Learning Institution's (HLIs) Leadership during Covid-19 pandemic, thus led to the improvement of HLI's leadership despite the pandemic.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership; Higher Learning Institutions; Covid-19; Literature Review*

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## Introduction

The advent of 2019 saw the rise of Covid-19 linked pandemic, in which the pandemic continued up until the date the paper is written and or is continuing until an unspecified date. It is widely reported that the deadly virus was first detected in Wuhan, China by end of 2019 (Zhu, Wei & Niu, 2020; Mcleod, 16 March 2020). Media even reported that the virus quickly spread throughout China and that it later led to the significance and rapid response from the government of China in the form of policy implementation and medical infrastructure constructions. The policy, particularly the ‘lockdown of many major cities as well as the country’, in turn made the typical tight weekday schedule and hectic weekend lifestyle were replaced with staying indoors in the blink of an eye. The concept of ‘stay-at-home’, ‘stay safe and healthy’, ‘social distancing’ and ‘Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)’ thus has become phrases echoed by many around the globe, in which it generally appeared in both social and printed medias at the aim of reminding everyone of the virus's lethal nature. By early 2020, the Covid-19 has infected hundreds of thousands of people all around the world (Pak, Adegboye, Adekunle, Rahman, McBryde & Eisen, 2020). This includes not only the developing countries but also the developed of high-income countries such as Russia, Italy, Australia and United States of America.

Given the significance of the pandemic, medical researchers appeared to have come out with the idea of producing vaccine in curbing as well as combating the virus. As a result, number of Covid-19 linked vaccine such as Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Sinovac and mRNA emerged and is now produces for the benefit of the global population. In some country, the vaccination appeared to have been widely implemented with larger in terms of vaccination percentage. Nevertheless, in some country, particularly in Malaysia, the vaccination seems remain inadequately affected majority of its citizens. While a vaccination seems still a long way off in this country, scientists recommend various ideas of combating the pandemic such as social distancing, hand washing for 20 seconds, hand sanitizing, avoiding handshakes, coughing and sneezing etiquette, and wearing a facemask to prevent the spread of the virus. This made the life of the citizens seems abnormal; thus, many describe it as a new normal. The most difficult issue, however, came when the government implemented a series of Movement Control Orders (MCOs) to break the virus's chain and flatten the curve. When this policy came into effect, it eventually has wreaked havoc on education systems around the world, affecting approximately 1.6 billion students in over 200 nations. To be more specific, more than 94 percent of the world's student population has been touched by school, higher learning institution, and other learning facility closures. This has resulted in significant changes in the trends of education sector's leadership trend, especially the Higher Learning Institution's (HLI) leadership. Despite the significance change in term of trend, the execution of MCOs also open up a room of improvement as well as challenges of HLI's leadership. This paper intends to presents a discussion on the trend, potential and challenges of HLI's leadership during Covid-19 pandemic.

## Problem Statement

Traditional educational techniques have been considerably disrupted by the occurrence of Covid-19 linked pandemic as well as the execution of continuous Movement Control Orders (MCOs). It even appeared that the operation of education intuitions, particularly the HLIs being affected significantly by the need of applying technology-based teaching and learning, some of the research and innovation activities, and managerial and community engagement activities. This is particularly being executed in line with the introduction of SOPs widely.

Specifically, the government, especially the Malaysia government have executed the so-called MCOs at the aim of combating the fatal coronavirus's increasing infection rate, but it turned out to have been effectively halted learning institutions' operations. For this reason, many suggests that the HLIs should change their course of action from the traditional norms to the already-appealingly good alternative of adopting online learning. To do so, as well as to avoid future interruptions, the modification is expected to be well-planned and suitably designed. The modification generally expected to be finalised in a more structured way because there would be plenty of time to prepare a strong instructional design for various programs that meets the needs of the existing learning environment (Gallagher & Palmer, 29 September 2020). As a result, an online and web-based learning systems have exploded in popularity, particularly when all educational activities are halted. It enables institutions to immediately alter their traditional blended-based learning in the event of a pandemic.

Therefore, it is, by now, become unavoidable to suggests that the pandemic has speeding the process of making online learning a key teaching and learning in education sector (Gallagher & Palmer, 29 September 2020). Despite that, however, the pandemic also has created an unprecedented problem for HLIs as it come with significant obstacles. This is especially true in the case of HLIs' leadership. The HLIs' leaders appeared to have faces difficulties in reorganising the existing systems as to maintain instructional quality while working with drastically reduced resources (Aagaard & Earnest, 30 December 2020). The complexity of the problem crisis revolves upon HLIs' leadership, in which it looks as if the effectiveness of leadership as a collective incorporating the shared and diverse talents of faculty, students, and programme stakeholders must be highly accounted. Some made it clear that the current environment required HLIs' leaders to react both quickly and adequately (McLeod & Dulsky, 12 March 2021). This in turn made the changes become priority among the HLIs' leaders at the aim of ensuring the maintenance of relationships and guaranteeing quality while balancing student needs with their own personal safety, and other individuals. What this now hinted is that there must be a change in the trend as well as the rise of potential and challenges of HLI's leadership during Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the objective of this paper is to examine the trends, potential and challenges of Higher Learning Institution's (HLI) leadership during Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Objective and Approach to the Study of HLIs' Leadership - Pandemic Relationship**

As mentioned, the objective of this paper is to examine the trends, potential and challenges of Higher Learning Institution's (HLI) leadership during Covid-19 pandemic. To do so, the study which the paper is based applies a qualitative approach through the examination of information gathered from various sources such as books, journals and media reports on the trend, potential and challenges of HLI's leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to ensure that the obtained information represents the issues being studied or to ensure the construct validity of the information, all documents were verified by the third parties as accurate sources. Such move generally vital as it aims at detecting and correcting errors and inconsistencies in the data collected so that the information be cleaned to pass consistency and validation, a procedure that involve the removal of unverified data (Olteanu, Castillo, Diaz, & Kiciman, 11 July 2019; Rahm & Do, 2000). Information or data cleaning is especially essential when dealing with information from multi-sources (Ationg, Esa, Ibrahim & Muis, 2020; Ationg, Zulhaimi, Ibrahim & Hashim, 2018; Rahman, Ationg & Zulhaimi, 2017; Ationg, 2001), in which it involves identifying and thereafter overlapping information

or to match the records referring to the same real-world entity as well as substitution of incomplete data. This helps diminishes any orderly bias insights about the topic being conversed. This orderly bias might encompass the investigators own judgement toward the issue being studied. Thus, it is imperative to note that for the sake of ensuring the validity of the information gained, according to Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi and Nerur (2018), only the reliable information from several sources that are related with this paper. The reliable sources of information in this study denotes to sources that are more consistent than others which were free from the portion of bias towards other parties.

### **The Trends, Potential and Challenges of HLI's Leadership**

Based on the information gathered, this section presents a discussion about the trends, the potential and the challenges of HLI's leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the significance use of online as well as digital technology in HLIs, the leaders of such institutions required to apply appropriate leadership approach in managing the institution. Heimans and Timms (2019) in explaining such idea portrays that individuals are more likely to work in conditions not too formal and most organizations are reinforced network-based and openness. For this reason, participations of each member in the organization to communicate actively virtually pertaining to their jobs regardless been boosted. encourages. This new working norm allows each member of the HLIs to connect with not only colleagues but also the management personals (Hickok, 18 March 2021). Such condition made the HLI management highly required to change of leadership approach. They turn to be the parties within the HLI who need to practice management and leadership flexibly that remain adhere to rules, ethics and with integrity towards achieving HLI's goals.

Being a leader with flexibility in terms of management and leadership approach, however, does not come easy (Zezeza & Okanda, 10 December 2020). To do so, the HLI leaders required to understand what exactly are the knowledge and skills required in managing the institution during the pandemic (Kumar, 03 June 2020). Apart from that, the aspects of creativity and innovation are also become vital in dealing with the uneasy situation because they must be able to provide a solution to any issues affected by this new phenomenon. In many cases, solutions in education sector that have been implemented in most countries at the aim of curbing the pandemic has been the changing of teaching and learning concentration from traditional learning methods which refers to face-to-face methods in the classroom to online education (Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia & Koole, 2020). This solution made online education has become the centre of attention, and that Malaysia is no exception to follow the same technique.

With this in mind, every effort to bring about changes in HLIs generally affected with issue of potential disagreement between the two generations of leaders or between the seniors and the young leaders. In this context, the seniors generally interested as well as well-versed with the traditional management approach. On the other hand, however, the young leaders often affected as well as specialised in modern management approach. For this, reason, both groups may disagree on certain areas. Nevertheless, the need to apply flexibility overcomes this issue systematically. This suggest that the rise of a new trend in HLIs' leadership made everybody not only be able to paly significant role, but also being tolerate to one and another.

Having said that, however, the key challenge among the HLI leaders in confirming their presence really significance is to make sure every work instruction, idea, and their action are really meet the demands of the job. They also need to be efficient in adapting themselves

with the new management methods and improve their role in the decision-making area and executing daily tasks for overcoming obstacles that may arise (Alexander, De Smet & Weiss, 24 March 2020). The changes which taking place quickly, suddenly and unexpectedly also require leaders to be a high self-efficacy. In addition, the HLI leaders also confronting themselves with the challenge of understanding the role and their responsibilities clearly.

Despite the challenges, the advent of Covid-19 pandemic also provides a room for improvement in terms of leadership quality among the HLI leaders. Among the improvement, as Kezar (2020) explained has been the decision-making ability. The pandemic that hit the world caused confusion in all spheres of life when there is a clash between existing roles with current and future claims. As a result, the HLI leaders made themselves compulsory to understanding on how to deal with the crisis (Coynne, Ballard & Blader, 2020). For example, in the context of teaching and learning activities the pandemic made such activity no longer rely on traditional approach, but the lecturers/teachers must the new technology as a state-of-the-art approach. This certainly means that the discussion and meeting sessions for management and administrative purposes are made via online. Before the new approach is being implemented, the leaders as well as the ministries of higher learning have earlier decided to make it compulsory among the lecturer/teacher in combining the old or existing approach with the latest. Based on the decision, recognising the leadership improvement among the HLI leaders become inevitable.

Apart from becoming a good decision-makers, some such as Dumulescu and Muțiu (20 April 2021), and El Said (2021) portrays that the pandemic also has made the HLI leaders the creative and innovative leaders. In general, the HLI leaders must be creative and innovative in managing the changes needed as long as the pandemic is still around. The creative and innovativeness ignited when they are not tied to routines in the workplace, an issue which often leads to loss of creativity and innovation. In the process, they adopt encouraging working culture which mainly affected with integrity and the growing of interest in improving both knowledge and skills relating to management. This made them not only become the leaders with knowledge and skills, but also interested in taking into account all aspect of social and organizational development. This includes to efficiently and politely responding to any emotionally or feelings, personal attitudes, concerns and needs of organizational citizens and can make monitoring and direct involvement in managing change. This in turn, led to the enhancement of HLIs efficiency as they are interested in facilitating work organization through sharing responsibilities and authority, rather than doing it all alone.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the paper shows that the advent of Covid-19 pandemic has bring about changes in terms of trend, potential and challenges of HLIs' leadership. This is not only the case of the developing countries, but also all countries around the globe. While it appeared that the pandemic has disrupts traditional as well as the norms of the global citizens, it is also important to stress that the pandemic also provides room for improvement in the context of educational sector, an improvement described by Gallagher and Palmer (29 September 2020 as 'long overdue'. The HLIs leaders now become more interested in technology, in which they starting to integrate HLI with the technology-driven activities. This is already happening in online learning and the use of technology for management purposes. Afterall, such move

created an opportunity to not only resolving issues pertaining to management, but also led to the significance improvement of higher education sector.

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