

Full Length Research Paper

Differences in the perception on leadership of the village development and security committee

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Previous studies revealed that the socio-demographic factors are vital and would sway the perception of rural community towards the leadership of their community leaders. Nevertheless, the outcome of these studies had shown inconsistent results. Hence, it is pertinent to investigate further on the socio-demographic factors that influence village development and security committee (VDSC) perception towards the VDSC leadership in Vision Village Movement. Data was gathered through a survey questionnaire and a total of 235 respondents from three states in Malaysia participated in this study. Interestingly, overall the members of VDSC had a high level of positive perception towards the VDSC leadership and the factors that had significant difference with perception towards VDSC leadership were age, zone and monthly income. The findings of this study would help to develop a better understanding on some of the pertinent socio-demographic factors that rural development leaders need to be aware of to become effective leaders in the future.

Key words: Village development and security committee (VDSC), leadership, rural community.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is often cited as one of the front-runners in implementing rural development programs among the developing nations. Evolution and transformation in rural areas have started since 1957 with Pre-new Economic Policy to reduce the level of poverty among the poor and the marginalized. In the era of Second Transformation of Rural Development (1994 - 2000), the focus was on further developing the rural areas so as to balance the economic growth in both rural and urban areas, in line with the establishment of the Malaysian Vision Policy, that would be able to drive the nation towards achieving an equitable society (Fatimah and Mad, 1997). One of the major ways that the government had undertaken to enhance rural development is by establishing the Village Development and Security Committee (VDSC) and launching the Vision Village Movement (VVM) program.

The VDSC was established with its main objectives to

create government representatives in order to initiate more successful rural community programs and to strengthen the relationship between the government and the rural community. Based on the recent statistic, there are 68,000 VDSC members all over Malaysia administering 14,503 villages throughout the country. The Vision Village Movement (VVM) concept was introduced for the purpose of establishing more competitive, self-reliance, educated and disciplined rural community. Presently, there are 7,808 VVM villages in Malaysia. This program was initiated to give specific focus on village development with the aim of creating developed and attractive rural areas. This program hope to strengthen the ability of rural community whereby it can be a catalyst for the change of attitude among rural community towards development. VVM emphasizes villagers involvement in their planning to create more developed, attractive and profitable villages. A research done by Mohd (2005) claimed that VVM is one of the mechanisms to make a paradigm shift in attitude, practice and inspiration among rural community in accordance with the objectives of the Second Transformation of Rural Development and Vision 2020.

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The development of rural areas and communities are essential for the well being of rural people in developing countries such as Malaysia since many rural areas are still characterized by low population density, poor infrastructure and limited access to public services (Fletcher and Fatimah, 2007). According to Brennan (2006), the need for rural development and local leadership to address traditional obstacles and facilitate development in the face of new challenges is therefore vital. Due to the tremendous pace that development is taking place, leadership aspect is important to ensure that rural residents are not left behind and able to compete with the urban residents especially when it comes to development issues. The conditions facing rural areas also show the need for development efforts to be focused on the community and territorial elements of rural areas as opposed to focusing solely on various sectors of the economy in the urban areas. Effective stewardship therefore is essential to guarantee the availability of creative and innovative response as it will help to produce stable organization thus smoothening the running of organizations such as VDSC.

Before we go any further, let's first define leadership. According to Astin and Astin (2007), leadership is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change. Leadership implies a process where there is movement to some future place or condition that is different. Leadership also implies intentionality, in the sense that the implied change is directed toward some future end or condition which is desired or valued. Accordingly, leadership is a purposive process which is inherently value-based. Consistent with the notion that leadership is concerned with change; the leader is basically a change agent. Leaders, then, are not necessarily those who merely hold formal leadership positions; on the contrary, all people are potential leaders meaning here, VDSC members without considering their position are the leaders of the community. Furthermore, since the concepts of "leadership" and "leader" imply that there are other people involved; leadership is, by definition, a collective or group process and therefore will not work alone. Good VDSC leaders are needed as they hold the responsibility to bring development and safety to villages. There are numerous theories that explain about effective leadership and according to Bass (1990) one of the basic ways to explain effective leadership is through analysing the personality traits of individual leaders. Mitchell (2008) suggests that several factors account for differences in the attitudes and behaviour of leaders. The level of education and age were identified as important determinants. Mitchell (2008) mentioned that the level of education influences people's values, wants and needs and makes them think and behave differently. Age, on the other hand tends to give greater or lesser degree of individualism among the leaders with the younger generations feeling more comfortable exhibiting individualistic behaviours. Older leaders were identified to maintain a calmer and more understated demeanour

besides showing a greater degree of empathy and concern for others in society.

Several studies too have been conducted that addressed the relationships between selected demographic variables such as region or zone and period of staying and leadership. One such study was Wicks (2007) who found a weak relationship between zone and leadership. Conversely, in a study on rural leadership, Stevens (2006) found that almost 60% of the rural leaders in their study believed that a region where they stayed had an impact in their leadership styles. Besides, a number of researchers had singled out the phenomenon of period of staying as one of the factors that serve to influence leadership (Horwitz, 2006). However, not all studies drew this conclusion. Rotter (2006) found that the relationships between period of staying and leadership were not especially strong.

One of the pertinent factors contributing to the leadership is the type of occupation that a leader is undertaking (Gray, 2008). This is due to the fact that cultures are inherited from where a particular place where the leader is working and as the culture is embedded with the individual, the culture shapes the styles of leadership (Schein, 2004).

On top of it, monthly income of an individual does affect leadership styles of individuals (Robbins et al., 2008). In today's dynamic world, leaders must be able to cope with increasing volatility and turbulence of the environment and they need to be financially sound to overcome numerous obstacles. Even though there were many references to a relationship between leadership and monetary values in many researches, little systematic research has been conducted to investigate the link between the nature of relationship of these concepts among the agricultural leaders (Parry, 2008). Since these two concepts are important in the development of an organization, further research is required to provide significant information to leaders.

Based on the above literature, this study aims to explore the level of perception among the VDSC members towards the VDSC leadership and to seek the differences between selected demographic factors and perception towards VDSC leadership. Consequently, it is hoped that this study would add to the body of knowledge pertaining to rural leadership.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative survey method to obtain data. The data were gathered from 235 respondents through a face-to-face interview based on structured questionnaire. The data collection process started in April and ended in May 2008. The instrument was designed by the researchers based on previous literature and was pre-tested in order to ensure the items reliability and validity and also to ensure it can easily be comprehended by the respondents. The pre-test was conducted at Sungai Ramal Dalam Village located in city of Kajang in February 2008. The Cronbach alpha value obtained for all the constructs were between 0.80 - 0.85, exceeding Nunnally's (1978) recommended threshold

Table 1: Respondents profile (n = 235).

Respondents profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	202	86.0
Female	35	14.0
States		
Central	90	38.3
Southern	75	31.9
East Coast	70	29.8
Village grade		
Grade A	57	24.3
Grade B	69	29.3
Grade C	109	46.4
Occupation		
Work on their own	105	43.8
Government sector	57	24.3
Private sector	33	14.0
Not working	32	17.9
Education achievement		
Primary school	55	23.4
PMR/SRP/LCE	43	18.3
SPM/SPMV/MCE/certificates	105	44.7
Pre University/ University	32	13.6
Position in VDSC		
Chairman/Vice Chairman	19	8.1
Secretary	17	7.2
Treasury	15	6.4
Committee	184	78.3

of 0.7, indicating high reliability. Sampling frame was obtained from Department of Community Development (DCD) based on the states selected. The sample list was developed by selecting villages that were listed in VVM. VDSC members selected were from three states. For each state, a district was selected and from each district, six villages were chosen as a research sample based on stratified random sampling. Before the data collection process, the researchers have contacted leaders of VDSC to determine the date of data collection session to ease the process.

The study sample was categorized in three zones. A total of 90 VDSC members represented central zone (Selangor), 70 VDSC members represented southern zone (Negeri Sembilan) and 75 VDSC members represented east coast zone (Pahang). In the earlier stages, the number of respondents determined for each states was same but because of some obstacles and problems, the number of respondents determined earlier could not be fulfilled. Among the problems faced were some of VDSC leaders cannot give the actual number of VDSC members, there were absentees among VDSC members during the session of data collection. To overcome this problem, the researchers left a number of questionnaire forms to be fulfilled by the absentees. Even though this action was taken, the VDSC members on certain location failed

to return the questionnaire as required. SPSS software was used to analyse the data collected, statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and ANOVA were used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are many studies that showed the effect of socio-demographic factors on leadership. This section presents the results of the study based on the stated objectives. The first part gives a description of demography profile of respondents, followed by the level of VDSC members perception towards VDSC leadership and factors that affect it.

Respondents demography profile

A total of 235 respondents were involved in this study. Out of this total, 38.3% respondents were from Selangor, 31.9% from Negeri Sembilan and 29.8% from Pahang. A total of 46.4% VDSC members that responded to the questionnaires were from grade C village, 29.3% from grade B and the remaining 24.3% from grade A village.

The majority (44.7%) of respondents had attended their education to SPM/MCE/SPMV/Certificates, while primary school and PMR/SRP/LCE was at 23.4% and 18.3% respectively. There were also respondents who had received pre-university and university (13.6%) education. In terms of employment, a total of 24.3% of respondents are working in the government sector, 14.0% in the private sector and the majority (43.8%) are self-employed. In this study, it revealed that a large majority (78.3%) were VDSC members, while the remaining percentage consists of chairman/vice chairman (8.1%), secretary (7.2%) and treasury (6.4%) (Table 1).

As in Table 2, it signals that the majority (37.9%) of respondents were in the 56 years and above age group followed by 33.6% 46 - 55 years age group and the remaining one 28.5% fall in 45 years and below age group. The mean age of respondents was 52.61 years. For monthly income, this study reveals that the majority of respondents earned between RM1,001-RM2,000 per month (40.4%). A total of 39.9% earned below RM1,000 per month while 19.7% earned more than RM2,001 per month. Their mean monthly income was RM1,663.08.

The majority of respondents had stayed at the village for a long period (M = 37.1 years). Most of the respondents had stayed the same village between 26 - 45 years (38.7%), followed by those who had stayed for 46 years and more (33.0%) and lastly those who had stayed for 25 years and less (24.3%). Most of the respondents had some experience in VDSC based on the mean period of holding a position in VDSC (7.33 years). Slightly more than half (50.7%) of VDSC members had 5 years or less experience, one third of respondents (29.7%) had 6 to 10 years experience while the rest (19.6%) had 11 years and more experience in VDSC.

Table 2. Respondents profile.

Respondents profile frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D
Age (n = 235)		52.61	10.38
≤ 45 years	67	28.5	
46 - 55 years	79	33.6	
≥ 56 years	89	37.9	
Income per month (n = 213)		1663.08	1239.85
≤ RM1,000	85	39.9	
RM1,001 - RM2,000	86	40.4	
≥ RM2,001	42	19.7	
Staying period (n = 221)		37.10	15.10
≤ 25 years	57	24.3	
26 - 45 years	91	38.7	
≥ 46 years	73	33.0	
Period of holding a position in VDSC (n = 209)		7.33	6.09
≤ 5 years	106	50.7	
6 - 10 years	62	29.7	
≥ 11 years	41	19.6	

Table 3. Distribution on perception towards CVD leadership (n = 235).

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low (0 - 1.33)	-	-
Moderate (1.34 - 2.67)	3	1.3
High (2.68 - 4.0)	232	98.7

As depicted in Table 3, the majority of the respondents have very good perception towards the VDSC leadership. This is a positive finding whereby it indicated VDSC leadership received positive perception among the VDSC members thus enhance their opportunity in creating effective rural administration. Only three respondents or 1.3% found to have fair perception towards their VDSC leadership. It was interesting to know that none of the respondents have poor perception on their VDS leadership.

On top of it, Table 4 provides further input on VDSC members perception towards the leadership in VDSC organization. To reveal the perception on VDSC leadership, 16 items were measured. Based on the overall mean score of 3.90 from the maximum 5.0 mean score, there was a high perception among VDSC members towards the leadership aspects. Results presented in Table 4 obviously signal that there were three items that recorded the highest perception towards leadership aspects in VVM village which were "I am satisfied with VDSC members relationship" (M = 4.15), followed by "VDSC leaders take care of its members charity" (M = 4.11) while "team spirit in this village is high"

recorded the third highest mean score which was 4.09 while the item of "there was unhealthy relationship in VDSC organization recorded a mean score of 2.76.

Leadership aspect is highly needed for sustainable development as stressed by Uphoff (1992) and Shorthall and Shucksmith (1998) in their study that revealed that leadership aspect is important in order to create participative institution thus creating positive relationship between leaders and local institution members. Results gained signalled that there were healthy leadership and relationship among VDSC members in VVM village. A positive VDSC leadership proved to produce positive relationship among the VDSC members. This is based on the high perception recorded on items measuring VDSC members relationship, VDSC members team spirit, acceptance of VDSC way of administration and satisfaction on VDSC leadership while items measuring unhealthy relationship in VDSC members recorded lowest perception. Besides this, effective and influential leadership will also create good acceptance and involvement from the organization members and the community (Salawu and Abu Bakar, 2008) and it fits with the finding of this study where items measuring their satisfaction

Table 4. Perception towards leadership aspects (n = 235).

Statement	Absolutely not agree	Not agree	Not sure	Agree	Absolutely agree	Mean
Overall mean score for perception towards VDSC leadership						3.90
I am satisfied with the VDSC members relationship	-	0.4	4.7	74.5	20.4	4.15
VDSC leaders take care of members charity	-	0.9	7.7	70.6	20.9	4.11
Team spirit in this village VDSC is high	-	0.4	11.1	67.7	20.9	4.09
The way of this village VDSC administration can be accepted by any party.	-	1.7	10.6	65.5	22.1	4.08
Generally i'm satisfied with the this village VDSC leadership	-	2.1	8.5	68.9	20.0	4.07
There are cooperation between VDSC and government/ private / NGO agencies	-	1.3	9.8	69.4	19.6	4.07
VDSC is alert on changing of government policy.	-	1.3	10.2	71.1	17.4	4.05
Members opinion are accepted by all VDSC members in any discussion or meeting	-	1.3	9.4	75.7	13.6	4.02
VDSC has initiative to overcome issues regarding social problem, family problems, drugs addict problems and community unity problem	0.9	3.4	8.5	72.3	14.9	3.97
All VDSC members have equal chances of attending training and courses.	2.1	3.4	10.6	70.2	13.6	3.90
There are scheduled program/ activity conducted by VDSC for the purpose of changing the mindset and attitude of the villagers.	0.9	1.7	14.0	73.2	10.2	3.90
There are efective information dessiminations to the villagers.	0.9	3.8	14.9	69.4	11.1	3.86
This village leadership provides complete and useable village profile and action plan	0.4	1.7	23.8	60.0	13.6	3.85
There are management of emergency issue such as unexpected programs that must be conducted instantly.	0.9	1.7	24.7	63.8	8.9	3.78
There are complete and useable village activity schedule.	1.3	4.3	20.0	65.5	8.9	3.77
There are unhealthy relations in VDSC organizations.	9.4	36.2	28.1	22.1	4.3	2.76

towards their leadership, cooperation between VDSC

and other agencies, acceptance of members opinion in a

Table 5. Differences on perception towards VDSC leadership (n = 235).

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	F	p
Zone				5.094	0.007
Central	90	3.92	0.377		
East coast	75	3.98	0.478		
Southern	70	3.78	0.346		
Age				7.066	0.001
< 45 years	67	3.75	0.432		
46 - 55 years	79	3.93	0.324		
> 56 years	89	3.98	0.407		
Income per month				3.707	0.026
< RM1,000	85	3.98	0.335		
RM1,001 - RM2,000	86	3.86	0.386		
> RM2,001 (Value in Ringgit Malaysia)	42	3.79	0.379		
Period of staying in VVM village				2.733	0.067
< 25 years	57	3.89	0.431		
26 - 45 years	91	3.84	0.402		
> 46 years	73	3.98	0.390		
Occupation				1.380	0.250
Work on their own	103	3.92	0.396		
Government staff	57	3.82	0.438		
Not working	42	3.97	0.365		
Private company staff	33	3.90	0.399		
Education achievement				1.690	0.170
Primary school	55	3.99	0.407		
PMR/SRP/LCE	43	3.91	0.321		
SPM/MCE/ SPMV/CERTIFICATES	105	3.88	0.371		
Pre-University and University	32	3.80	0.536		

VDSC meeting recorded mean score exceeded 4.0.

Differences in the perception towards VDSC leadership

An ANOVA test was employed to determine whether zone, age, income per month, period of staying, occupation and education achievement influence the different perception of VDSC members towards the VDSC leadership and the results were presented in Table 5.

The ANOVA test results showed that there was significant difference on the perception towards VDSC leadership and for three zones studied [F (3, 235) = 5.094, P < 0.05].

A post hoc multiple comparison test employed showed that there was a significant difference on the perception towards VDSC leadership between the east coast and

southern zone. However, results revealed that there was no significant difference between central zone and east coast and southern zone. The highest mean score recorded for those from grade east coast zone (M = 3.98) followed by central zone (M = 3.92). The lowest mean score was recorded by southern zone (M = 3.78).

Based on the data presented in Table 5, obviously it concludes that there is difference in the perception of VDSC members towards VDSC leadership by age group. The ANOVA results [F (3, 235) = 7.066, p < .05] revealed that there was significant difference on perception towards VDSC leadership among the three age groups studied. There is a possibility that the older group will have more positive perception towards their leadership (Rickets et al., 2002) and among the reasons related to this are experience and loyalty to their leader.

The post hoc analysis done showed that there was a significant difference between VDSC members whose ages

were < 45 years old, those whose ages were between 46 - 55 years and > 56 years. However, there was no difference between VDSC members whose ages were 46 - 55 years with those whose ages were > 56 years.

In terms of monthly income category, the highest mean score ($M = 3.98$) was recorded for those who received < RM1,000, followed by those who gained between RM1,001 - RM2,000 ($M = 3.86$) and those who gained > RM2,001 ($M = 3.79$). Results gained showed VDSC members perception towards the VDSC leadership differ according to the monthly income category [$F(3, 235) = 3.707, p < 0.05$]. Post Hoc test suggested that there was difference on those who received < RM1,000 and those who gained > RM2,001.

On the other hand with regards to staying period in VVM village, the results presented in Table 5 depicted that there was no significant difference between the three groups studied on their perception towards VDSC leadership [$F(3, 235) = 2.733, p > 0.05$]. The highest mean score recorded by those who had stayed in the village for a period of more than > 46 years ($M = 3.98$) followed by those who had stayed for < 25 years ($M = 3.89$) and those who had stayed for 26 - 45 years ($M = 3.89$).

Moreover, the results also showed that types of respondents' occupation had the possibility of not influencing perception towards VDSC leadership. This was based on ANOVA reading that showed $F(4, 235) = 1.380, p > 0.05$, indicating that there was no significant difference between four types of occupation group studied. Based on the result, there is equality in perception towards leadership between the junior and senior village residents. This supports what have been done by Farinde et al. (2004) where he found that occupation will not influence people's perception towards leadership.

The findings of this study also pictured that members of VDSC who do not work recorded the highest mean score which was 3.97. Followed by those who work on their own (3.92) and private company staff ($M = 3.90$). The lowest mean score was recorded by government staff ($M = 3.82$).

The highest mean score recorded for those who achieved primary education with the mean score of 3.99 while the lowest mean score recorded for those who achieved pre-university and university level of education ($M = 3.89$).

Based on the results, the level of education may not influence the level of competency of VDSC members. ANOVA analysis done proved that there was no significant difference between four groups of education based on the value of $F(4, 235) = 1.690, p > 0.05$. This is pertinent with the study done by Sirsikar (1964) where he found that education attainment is not a factor that influences leadership and he stressed that there are people without higher education who were able to become a leader if he has the commitment, capability and interest to become a leader.

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this study showed that there is a high perception among the CVD members towards the VDSC leadership. It is a good indicator that VDSC members have positive and healthy relationship with their leaders. It is suggested that the responsible authorities should maintain the existing VDSC leaders and their organization based on the high acceptance and positive relationship that occurred among them.

Besides, the factors of zone, age and income per month were found to have significant difference with the perception towards VDSC leadership. Age was found as the most contributing factor to competency level. The study indicates that senior VDSC members have the possibility to have more leadership competency compared to the younger VDSC members. Thus, the study implies that agriculture agencies have the responsibility of creating various programs whereby the senior VDSC members can share and impart useful knowledge and experience to the younger members so that it would be able to create a pool of future leaders with great calibre.

Previous research had proved the importance of region or zone as a positive indicator towards leadership in creating effective organization. The finding of this study showed the importance of region or zone and it has clear implication for policy makers to understand the current trend of leadership in rural areas. It is vivid that zone plays an important role perhaps due to the fact that these leaders of the particular area or zone might have a deeper knowledge of the range of elements that might be effective in their organization to improve performance. Besides, they might know best the changes that is needed in their own area so that they would be able to build a dynamic and successful organization in their particular zone. Hence, their leadership is greatly needed to ensure the smooth performance of village development.

The findings also indicated the influence of monthly income towards rural leadership. Since leadership is about coping with change, the people in the rural areas believe that money has a major role in ensuring projects will be carried out without any hitches. Thus, they realize that they need leaders who are wealthy and influential in delivering strong leadership that would enable to get the support of the public policy implementers to execute more projects in their respective villages.

In conclusion, the influence of age, zone and monthly income is enormous in generating rural leaders who are able to match the needs of rural people. However, it is believed that more effort is needed from the policy makers to develop university graduates to take up the challenges of being rural entrepreneurs so that more rural development programs could be implemented in a creative and innovative manner.

It is suggested that future research could be carried out on other factors, such as culture, effective communication skills and leadership styles, in determining its influence on

rural leadership. Moreover, it is recommended that future research could use different methods employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in further understanding the construct of leadership among the rural leaders.

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