Research Article

# Leadership Qualities of Librarians

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of librarians on their leadership qualities. The respondents are 282 librarians from 20 public university libraries in Malaysia. The survey method is employed using a questionnaire to collect data. The librarian respondents are very positive on their own leadership qualities. In particular, they perceive their transformational leadership (mean= 5.92) to be the highest, followed by emotional intelligence (mean= 5.87), servant leadership (mean= 5.77) and leadership skills (mean= 5.60). Overall, the results show that librarians are very positive about their leadership qualities, however, they are moderately capable of understanding abstract ideas. In particular, leadership skill is positively and strongly correlated with servant leadership ($r = 0.795; p < 0.01$), followed by transformational leadership ($r = 0.794; p < 0.01$) and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.743; p < 0.01$). Similarly, the correlations between other pairs of leadership qualities' dimensions are strong, positive and highly significant. This study is significant as it contributes to the body of knowledge in leadership qualities of university librarians. It benefits public university libraries, faculties, researchers and the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the nation.

**Keywords.** Leadership; Qualities; Librarians

**MSC.** 11H60

## 1. Introduction

Leadership qualities as referred by the Malaysian Minister of Education are applicable to librarians: highly educated; highly skilled; possessing qualities to succeed in any competitive situation; strongly independent with high survival capabilities; creative and innovative in

transforming adversities into opportunities; and possessing superior values which enable them to thrive under all circumstances. Leadership qualities are also referred to as the personal attributes of an individual. As mentioned by [1], personal attributes refer to thoughts, feelings, opinions, attitudes, motivation and desire for professional information involving the tasks pertaining to university libraries. [2] in his study entitled "The contemporary librarian: Skills, knowledge, and attribute required in a world of emerging technologies" states that personality characteristics, not just educational background, are crucial to the future success of a librarian. The qualities or traits for future librarians are interpersonal and communication skills, management skills, complementary skills, information management, innovativeness, ability to adapt and being flexible, active pursuit of knowledge, leadership skills, good marketing, project management skills and ability to engage the community. Librarians must keep themselves updated with technological changes, focus on customer service, be able to deal with new trends, be resilient as well as uphold effective communication skills. University librarians have been retooling themselves and continuously upgrading their knowledge, skills, and abilities [3]. These librarians focus on the effective library services for the users more than what they do to the physical library buildings and infrastructure. They are now experts in the use of new technologies and are developing new methods of providing support to users who are adapting to the digital technologies and the development of new resources and services. A major issue among academic librarians is providing quality services in their libraries. The roles of libraries and librarians are also changing due to the information technology that has changed the way people perceive about the roles of libraries and librarians. [4] notes that librarians are more often than not intellectuals and introspective people. Librarians possess the qualities needed to run libraries such as being naturally good at planning meticulously, being thorough in research, paying attention to details as well as having the ability to get along with people; all of which are necessary to maintain a stable environment. But the environment we live in endorses high-level tolerance to ambiguity and change, the ability to continually re-evaluate situations and align programs and goals in a timely fashion as needed, and above all, the ability to anticipate and plan for the future even in time of uncertainty. Developing this kind of program requires a new style of leadership that encourages decision-making at all levels of the organization, that emphasizes flexibility in program planning, and that is designed to build a program which is capable of responding quickly to emerging needs within the university community. [5] includes traits such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, sociability, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, low neuroticism and agreeability as personal characteristics that constantly contribute to leadership. Another recent research focuses on emotional intelligence and its relationship to leaders and reveals that leaders are seemingly sensitive to their emotions, which in turn impact on others, and that the former are more effective as leaders [6].

This paper highlights the result of a study that examines:

(1) the perception of librarians on their leadership qualities (leadership skills, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and servant leadership) in Malaysian public university libraries,

(2) the relationship between the various dimensions of leadership qualities.

## 2. Methods

The study sample was made up of 282 librarians, sampled from 20 public university libraries in Malaysia. This study employed a survey method using a self-assessment instrument called "A Survey on Perceived Leadership Qualities of University Librarians in Malaysia. The survey instrument to measure leadership skills were adapted from [5]; transformational leadership from the (MLQ) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire developed by [7] and created by [8]; emotional intelligence were adapted from the one used by [9]; and servant leadership were adapted from that of [10], which was based on [11]'s concept. The perceptions of respondents on all dimensions were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Pretest, validity test, pilot test and reliability test were done in developing the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis and test of the relationship using the Pearson correlation of coefficient test were used to analyze data using the SPSS.

## 3. Results

### Profile of Respondents

Almost three-quarters (72.7%) are females, with a substantial portion (42.4%) belonging to the 31-40 age group, followed by those in the 20-30 age group (31.4%). Those in the 41-50 and 51-60 age groups make up 17.3 per cent and 8.9 per cent of the sample, respectively. These statistics indicate that almost three-quarters (73.8%) of those sampled are at most forty years old.

About half (50.9%) among the librarian respondents holds a bachelor degree in various disciplines and close to forty percent (39.9%) has a master's degree. The rest has a post-graduate diploma (8.8%) while one respondent has a Ph.D. Among those with a bachelor degree, the majority (88.9%) graduated in Library & Knowledge/Information Management. Similarly, a large proportion among the master's degree holders also graduated in the field of Library & Knowledge/information Management (85.0%), while the rest graduated from other fields of studies (15.0%).

In terms of experience, the largest proportion (38.3%) has been working as librarians for at most five years (Figure 4.5), followed by those with 6-10 years (28.0%), meaning that the majority (66.3%) has at most ten years experience in their jobs. Quite a substantial proportion of the respondents have between 11-20 years while slightly more than ten percent (11.3%) has more than 20 years experience as librarians.

### Perception of librarians on their leadership qualities

This study aims to assess the perceptions of librarians on their own leadership qualities. The study uses a set of statements to measure the perceptions of respondents with respect to the four dimensions of leadership qualities (leadership skill, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence and servant leadership). The mean scores are interpreted as follows: a mean score of at least 5.0 indicates strongly agree/positive, between 3.0 and below 5.0 as moderately agree/positive, and below 3.0 means do not agree/not positive.

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations ($s$) of the self-assessment of librarians

on the four dimensions of leadership qualities. It may be concluded that librarian respondents are very positive on their own leadership qualities. In particular, they perceive their transformational leadership (mean= 5.92) to be the highest, followed by emotional intelligence (mean= 5.87), servant leadership (mean= 5.77) and leadership skills (mean= 5.60). The size of the various $s$ values indicates that the above perceptions are consistent for the majority of the respondents.

**Table 1.** Summary statistics of perception scores on leadership qualities of librarians

| Dimension | Mean score | S |
|---|---|---|
| Transformational leadership | 5.92 | 0.684 |
| Emotional intelligence | 5.87 | 0.671 |
| Servant leadership | 5.77 | 0.635 |
| Leadership skills | 5.60 | 0.615 |

The summary statistics of each statement of Table 2 to Table 5 show that librarians rated themselves as positive in their leadership qualities. With respect to transformational leadership (Table 2), librarian respondents rated themselves as relatively most likely to be encouraging their staff to share their ideas (mean= 6.42), they treat staff with dignity and respect (mean= 6.18), encourage staff to develop new skills (mean= 6.17) and encourages an organizational culture of continuous improvement (mean= 6.12). However, they are least likely to be consistently challenging old assumptions (mean= 5.57).

In the case of emotional intelligence (Table 3), they are most likely to perceive themselves as being committed to their jobs (mean= 6.25), they have high regards in preserving integrity and honesty (mean= 6.20), they keep their organization focused on high-quality service (mean= 6.09) and able to gather resources (6.08) but least likely to perceive themselves capable of reading office politics (mean= 5.54).

In the case of servant leadership (Table 4), librarians are most likely to perceive that they are continuously appreciating, recognizing and encouraging the work of others (mean= 6.10), that they have the heart to serve others (6.01), and that they readily admit when they are wrong (mean= 6.00). Furthermore, they consistently encourage others to take initiative and encourage cooperation rather than competition through the group (both mean= 5.90). However, they are relatively least likely to believe that the greatest amount of decision-making is in the hand of those most affected (mean= 5.40).

Among the leadership skills evaluated (Table 5), they are most likely to enjoy getting all parties to work together as a challenge (mean= 5.90) and they are aware of how to perform the basic things required of them and they seriously consider of how decisions affect others' lives (both mean= 5.88 respectively) and they seek to understand the social fabric of the organization (mean= 5.86). On the other hand, they are relatively least likely to perceive themselves as being capable of understanding abstract ideas (mean= 4.85). In general, only one aspect – capable of understanding abstract ideas – is rated moderately (4.85). Hence, overall, the librarians are positive of their own capabilities as leaders except when it comes to those related to abstract ideas.

**Table 2.** Summary statistics of transformational leadership by librarians

| No. | Transformational Leadership | Mean | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Encourages staff to share their ideas | 6.420 | 4.299 |
| 2 | Treats staff with dignity and respect | 6.180 | 0.750 |
| 3 | Encourages staff to develop new skills | 6.170 | 0.815 |
| 4 | Encourages an organizational culture of continuous improvement | 6.120 | 0.776 |
| 5 | Considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions | 6.100 | 0.728 |
| 6 | Facilitate teamwork and trust | 6.080 | 0.763 |
| 7 | Understands that changes are not to be scared | 5.960 | 0.771 |
| 8 | Considerate to all staff members | 5.940 | 0.813 |
| 9 | Encourages staff to scan the environment for new library service opportunities | 5.930 | 0.859 |
| 10 | Engages the imagination and creativity of all staff members in problem solving | 5.930 | 0.799 |
| 11 | Helps others to develop their strength | 5.910 | 0.812 |
| 12 | Encouraging new services possibilities | 5.900 | 0.786 |
| 13 | Empowers library staff | 5.880 | 0.822 |
| 14 | Willing to take risks with new services | 5.790 | 0.813 |
| 15 | Be a role model who is admired | 5.790 | 0.829 |
| 16 | Strives to build a technically diverse staff | 5.750 | 0.889 |
| 17 | Talks optimistically about the future | 5.730 | 0.829 |
| 18 | Provides counselling designed to improve performance | 5.640 | 0.961 |
| 19 | Admits when poor decision is made | 5.640 | 1.006 |
| 20 | Consistently challenges old assumptions | 5.570 | 0.821 |
| | **Overall** | **5.920** | **0.684** |

**Table 3.** Summary statistics of emotional intelligence by librarians

| No. | Emotional Intelligence | Mean | S |
|---:|---|---|---|
| 1 | Commitment to job | 6.250 | 0.753 |
| 2 | High regards in preserving integrity and honesty | 6.200 | 0.786 |
| 3 | Keep organization focused on high quality service | 6.090 | 0.809 |
| 4 | Ability to gather resources | 6.080 | 4.274 |
| 5 | Understand own strengths and weaknesses | 6.020 | 0.786 |
| 6 | Be realistic | 6.020 | 0.756 |
| 7 | Create environment that fosters accountability | 5.990 | 0.745 |
| 8 | Exercise good judgment | 5.950 | 0.797 |
| 9 | Attract, build and retain talent | 5.940 | 0.794 |
| 10 | Have self-confidence | 5.890 | 0.868 |
| 11 | See things from another person's point of view | 5.870 | 0.800 |
| 12 | Build collaborative partnership | 5.790 | 0.830 |
| 13 | Sense of perspective | 5.770 | 0.766 |
| 14 | Stay optimistic when things go wrong | 5.760 | 0.912 |
| 15 | Have sense of humor | 5.750 | 0.930 |
| 16 | Lead in a shared decision-making environment | 5.650 | 0.892 |
| 17 | Create a sense of resonance in the workplace | 5.650 | 0.816 |
| 18 | Shape library culture | 5.620 | 0.875 |
| 19 | Be meticulous | 5.600 | 0.871 |
| 20 | Can read office politics | 5.540 | 0.972 |
| | **Overall** | **5.87** | **0.671** |

**Table 4.** Summary statistics of servant leadership by librarian

| No. | Servant Leadership | Mean | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I continuously appreciate, recognize and encourage the work of others | 6.100 | 0.726 |
| 2 | I have a heart to serve others | 6.010 | 0.778 |
| 3 | I readily admit when I am wrong | 6.000 | 0.778 |
| 4 | I consistently encourage others to take initiative | 5.900 | 0.849 |
| 5 | I encourage cooperation rather than competition through the group | 5.900 | 0.805 |
| 6 | I have great satisfaction in bringing out the best in others | 5.890 | 0.851 |
| 7 | I practice what I preach | 5.870 | 0.820 |
| 8 | I genuinely care for the welfare of people working with me | 5.860 | 0.781 |
| 9 | I am very focused and disciplined at work | 5.850 | 0.846 |
| 10 | I am willing to have my ideas challenges | 5.850 | 0.753 |
| 11 | I lead by example | 5.790 | 0.934 |
| 12 | I invest considerable time and energy equipping others | 5.760 | 0.776 |
| 13 | Many people come to me with their problem, because I listen with empathy | 5.740 | 0.926 |
| 14 | I learn from subordinates whom I serve | 5.720 | 0.831 |
| 15 | I try to match people with their jobs in order to optimize productivity | 5.710 | 0.902 |
| 16 | I am willing to sacrifice personal benefits to promote group harmony and team success | 5.700 | 0.873 |
| 17 | I am able to inspire others with my enthusiasm and confidence for what can be accomplished | 5.700 | 0.837 |
| 18 | My leadership is based on a strong sense of mission | 5.680 | 0.849 |
| 19 | I usually come up with solutions accepted by others as helpful and effective | 5.680 | 0.797 |
| 20 | I am genuine and candid with people | 5.660 | 0.869 |
| 21 | I am able to motivate others to achieve beyond their own expectation | 5.640 | 0.838 |
| 22 | I often demonstrate for others how to make decisions and solve problems | 5.550 | 0.965 |
| 23 | I am willing to make personal sacrifices in serving others | 5.530 | 0.936 |
| 24 | I place the greatest amount of decision-making in the hands of those most affected by the decision | 5.460 | 0.906 |
| | **Overall** | **5.77** | **0.615** |

**Table 5.** Summary statistics of leadership skills by librarians

| No. | Leadership skills | Mean | S |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I enjoy getting all parties to work together as a challenge | 5.900 | 0.839 |
| 2 | I am aware how to perform the basic things required of me | 5.880 | 0.835 |
| 3 | I seriously consider of how decisions affect others' lives | 5.880 | 0.762 |
| 4 | I seek to understand the social fabric of the organization | 5.860 | 0.786 |
| 5 | I am skillful in completing the tasks assigned to me | 5.850 | 0.777 |
| 6 | I am capable of completing the tasks I have been assigned to do | 5.820 | 0.777 |
| 7 | I can easily envision the way forward of the library | 5.800 | 0.855 |
| 8 | I take pleasure in knowing the details of how things work | 5.730 | 0.880 |
| 9 | I appreciate the process of developing strategies for the organization's growth | 5.700 | 0.858 |
| 10 | I have the genuine interest in thinking about organizational values and philosophy | 5.700 | 0.843 |
| 11 | I am concerned with having a supportive communication climate | 5.630 | 0.838 |
| 12 | The most important part of my work is to understand others | 5.620 | 0.797 |
| 13 | I can follow directions easily | 5.520 | 0.938 |
| 14 | I find constructing a mission statement as a gratifying work | 5.520 | 0.921 |
| 15 | I am fascinated by multifaceted organizational problems | 5.280 | 0.926 |
| 16 | I am intrigued with technical things | 5.140 | 1.034 |
| 17 | I can easily adapt ideas in order to fulfill the needs of others | 5.030 | 1.041 |
| 18 | I appreciate working with abstract ideas | 4.850 | 1.047 |
| | Overall | **5.600** | **0.615** |

## Relationship between Leadership Qualities' Dimensions of Librarians

Table 6 presents the Pearson's coefficient of correlation ($r$) between the four dimensions of leadership qualities. [12] suggests that the absolute value of $r$ manifests the strength of association between two variables as follows: Less than 0.2 is very weak; between 0.20 and 0.39 is weak; between 0.40-0.59 is moderate; 0.60-0.79 is strong; and 0.80-1.0 is very strong. Based on the librarians' self-assessment, the four dimensions of leadership are highly correlated among themselves. In particular, leadership skill is positively and strongly correlated with servant leadership ($r = 0.795$; $p < 0.01$), followed by transformational leadership ($r = 0.794$; $p < 0.01$) and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.743$; $p < 0.01$). Similarly, the correlations between other pairs of leadership qualities' dimensions are strong, positive and highly significant.

**Table 6.** Correlation between dimensions of leadership qualities of librarians

| Category | Dimension | Dimension | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Skill | Transformation | Emotional | Servant |
| Librarians | Leadership skills | 1 | 0.794** | 0.743** | 0.795** |
| | Transformational leadership | 0.794** | 1 | 0.755** | 0.791** |
| | Emotional intelligence | 0.743** | 0.755** | 1 | 0.782** |
| | Servant leadership | 0.795** | 0.791** | 0.782** | 1 |

**: Significant at 0.01

# 4. Discussions and Conclusion

This study examines the leadership qualities of public university librarians in Malaysia by incorporating existing theories of leadership skills, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and servant leadership, which is in line with the aspiration of the Malaysian Ministry of Education to create a pool of human capital with a first class mentality.

The results suggest that librarians are very positive about the qualities of their leadership, are confident of their abilities to lead as well as motivate others, and perceive themselves as being committed. However, they consider themselves to be only moderately capable of understanding abstract ideas. They consider their transformational leadership to be the highest, followed by emotional intelligence, servant leadership, and leadership skills.

In the opinion of the librarians, the four dimensions of leadership qualities (transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, servant leadership and leadership skills) are positively and highly correlated with one another.

The results of the study imply that librarians as library leaders need to provide high-quality library services as the important finding shows that librarians are highly committed to their work. This is very good for the success of any organization in that it would bring about stability in the latter.

It also implies that librarians should strengthen their leadership qualities, where the following weaknesses are apparent, specifically in understanding abstract ideas, willingness to admit mistakes, and make personal sacrifices in serving others. The study has revealed some weaknesses among librarians, in particular with respect to a conceptual skill such as in understanding abstract ideas. Conceptual skill is the ability to think creatively and analyze and understand complicated and abstract ideas. It involves knowing how to formulate ideas and examine how ideas are interrelated. Individuals who have strong conceptual skills typically have excellent cognitive abilities to think creatively and solve problems. Librarians who are strong in conceptual skills would be considered as effective leaders because they are able to understand the organization as a whole and develop creative strategies.

It is recommended that future research on thinking skills of library leaders need to be developed. This recommended research should focus on cognitive abilities, intellectual capacities and the credibility of future library leaders.

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### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### Authors' Contributions

All the authors contributed significantly in writing this article. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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