Trends in Governance and Management of the Malaysian Academic Profession (2007-2013): Evolution or Devolution?

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Abstract

This article analyses the academics' role in the (shared) governance of the Malaysian higher education system over a period of five years (2007 – 2013). The aim is to provide a perspective of how Malaysian academics perceive the governance and management practices based on data from two similar studies of the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) in 2007 and 2013. Findings reveal that the academics clearly consolidated their hold over personnel decisions. However, the mid-level management maintained the control of decisions in areas related to the regulation of academic work. Furthermore, the respondents in the 2007 and 2013 studies acknowledged having little influence in determining institutional policies at the school/faculty and institutional levels. In the areas of selection of administrators and approval of new programmes, top management and boards retained their primary influence. While the quality of communication seemed to have improved since 2007, the academics' perceptions of a stronger performance orientation, top-down management style and bureaucracy over the five years reflected the continued strength of the market coordinated system in the Malaysian higher education system. Middle management appeared to have made inroads in the management and governance of HEIs. The paper concludes by proposing a number of initiatives for ensuring that shared governance is effectively implemented in higher education institutions.

Keywords: decision-making, Malaysia, management, shared governance

Introduction

The evolution of higher education in Malaysia, as in other countries around the world, is dynamic and continues to be challenged on a number of fronts such as cultural shifts, student and academic demography, reduced funding, the influence of technology, globalization, and internationalization (Altbach, 2010; Kaur & Manan, 2010; Sirat, 2010). In addition, the system is influenced by a number of external and internal constituents including various government agencies, industries, governing boards, administrators, academics, students, alumni, and accrediting bodies and associations. Various reforms in government policies targeting the higher education system aimed at strengthening higher education institutions' (HEIs) governance and management have been implemented since 1996, including the Private Higher Education Act, 1996, the National Council on Higher Education 1996, the National Accreditation Board Act 1996, and the University and University Colleges (Amendment) Act (UUCA) 1996. The passing of the Acts in Parliament highlights the evolution and liberalization of the Malaysian higher education governance, the commercialization of the academic activities as well as the establishment of a regulatory framework to monitor the HEIs (Hambali, Faruqi, & Abdul Manan, 2009; Taib & Abdullah, 2015). The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007-2020) and its accompanied action plans (2007-2014), the quality assurance system such as the Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA) and the Teaching and Learning Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education System (SETARA), and the most recent, the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB 2015-2025) further strengthen the idea of corporatization to enhance efficiency and efficacy of HEIs through

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institutional autonomy, managerialism, marketization, competition and total quality management (Azman, Jantan, & Sirat, 2011; Azman, 2019; Mok, 2007).

Prior to 1996, the government was seen as exercising a minimal influence in the running of HEIs and the development of higher education in general (Md Taib & Abdullah, 2015). Public HEIs were governed by the UUCA and the government only took mild and relaxed changes in liberalising the public universities. The liberalization of higher education was more focussed on the public HEIs as more private institutions were needed to cater for the rising needs for tertiary education. However, after 1996, neoliberalism and New Public Management (NPM) emerged as the primary mechanisms through which the whole system of higher education reforms are enacted. The basic principle of NPM is increased competition among and within universities for resources, students, and national as well as international standing (Santiago, Carvalho, & Cardoso, 2015). In order to achieve competitiveness, the Malaysian HEIs deregulate, create new leadership strategies, and accept new market-based interventions. These resulted in the concentration of executive powers at the top, a decentralized operational management, and the replacement of the collegial-based with output-based governance. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) became the main instrument used to promote a new organizational order among HEIs (Azman, 2019; Azman et al., 2011). In addition, along with the steadily decreasing public funds for higher education, the reforms include countless schemes to regulate academic work, promotion, and funding system. In essence, the Malaysian higher education system is claimed to be both evolving and devolving.

In the process of growth, development, and seemingly, of devolution of HEIs, both external and internal influences, and the new reforms continue to create unique sets of complex problems for Malaysian academics (Azman, 2019; Azman et al., 2011; Lee, 2004; Mok, 2008). The government's effort to provide semi autonomy to institutions, while providing flexibility for individual institutions to govern, has instead somehow strengthened the power of the executive authorities, especially the governance board and the top management (Wan Abdul Manan, 2008; Sirat, 2010). This change reduces collegiality and limits academics' freedom over decision-making practices (Azman, 2019; Azman et al., 2011). Consequently, the academics' decision making, and professional roles is slowly being taken away by the administrators or managers. As such, academics have increasingly become 'managed academics' (Azman, 2019; Santiago et al., 2015), more regulated and regimented through a plethora of accountability systems (Mok, 2007; Santiago et al., 2015). Subsequently, these changes have brought about new set of principles and values in responsibilities of, and roles for academics (Md Taib & Abdullah, 2015; Azman, 2019).

As evidenced by limited available studies, Malaysian academics seem to have acted differently in response to the aforementioned changes, taking on different attitudes ranging from non-consensus/resistance to adjustment, including hybridization and agreement/conformity. For example, in relation to performance targets used to regulate their work, teaching and learning audits and research output, some academics were found to comply with the reforms while others utilized the reform to reap positive effects by increasing productivity (Azman & Kutty, 2016; Harun & Komoo, 2020). Some have developed coping strategies to avoid negative effects while some others use 'gaming strategies' (Azman & Kutty, 2016; Harun & Komoo, 2020). Arguably, the management of academics by using performance targets set by the various national quality assurance systems has changed the distribution of power and values within academe and created an environment where academics have more vested interest in the output as they are not held accountable for the processes and practices anymore. The risk of these reactions is a disregard for institutional core values, commitment to mission, and long-term perspective that is unique to institutions of higher education (Azman, 2019; Birnbaum, 2004). This may also reflect the emphasis on managerial values over professional ones with the academics losing control over both the goals of their work practices and their technical tasks. The question of management and academics' attitudes towards shared decision making generates a concern for the future of shared governance in the Malaysian HEIs (Azman, 2019; Mok, 2007). Examining the literature on good governance in the Malaysian higher education system, it is evident that limited studies have focussed on the academics, especially in terms of how they perceive their decision-making practices, or the concept of shared governance. Thus, it remains unclear what role academics play in any shared decision-making, and to what extent they might value a participatory decision-making environment.

The present study examines the trends in Malaysian academics' perceptions on three related areas: the employment of organizational power, that is, the most influential actors involved in decision-making processes in academics' work; the involvement of academics in the decision of institutional policies; and the dominant management model. The data from this study is specific to the relationship between the governance, structure, and shared decision-making in HEIs, with a focus on academics' perspectives. The findings will contribute towards understanding how academic staff perceive their role in the shared governance process, and hence better inform policy makers about the importance of academic decision making in institutional governance. In addition, policy makers can use this information to make policies that will necessitate academics' active participation in decision making in areas where they should partake on. This study will greatly enhance the small body of literature currently available on the topic of academic governance and, more specifically, on Malaysian HEIs' academics' involvement in institutional governance.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The concept of shared governance and the roles and structures in internal governance is briefly discussed, followed by an overall brief synthesis of the Malaysian higher education system and the academic profession in the third and fourth sections. A description of the methodology follows, specifically, the use of data derived from the Malaysian version of the 'Changing Academic Profession' (CAP) (2007) and the Malaysian Academic Profession (MAP) (2013) surveys. The sixth section comprises the analysis of data, depicting the trends in the perceptions of academics on decision making between 2007 and 2013 including similarities and differences. Finally, the major conclusions of the trends are offered along with suggestions for strategic initiatives and for advancement of knowledge in this field.

Roles and Structures in Internal Shared Governance

This section focuses on the institutional level governance structures that shape the internal governance process. Internal governance refers to the decision-making processes of an institution, as well as institutional policy (Moran, 2012). Unlike day-to-day management decisions and processes, the governance of an HEI is concerned with determining the mission, purpose and strategic planning of the institution, resource allocation, academic planning and policy, among other decisions (Johnson, DuVivier, & Hambright, 2017; Kaplan, 2006). The locus of this governing authority is the unique concept of shared governance, which has been a defining feature of HEIs for centuries (Bowen & Tobin, 2014; McGrane, 2013).

Shared governance can be characterized as anything from a shorthand for faculty participation in decision-making (Schwartz, Skinner, & Bowen, 2009) to full-fledged power sharing involving the entire HEI community (Austin & Jones, 2016). It is a broad, over-arching term that describes the system by which different members of HEI communities come together to help with institutional decision-making. In defining shared governance, Birnbaum (2004) highlights the prominent role of academics by describing shared governance as a "generally accepted normative principle" (p. 16) with an expectation of academic staff playing a preeminent role. Others describe shared governance in the form of faculty representation in institutional decision-making (Nadler, Miller, & Modica, 2010). Flynn (2005), Crellin (2010) and Moran (2012) describe shared governance as the collaborative responsibility among various parties for primary decisions about the general institutional policy. The parties typically involved in the sharing include the academics, the administration, and the board of trustees and students. Each of these groups of stakeholders brings its own unique perspective to what they consider the ideal or most appropriate approach to governance in higher education.

There are variations in the models of shared governance used in higher education. Generally, there are three fundamental assumptions that institutions should use as principles in guiding their shared governance environment: (a) governance should result from the interdependence and support from the various governance sections; (b) shared governance and academic freedom are inseparably connected; and (c) academics' involvement in governance is an ethical commitment (Ramo, 1997). The four main functions of shared governance include facilitating faculty contribution in management; providing a forum for debate to discuss organizational matters; gaining an understanding of educational goals; and creating a statement of professional ethics (Birnbaum 2004; Austin & Jones, 2016). The aim of the

shared governance mechanism is to foster institutional growth, higher education excellence, and the freedom of scholarly thought and expression (Austin & Jones, 2016).

Significant research literature has demonstrated that an HEI's success may be determined by academics' participation in institutional governance (Jones, 2012; Shattock, 2013; 2014) as scholars have found that: faculty involvement affects the academic quality of an institution (Carroll, Dickson, & Ruseski, 2013; Taylor, 2013); lack of faculty governance reduces academic freedom and trust; and lack of power sharing can lead to an institutional uproar (Bucklew, Houghton, & Ellison, 2012). Research also indicates that shared governance helps maintain academic excellence for HEIs (Taylor, 2013) and that it protects institutions from political trends and safeguards the stability of the institution from unjustified control of any one group of people (Nelson, 2010). Hence, studies have found that more than 80 percent of HEIs in North America believe that shared governance is important, and many academics and administrators consider shared governance as a pivotal element of higher education (Austin & Jones, 2016; Jones, 2012; Tierney & Minor, 2003).

However, academic involvement in shared governance has significantly declined in the last few decades. Heaney (2010) blames this on the lethargic pace of decision-making when academic staff are involved in the process. Pierce (2014), for instance, questioned whether the structures of shared governance can meet the challenges facing HEIs as the processes of shared governance were found to be slow and ineffective. Moreover, due to delays in decision-making, some HEIs tend to experience static progression especially when they are expected to make rapid changes to various aspects of their institutions (Stensaker & Vabo, 2013). Other scholars claim that academic staff are not interested enough in being part of the process or informed to the degree to be qualified to make decisions necessary for their institutions, particularly in responding to market demands (Bok, 2013; Gerber, 2014). Critics of shared governance also contend that a narrowly focused academic staff is unable to manage institutional affairs and as such, HEIs need to be governed by professionals who are trained and experienced in corporate policy and planning (Leach, 2008; Sheets, Crawford, & Soars, 2012; Trakman, 2008). Another problem with shared governance is that it involves many stakeholders with different agendas. Nevertheless, findings regarding the importance of shared governance persistently claim that it is important to have a governance model for HEIs which operate as a loosely coupled system as, throughout history, the most highly regarded and successful HEIs have been the institutions that employed shared governance and granted academics a primary role in decision-making (Gerber, 2014; Taylor, 2013; Tinberg, 2009). Thus, as a compromise, some scholars have advocated that HEIs should seek a balance between corporatism and collegiality with a consistent accommodation of shared governance (Dearlove, 2002; Harman & Treadgold, 2007).

Considerable variation is evident in shared governance concepts and definitions, its practices and influence across institutional types, context and culture. The present study is not grounded in any one prescribed definition of shared governance, but rather assumes a great variation both in terms of higher education systems and settings over time. It is expected that internal governance processes have a certain amount of fluidity given the nature of HEIs, culture and politics of the system (Maassen, 2017).

The Malaysian Higher Education System

The Malaysian higher education system is made up of both public and private institutions. The public sector of higher education comprises 20 public universities (established between 1962 and 2007), 36 polytechnics, and 94 community colleges. The private sector includes 47 private universities, 10 foreign university branch campuses, 34 private university colleges, and 347 colleges. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) co-ordinates and monitors the activities of public and private HEIs.

The Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971 is the main legislative structure that governs public universities in Malaysia. It bestows the government with full power over student enrolment, staff appointments, educational programmes, and financing. As public universities expanded in magnitude and form, administrative practicality necessitated the regulation of guidelines and procedures, both at the MoHE and university levels. The Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971 was amended in 1996 to restructure the public universities in terms of corporatization of their governance. Corporatized

public universities are allowed to participate in business ventures, collect and grow endowments, establish companies, and procure and hold investment shares (Lee, 2002). These corporate universities are expected to be managed using a market-based approach by minimising cost, increasing efficiency and profits.

In 2007, five of the 20 public universities were designated as Research University (RU) status which entitled them to receive additional funding for research development and commercialization. The remaining 15 public universities were either classified as comprehensive or focussed universities. Comprehensive universities are large universities that offer a wide variety of programmes while the focussed ones are smaller universities that maintain special assigned niches such as marine science or entrepreneurship. In Malaysia, most focussed universities specialize in technical and vocational education training (TVET).

Private higher education institutions were officially recognized in Malaysia in 1996 with the enactment of the Private Higher Education Institutions Act (PHEIA) 1996. This act authorizes the founding of degree-awarding private universities and the founding of branch campuses by foreign universities. It also warrants private colleges to conduct their courses in English with the approval of the Minister of Higher Education.

A somewhat comparable hierarchical model exhibiting a top-down approach is apparent in the governance and management organizations of both public and private universities. The hierarchy of academic organization ranges from Vice-Chancellor/President at the university-wide level, assisted by Deputy Vice-Chancellors/Deputy Presidents, Pro Vice-Chancellors, and Registrar and Bursar, at the senate comprising academics and administrators, and at the level of particular faculties and schools, Deans and Heads of Department.

The Malaysian Academic Profession

The academic profession in Malaysia is relatively large and not very competitive (Azman et al., 2016). The number of academics employed in both public and private universities in Malaysia rose from 39,153 in 2007 to 66,627 in 2015. Between 2007 to 2015, private universities had a total increase of 53.2 per cent with 16,270 academics employed in 2007 to 34,750 in 2015 (MoHE, 2015a). As of December 2018, 31,528 academic staff were employed in the public universities and 14,716 academic staff in private institutions. A total of 7,281 and 2,764 academics are employed in the polytechnics and community colleges respectively (MoHE, 2018).

Academics in private universities are employed on a tenure basis while those in public universities hold permanent appointments as civil servants ending with retirement. The legal status of civil servants is based on the Public Services Statute (UUCA, 1971; 2009). As civil servants, academic salaries are similar across all universities and are not considered high. While part-time appointments are still rare in public universities, private universities retain a more moderate association between full-time and part-time employment. However, no statistics are available on part-time academics employed by both public and private universities.

Full time academics in Malaysian HEIs generally hold one of four academic ranks: lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and professor. The academic population has a relatively bottom-heavy structure as nearly three quarters of academics (74.2%) are of lecturer and senior lecturer status. For the 2015 academic year, women comprised 44.1 per cent of all academics. However, the number of female academics at public universities is growing; more than half (53.6%, or 17,081) are women. Conversely, women academics are not well represented in the private universities; only 35.4 per cent of academics (12, 289) are female (MoHE, 2015a). In most public universities, only candidates with doctoral degrees can be hired directly as lecturers. Out of 31,528 academics employed by the public universities, 43.7 per cent (13,925) hold doctoral degrees whereas only 14.9 per cent (1,331) of academics in the private universities have doctoral qualifications (MoHE, 2018).

Purpose

This paper will highlight analysis intended to provide a perspective on the academic role in institutional governance in the period between 2007-2013 in Malaysia. This paper addresses three specific dimensions of governance:

i.   Academics' perceptions of which group of stakeholders exerted major influence over decisions on academic promotion and leadership appointment, budget priorities, new academic programmes and evaluation of key academic roles;

ii. Academics' perceptions of the influence they exerted as individuals on their department/centre, faculty or school (the larger academic units to which their department or centre belongs to) and their institutions;

iii. Academics' general perceptions of the competence of leadership in terms of communication style and management approach and practices.

Methods and Procedures

The datasets from the studies on the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) in 2007 and the Malaysian Academic Profession (MAP) in 2013 provide statistics on a variety of measures for academics in HEIs. The CAP study is an international survey of the academic profession that has been employed in 24 countries. The survey requires a large sample of academics in each of the participating countries to complete a set of questionnaires. The CAP uses cluster sampling: each country decides the main categories of HEIs in its national setting and selects institutions (clusters) randomly from each category of institutions which would be surveyed in their totality, i.e., all academics at chosen institutions would be considered to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire examines the following constructs: demographic background, teaching activities, research activities, community involvement, internationalization, and institutional management and governance. The survey provides data about the collective value system of the academic profession.

The MAP study replicating the CAP 2007 study commenced in 2011 and data collection concluded in 2013. As the study used the same questionnaire as that used for the CAP study with the same sampling method, the data should, in principle, be resultantly comparable. The four dimensions of governance and management addressed in this paper are those addressed in both the 2007 CAP and 2013 MAP surveys, thus allowing for direct comparisons of responses over a five-year period. Data for both CAP and MAP were collected via email and snail mail. The survey was linked with an individually coded identifier with a copy of the letter of invitation and emailed, while a paper version was mailed to all the respondents. The CAP project decided on an effective completed sample of 800 for each participating country. The reliability and validity of the surveys were assessed utilizing several different combination clusters of academics. Internal consistency reliability was calculated from the responses of 1,100 in CAP 2007 and 1,822 in MAP 2013. The internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha) of the item was 0.95 (MAP 2013) and 0.91 (CAP 2007) respectively.

Table 1. Respondents for CAP (2007) and MAP (2013) based on university types

Types of University	MAP 2013	CAP 2007
Public university	1,248 (68.5%)	746 (67.8%)
Public university college	0 (0.0%)	79 (7.2%)
Private university	477 (26.2%)	157 (14.3%)
Private university college	97 (5.3%)	109 (9.9%)
Private college	0 (0.0%)	9 (0.8%)
Total	1,822 (100.0%)	1,100 (100.0%)

The selection of sampling for both the CAP and MAP surveys used the combination of cluster (university types: public university, public university college, private university, private university college, private college) and stratified sampling (discipline, academic rank, and gender). Having determined the proportion of academic staff in the population of HEIs, a random sample of academics was selected within each institutional stratum so as to approximately reflect them proportionately (Table 1). This approach yielded a total sample of 1,100 in CAP 2007 and 1,822 in MAP 2013 (Table 2), which

represents 4.9 and 5.7 per cent of the target population, respectively. Basic frequencies and means were computed on the four dimensions addressed in this paper.

**Table 2.** Respondents for CAP (2007) and MAP (2013) based on academic rank

Academic Rank	MAP 2013			CAP 2007		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Professor	92	32	124 (6.8%)	50	20	70 (6.4%)
Associate Professor	131	75	206 (11.3%)	107	65	172 (15.6%)
Assistant Professor/Senior Lecturer	266	277	543 (29.8%)	105	93	198 (18.0%)
Lecturer	392	402	794 (43.6%)	313	345	658 (59.8%)
Tutor	71	67	138 (7.6%)	0	0	0 (0.0%)
Others	5	12	17 (0.9%)	0	2	2 (0.2%)
Total	**957**	**865**	**1,822**	**575**	**525**	**1,100**

Findings

Perceptions of Stakeholders' Influence

Both the CAP and MAP surveys posed similar questions on a series of decision-making areas (selecting key administrators, academic appointments, approving new programmes, etc.) by key stakeholders. For this dimension, four decision categories considered to be representative of decisions from entirely personnel and curricular to administrator selection (the typical domain of the academics) were sought to compare the responses in 2007 to those in 2013 by these groups of stakeholders: academics (including individual academics, academic committees, and the senate), middle managers (deans and department chairs), and central administration (top management leaders, boards and external groups). The results are displayed in Figure 1.

In terms of faculty personnel related decisions (selection of new academics, academic promotion, and tenure), a clear pattern emerged. According to the data, by 2013, the academics had gained influence in personnel decisions. Between 2007 and 2013, the academics had achieved influence (from 4.5% to 49.7%) in choosing new faculty members, making decisions on faculty promotion and tenure (7.9% to 43.1%) as well as in approving new academic programmes (14.5% to 40.5%). In addition, there was a minor increase in the influence of the deans and department chairs (3.2%) and a declining influence of the central administration (29.2%) in approving academic programmes. Between 2007 and 2013, top management leaders and boards retained their influence in selecting new administrators. The academics appeared to have made inroads in this area from 4.5 per cent in 2007 to 36.2 percent in 2013.
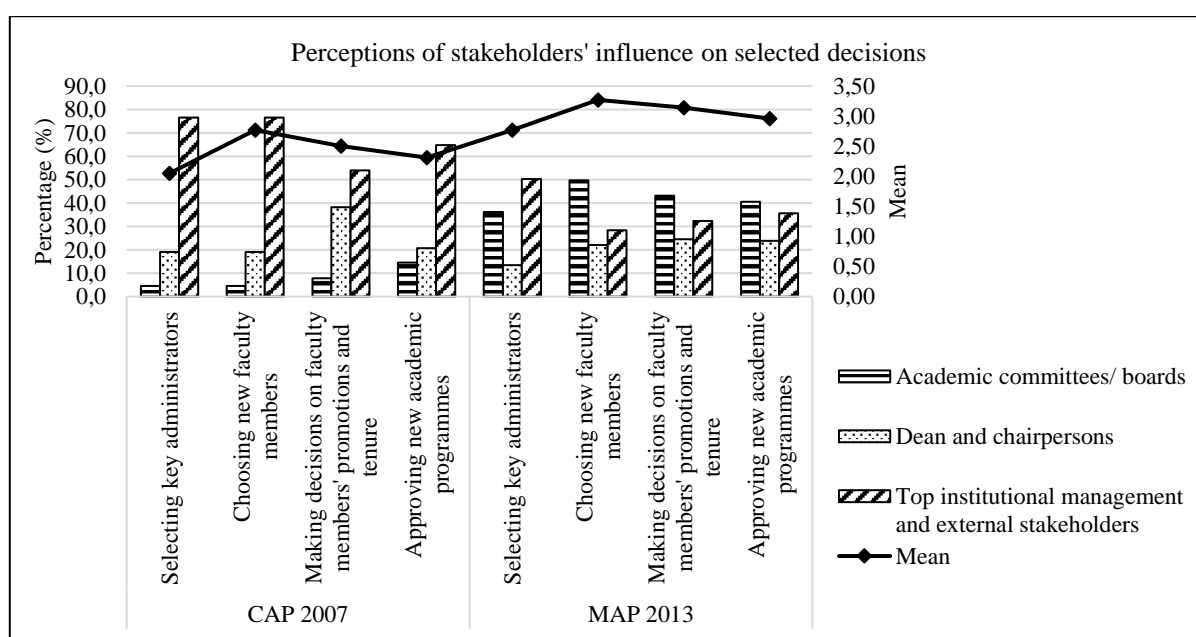
Figure 1. Perceptions of stakeholders' influence on selected decisions (percentage and mean, 2007 and 2013)

Perceptions of Individual Influence

How influential do the Malaysian academics individually consider themselves in decision-making at the level of their department/centre, at the level of faculty/school and at the level of their institution as a whole? The data in Figure 2 shows that the academics did not consider themselves 'very influential' at each of the three levels. In particular, academics in 2007 and 2013 did not consider themselves very influential beyond their department level. In 2007, 42.8 per cent reported themselves influential at the department level, and by 2013, there was a small increase of 2.4 per cent of respondents who reported being influential at their own departments. Similarly, a small minority reported themselves influential at the faculty or school level although the proportion increased from 27.2 per cent in 2007 to 36.9 per cent in 2013. In 2007, just over one-tenth (10.4%) self-reported themselves as very influential at the institutional level and by 2013, that had risen slightly to a quarter (25.1%), a modest increase of 14.7 per cent.
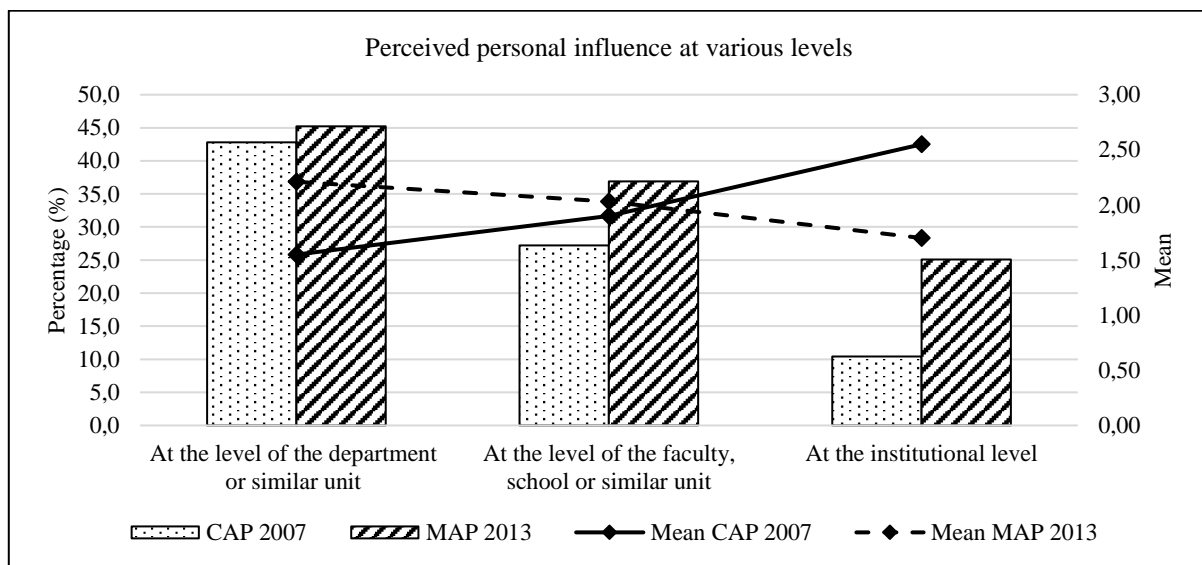

Figure 2. Perceived personal influence at various levels (percentage and mean, 2007 and 2013)

Influence in Evaluation of Key Roles

The respondents were asked to rate the relative influence of stakeholders in three decision areas including Teaching, Research and External activities. Specifically, the respondents were asked to determine who monitored or evaluated their main activities. For the purpose of simplicity, the analysis is focused on six stakeholder groups: academics (peers within the department and other departments), middle management (head of department/school), senior administrative staff, students, external reviewers, and self (see Figure 3).
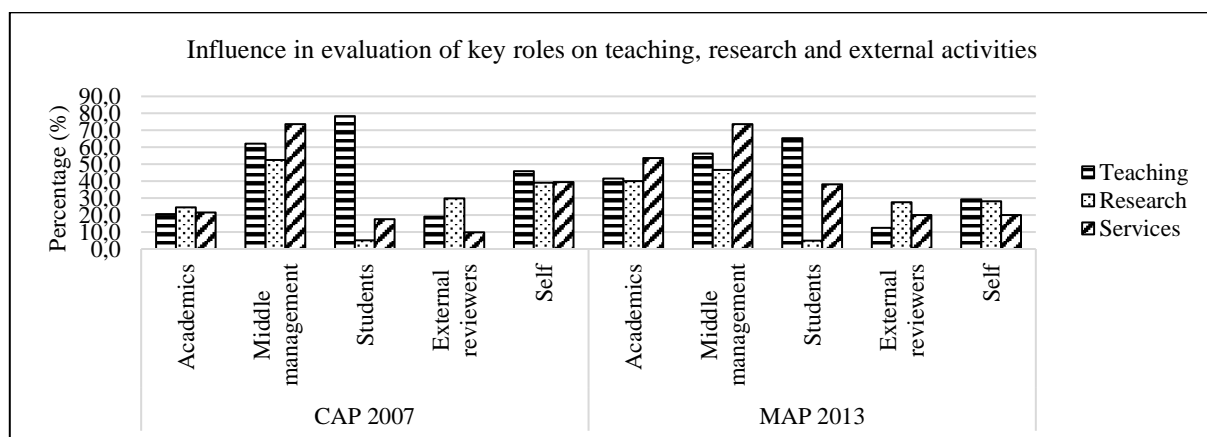

Figure 3. Influence in evaluation of key roles on teaching, research, and external activities (percentage and mean, 2007 and 2013)

Some conclusions can be made from the data on perceived power behind the undertaking of evaluation on academic activities**.** Most decisions seemed to be still vested with the heads of departments or units. The same trend is apparent for both the 2007 and 2013 data. Teaching was evaluated largely by the students (78.3% in 2007 and 65.3% in 2013) and the heads of units (62.2% in 2007, 60.7% in 2013). During the five-year period, there seemed to have been a declining influence on self-evaluation in teaching activities (45.9 % to 29.2%). Although peer evaluation (peers in the same unit or other departments) continued to retain a strong role in evaluating all the academic activities, the head of department continued to retain the highest share of influence in the evaluation of academic activities. This means that since 2007, middle management still dominated the monitoring of the teaching, research, and external activities of the academics.

Perceptions of Leadership Competencies
The academics were asked to assess the prevailing management style in their respective institutions on various aspects. Several items required respondents to record their level of agreement or disagreement with statements about competence in administrative leadership. The first group of competencies can be summarized as communication style of management and the second is operationally-oriented management.

Communication style
Four items in Figure 4 represent the dimensions of communication styles as typical of communication-oriented management. The decision-making in these items may require wide-ranging discussion between stakeholders and have a collegial character. On the other hand, other decision-making processes may tend to be top-down. The respondents registered their level of agreement with the four statements on the four dimensions of communication.
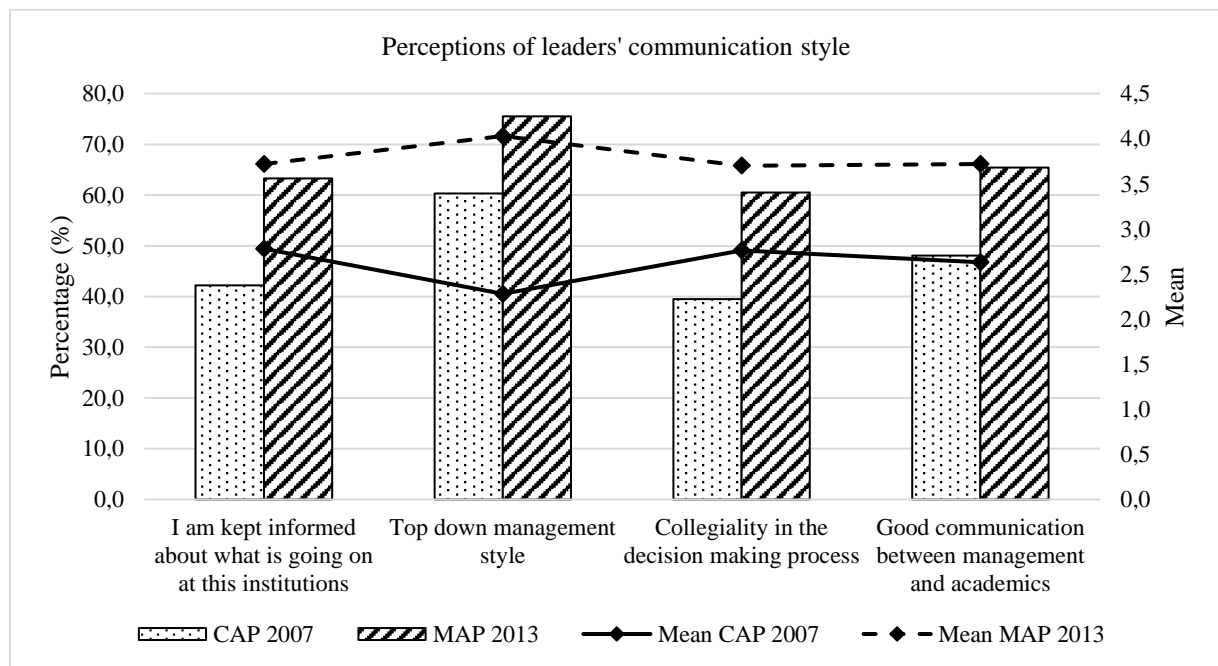

Figure 4. Perceptions of leaders' communication style (percentages of agree and totally agree for 2007 and 2013)

As Figure 4 shows, the quality of communication was perceived to have improved, judging by the 17.3 per cent increase between 2007 and 2013 in the percentage of faculty agreeing that good communication existed between management and the academics. Likewise, increases are evident in percentages of faculty agreeing on collegiality in the decision-making process (21%) and that community was kept informed of what was happening (21.1%) between 2007 and 2013. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of agreement is recorded for top-down management style in 2013 (75.5%) as compared to 2007 (60.3%). This 15.2 percent increase in agreement about the top-down style of management indicates that while academics were more positive about communication style in 2013 compared to in 2007, top-down

management was still considered highly exercised in their system. This means that a healthier communicative management style co-existed with a stronger top-down management style in 2013.

Operationally-oriented style
Distinctive from the communication aspects of management, the second group of competencies is summarized as an operationally-oriented style of management. These items specifically look at aspects of strategic management, competence, and efficiency. The five items are displayed in Figure 5.
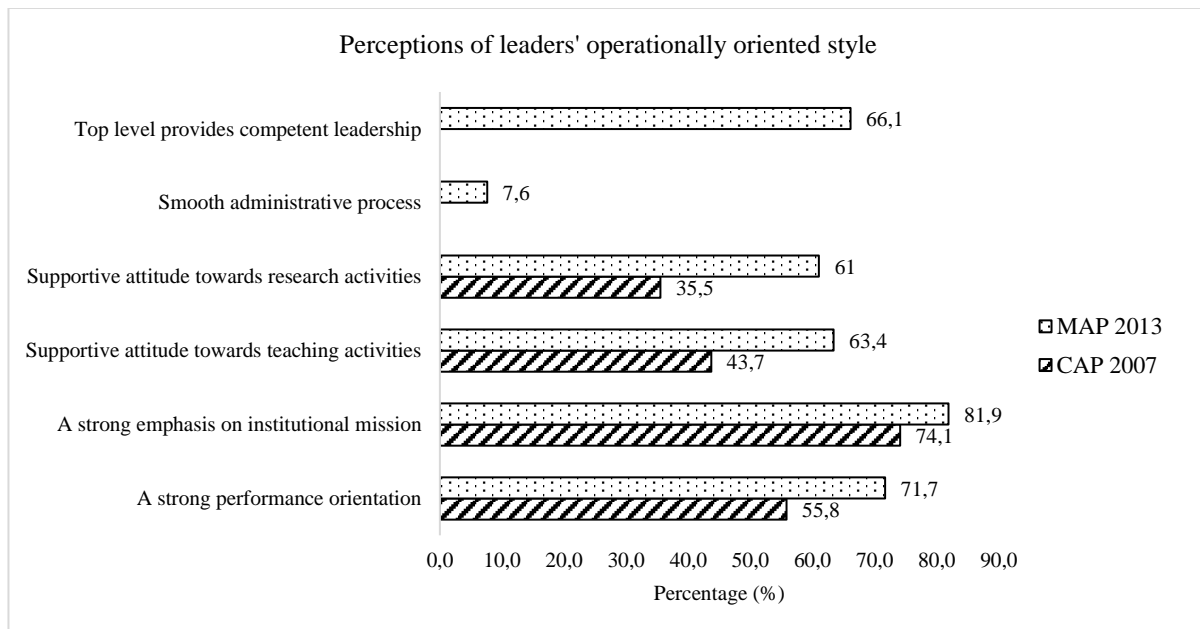
Figure 5. Perceptions of leaders' operationally-oriented style (percentages of strongly agree and agree for 2007 and 2013)

Generally, the data shows that with the exception of the item on smooth administrative process, the trend is clearly in the direction of improvement. A strong emphasis is evident on a strong performance orientation as 15.2 percent more of the respondents in 2013 (71%) rated their management leaders as placing a strong emphasis on institutional mission compared to the percentage in 2007 (56.5%). In 2007, 74.7 per cent of the respondents reported that their institutional mission was strongly emphasized, and by 2013, that had risen to 81.9 per cent. Higher ratings were also given to strong teaching performance (63.4%) and research performance orientations (61%) in 2013 than in 2007 (43.8%, 36.3%) respectively. These suggest that the academic communities in the 2013 MAP survey perceived greater institutional efforts in the attainment of performance than in the 2007 CAP survey. Competent leadership at the Malaysian HEIs was also perceived to be more prevalent as the respondents reported agreement of 66.1% in 2013, higher by 17 per cent compared to 49.1 per cent in 2007. Smooth administrative process received lower agreement in 2013 (7.6% rated agree and totally agree) than in 2007 (19.2 %). This implies that the administration had become less smooth (or more bureaucratic) over the five years.

Discussion
The Malaysian academics seemed to perceive a much more decentralized decision-making process in 2013 as compared to the detected stronger degree of centralization in 2007. Some evidence suggests that although the governance of the Malaysian HEIs was perceived to have become more decentralized, the academics still perceived of themselves as less influential and less prominent in decision-making processes. The main conclusions on the trends in the perceptions of the Malaysian academics on decision-making between 2007 and 2013 are summarized below.

First, between 2007 and 2013, the academics had clearly consolidated their hold over personnel decisions. It is important to note that while faculty influence on academic appointment and promotion had increased in 2013, the vote (for new posts) and the final decision on academic selection and

appointment in the public HEIs were still carried out at the top management level under the guidelines of the Public Service Department. This is similar to the administrators' appointment: most HEIs use the nomination process in choosing the administrators but the power of *appointment* is still the *prerogative* of the top management leaders. Arguably, the data probably reflects the academics' role in carrying out the initial stage or pre-selection for appointment and promotion.

The above interpretive caveat triangulates the findings on academic influence that tends to be located in the department while declining at the school/faculty decision level, even more markedly so at the institutional level. In addition, the consolidation of academics' influence in the three areas of personnel decisions has weak points in the context of a developing country like Malaysia as inbreeding may become rampant especially when no external reviewer or university-wide strategic talent management centre is available to counter and monitor the internal influences on academic recruitment and promotion. Failure to conform to academic norms of ethics and meritocratic values can lead to unqualified academics being appointed and promoted (Altbach, 2010; Azman et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, in the area of selection of administrators, top management and boards still retain the primary influence during this period. The top management and board's increasing influence in approving academic programmes suggests that the key role of approving soft and hard resources (including budgets) in the development of new programmes remains at the board and executive level as advocated in the University Transformation Programme (UniTP) - Green Playbook: Enhancing University Board Governance and Effectiveness (MoHE, 2015b). The Green playbook highlighted that the Board's fundamental roles and responsibilities include overseeing HEI finances, while the roles of the top management leaders (VC and DVCs) are to translate budget strategies set by the Board into guidelines for departments/faculties to follow (MoHE, 2015b).

Second, comparing data from 2007 and 2013, the pattern of perceived influence is still quite modest at all levels. In fact, the level of influence is perceived to decline at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy with most academics still seeing themselves as having small influence at the institutional level. Thus, despite a small rise between 2007 and 2013, the academics' perception is that they do not have much influence at the school/faculty and institutional levels. This suggests that although there seems to be a slightly greater empowerment and collegiality in the involvement and influence of academics at all levels since 2007, the mid and the top management still possess stronger executive decision-making powers. Thus, although the governance of Malaysian universities is more decentralized, Malaysian academics are less influential and prominent compared to academics in Japan, Germany, Canada, and the US (Finkelstein, Ju, & Cummings, 2011; Teichler, Arimoto, & Cummings, 2013) who seem to perform a more significant role in navigating their own institutions.

Third, with regard to the evaluation of academic activities, the same trend is apparent for the 2007 and 2013 data as most decisions are still vested in the heads of departments or units. During the five-year period, although peer evaluation (peers in the same unit or other departments) continues to retain a strong role in evaluating all the academic activities, the head of department/dean continues to exert the highest share of influence in the evaluation of academic activities. While the influence of academics in decision-making as collective bodies in matters involving primary academic activities (teaching, research, and service) increased in the 2013 survey, it is obvious that the middle management leaders have gained more influence in the evaluation of academic activities.

The fact that the Malaysian academics' influence has been taken over mostly by the middle management leaders and not by the top central administration highlights the rise of middle management in the Malaysian higher education system. The trend of 'one-headed leadership' position in the department or school is in line with management orientation in which the head of department's/dean's power has increased (Fitzgerald, 2009; Kekale, 2003; Kwiek, 2015). In this kind of hierarchy, the power to support, modify or dismiss ideas or decisions is often vested in a single person, and in the context of Malaysian HEIs, parochial priorities and self-interests have the tendency to skew decisions. The master and commander syndrome has been reported to be evident in the system, as the academics' role in decision making has become inconsequential despite there being existing academic committees. It has been pointed out that

the content and rationale for decision-making is often poor and that there has been less consultation (Azman, 2019; Mohd Yusoff, Syed Hassan, Che Omar, & Ahmad, 2020). The academics further claimed that the head of departments and deans should be leaders who put faculty interests above their own, thus leading the way to cultivating a healthy academic culture in which people feel a sense of belonging, of respected and that their contribution is valued (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2020). Generally, the Malaysian academics do not accept reasoning and decision-making based on personal views, much less the blatant domination of middle management leaders.

Fourth, the quality of communication seemed to have improved since 2007. The academics appeared to be more satisfied with the competence of top management leaders than before. However, the academics believed that decision-making was still inappropriately top-down. Usually, a top-down management style tends to discourage upward communication and instead emphasizes vertical communication. In the Malaysian HEIs, a communicative management style seems to co-exist with top management style despite the fact that these are often considered to be incompatible. This finding reflects the Malaysian culture which can be described as patriarchal, in which high power distance and group orientation are still customary and practised. In this culture, important decisions, often strategic in nature, tend to make verbally, out of formal meetings, and then circulated among the employees. On some occasions, employees may be persuaded to provide ideas and suggestions, but they are less likely to be granted the authority to make the final decisions. In short, decision-making is centralized, and the ultimate decision lies in the hands of the leaders in formally appointed positions.

Finally, the study found that a much stronger emphasis on institutional mission and performance orientation was perceived in 2013 than in 2007. In addition, higher ratings were also given to stronger teaching and research performance orientation in 2013 than in 2007. While the Malaysian academics reported more positively regarding competent leadership, they considered the administrative process to have become less smooth, i.e., more bureaucratic over the five years. This is not unexpected as critics over the last few years have been complaining that HEIs' bureaucracies have become too bloated (Greene, Kisida, & Mills, 2012; Wan Abdul Manan, 2008) mainly due to the establishment of new administrative roles, administrative concentration (i.e., size of university administration), and competing roles between academic and administrative staff.

Implications and Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the study detected some indications of the managerialist rhetoric in the governance of universities as mid-level managers seem to occupy a more pivotal role in much of the decision-making between 2007 and 2013. Through holding responsibility for evaluating teaching, research, service, and curriculum areas, they have come to play a key role in implementing and influencing decision-making and policy (Briggs, 2001). The nature of their role means that the mid-level management leaders need to have considerable 'local' knowledge (on higher education and management), autonomy, professionalism, and collegiality, as well as good understanding of the quality and nature of academic activities. In fact, the ecosystem (the culture and structures) that supports middle management leaders' in performing their roles is considered critical to the effectiveness of the institution, since they are the role-holders who, make decisions on a daily basis in order to sustain the business of the HEIs (Briggs, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2009; Floyd, 2016). Thus, the Malaysian HEIs should ensure that their academic managers have proven capacity, genuine interest in and commitment to developing fully functioning academics and departments/schools. It is also important to appoint a middle management leader who is regarded as a respected academic leader, who has a highly credible research reputation and sound understanding of teaching-learning practices.

Ideally, a shared governance process must respect institutional values, social norms, and academic traditions. In addition, clarity of individual roles and transparency in the decision-making process are also obligatory (Birnbaum, 2004; Kater, 2017). Thus, a core question for the HEI top management leaders who choose and appoint the mid-management leaders is whether their appointed middle management cadre understands the concept of shared governance and networks within their organization, and whether they could enable institutional changes to occur in a less confrontational and vague manner. In this regard, the middle management leaders should be seen as collegial leaders,

responsible for promoting a culture of consensus rather than promoting greater institutional isomorphism (managerialist control). Further, it is perhaps an appropriate time to question whether those involved in shared governance, particularly the academics themselves, have the expertise, discipline, authority, and accountability necessary to cope with decision-making processes. As expected, the less these individuals understand about the external (and sometimes internal) environment in which they are operating, the less rational or appropriate their decision making will be. This may leave the institutions more vulnerable to making unreasonable changes and eventually erode the autonomy and credibility of the academy. In other words, academics and administrators might have better control in decision-making if they understood more completely their environment, including the higher education mission, priorities, and roles.

Since the top and mid-level management leaders control the amount and type of participation by academics in governance allowed at their institutions, they must recognize that although they agree with academic participation in theory, they must create opportunities for the academics to have access to relevant information and to participate in decision-making processes. Academics, on the other hand, must not only insist on their rights to participate in decision-making but also be willing to invest the time and effort that a participatory role demands. HEIs must also accept their responsibility for promoting academic involvement in governance by providing professional development programmes that prepare future academic members for decision-making roles (Floyd, 2016). Each HEI and the Malaysian Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT) must provide professional development opportunities for top and middle management leaders not only with management skills but also skills that facilitate avenues for participation and communication.

Perceptions of stronger performance orientation, top-down management style and cumbersome bureaucracy during the five years reflect that the market-coordinated system is rather high in the Malaysian higher education system. In addition, the wider societal culture, an autocratic, paternalistic, and top-down rigid leadership structure, may also play a part in how shared governance has been incorporated in HEIs. These structures most often lead to the hierarchical/authoritarian leadership styles that keep decision-making in the hands of a few and therefore beyond the reach of the academics. Although Tierney (2008) and Tierney and Minor (2004) concluded that shared governance is bounded by organizational culture, the findings from the Malaysian surveys may suggest that shared governance is not only bound to the culture of the HEIs, but also to, and by, the culture of the wider society. In fact, the current results confirm that the devolution of governance is different from the models that prevail in developed higher education systems. The differences in faculty participation observed in the Malaysian HEIs compared to the HEIs in the west, are systemic in nature and can be attributed to the HEIs' external political and legal environment (Sirat, 2010).

It is important to bear in mind that the interpretation of the results has focused only on what was available from the CAP and MAP datasets and were from self-reported information. There are issues with regard to self-reported data, especially in the context of organizational behaviour (which is the case here), one of which is that self-reporting may result in response bias. Given the possibility of the respondents over- or under-reporting their influence in decision-making activities, the larger the sample size, the less likely it would be for response bias to be an issue, unless everyone over- or under-reports their activities. The re-running of the CAP and MAP survey (known as APIKS) for the third time in 2019-2020 will allow for more recent insights into changes occurring in HEI governance. Comparison of data in 2007, 2013 and 2020 will also capture more specific and longitudinal trends in the evolution and devolution of institutional governance in the Malaysian higher education system.

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