

## Chapter 19

# Entrepreneurial Leadership in a Malaysian Public University: Competency and Behavior in the Face of Institutional Adversity

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## ABSTRACT

*Based on case studies of top senior leaders (vice-chancellors) of Malaysian public universities, this chapter explores the characteristics of challenging experiences they encountered that require them to embrace entrepreneurship in their leadership. The complexity of diverse stakeholders, the multiplicity of academic disciplines, the lack of familiarity leading different and broader roles, leading in new directions, and creating change in high velocity and uncertain environments are among the entrepreneurial situations that characterize institutional adversities. Learning agility, opportunity recognition, and bridging capability are among their exemplary entrepreneurial leadership competencies in the face of adversity. This chapter concludes that entrepreneurial leaders in public universities as those leaders capable of bridging the gap between diverse stakeholders to achieve a unified vision of innovative public value creation and dynamic education marketplace adaptation.*

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## Introduction

*“A true measure of an entrepreneur and successful person is how they deal with adversity” – Noah Kagan*

Entrepreneurial leadership is a concept formed from the intersection between leadership and entrepreneurship (Reid et al., 2018). From the behavioral perspective, entrepreneurial leadership describes a leader leading with an entrepreneurial style or an entrepreneur who exhibits leadership traits (Leitch & Volery, 2017). There has been a rising demand for entrepreneurial leaders who can navigate evolving organizational missions in a dynamic environment (Huang, 2014, Harrison et al., 2016) since entrepreneurship is complementary to conventional leadership approaches that advance organizational performance (Anju & Mathew, 2017; Paudel, 2019). Entrepreneurial leadership competency has been studied in various organizational contexts such as new venture emergence (Sklaveniti, 2017), performance (Huang, 2014; Sklaveniti, 2017), small and medium enterprises (Al Mamun, 2018; Bagheri, 2017; Hasan, 2020; Maladzhi, 2015; Paudel, 2019; Quaye 2019), family-controlled business (Kansikas et al., 2012, Ng & Thorpe, 2010), healthcare (Bagheri & Akbari, 2018; Harrison, 2016), maritime (Kandil, 2016), and social enterprises (Newman, 2018). A greater emphasis has been placed on assessing the impact on business organizational success, which includes the strategic management of resources, wealth creation, innovation performance (Hejazi et al., 2012), and sustainability (Rae, 2017).

The role of leaders in a wider range of entrepreneurial circumstances has emerged as a salient opportunity for impending research (Leitch & Volery, 2017; Ram et al., 2019). Apart from profit-driven sectors, the need for the public sector to increase competitiveness and efficiency demonstrates the need for entrepreneurial leaders' governance (Currie et al., 2008) and intrapreneurship (Kearney et al., 2008). In the education sector, much of the literature on entrepreneurial leadership views the topic from the business-lens, particularly regarding its roles of addressing enrolment and financial challenges (Cleverley-Thompson, 2016), increasing self-sustainability (Hashim et al., 2019), and upholding the national education business (Batunable et al., 2019). Some authors have established the significance of entrepreneurial leadership for organizational and job performance in schools (Batunable et al., 2019; Kasim & Zakaria, 2019) and universities (Wahab & Tyasari, 2020; Bakar & Mahmood, 2014). Nonetheless, a recent review on the evolution of leadership research in higher education criticizes that despite the growing number of leadership models, insights on the conceptualization of those models in the higher education context are still lacking (Esen et al., 2020).

Founded on the theory of skill acquisition (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989; DeKeyser, 2007) that posits challenging experiences as the source of motivation for leaders to put forth a concerted effort to acquire skills demanded of them (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989, DeRue et al., 2009), this chapter develops the idea that institutional adversity (i.e. challenging work experiences) present the entrepreneurial circumstances that drive the content and acquisition of entrepreneurial leadership competency development among academic administrators in public higher education institutions (HEI). Experiential learning has been a topic of interest in the leadership development field (Hezlett, 2016). Other than participating in training and development programs, tackling a significant workplace challenge is the most highly rated experience type that develops leadership capabilities (Boak & Crabbe, 2019), which reinforces the increasingly popular '70-20-10' distribution emphasis rule (McCauley et al., 2014). Despite this popular implementation of developmental job experiences as managerial and leadership development interventions (Srikanth, 2018; Dragoni et al., 2011), prior research offers limited insight into the characteristics of challenging work experiences that promote entrepreneurial leadership competency development. Moreover, the ways

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