

Top Management Support: A Determinant Factor for the Implementation of Oral History Program in Malaysian State Public Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of top management on oral history collection development in Malaysian state public libraries. The research employs a qualitative, multiple-case study involving four state libraries. The methodology includes a solid research framework, a targeted data-gathering plan, and a structured interview schedule. Cross-case analysis, supported by data from semi-structured interviews and documents, highlights the roles of top management. Findings reveal that top management substantially shapes collection development. Leadership ensures the success of oral history projects by securing infrastructure, financial resources, morale, and direct engagement. This study uniquely contributes by extending the Critical Success Factors (CSF) framework to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in public libraries, highlighting the specific mechanisms of top management support in this setting. The findings offer both theoretical insights and practical advice for library managers and policymakers to strengthen oral history programs.

INTRODUCTION

The oral history method captures the experiences, reminiscences, and inner thoughts of a community regarding significant events in society and is conducted by various information agencies, such as libraries, museums, and archival repositories. This activity can help a nation in preserving its cultural heritage, which serves as the identity of a society.

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In the Malaysian context, state public libraries play an important role not only in providing access to information, which is one of their core businesses, but also in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the minds of, especially, local people (Abd Manaf, Z. (2008). Among the critical factors influencing the success of such initiatives is top management support, a widely acknowledged factor among scholars.

Top management support refers to the willingness of top management of an organisation to actively involve and give full commitment in providing all the required resources of a project, such as approving resource allocation, empowering staff capacity, and legitimising the program (See for examples, Ahmed, Samar & Philbin, 2025; Soesetyo et al., 2024). This study examines how top management support affects the implementation of oral history programs in Malaysian state public libraries. It also extends the Critical Success Factors (CSF) framework to these programs. Additionally, it offers insights into leadership practices in knowledge institutions.

Background of Oral History Program in Malaysia

As in other countries, especially in Southeast Asia, the oral history program spread to various institutions, including libraries, museums, universities, and archives (National Archive of Malaysia, 1978). This activity started in the early 1960s and mushroomed in the 1970s due to the greater awareness at that time (see, for example, Howarth, 2005; Sharifah Zawiyah, 1979).

The earliest institution that conducted this activity was the Sarawak Museum. It started recording and documenting some materials in 1957. During the sixties and early seventies, the number of institutions involved in this activity increased greatly. For example, the Language and Literary Agency began its program in 1961, the National Archive in 1963 and the Malay Studies Department of the University of Malaya in 1968 (Zakiah, 1978). The first project run by students of the history department of University Kebangsaan Malaysia was in the 1973/74 session. However, according to Nadzan (2012), oral history was formally introduced as an academic subject at the History Department of UKM in 1981. Universiti Teknologi MARA began its oral history project by introducing the course to students in 1998 (National Archive of Malaysia, 1978).

In parallel with developments in museums and universities, the library, which is crucial to the gathering and dissemination of oral history information to the public, has not been left behind in this field. There are a few libraries in Malaysia that conduct oral history projects, such as Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Kedah, Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Negeri Perlis, Perbadanan Perpustakaan Negeri Melaka, and Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Terengganu.

It is also observed that institutions expanded their oral history programs across various fields, including literature, music, drama, politics, medicine, biography, culture, economics, and legends. Furthermore, these activities spread across neighbouring countries as well (Sharifah Zawiyah, 1979). Several factors influence the implementation of oral history programs in Malaysian institutions. One factor is top management support. This study explores this factor and its influence on the implementation of the oral history program in Malaysian state public libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Top management support has been frequently reported in literature as one of the factors that significantly influence the implementation of a project (see, for example, Datta et al., 2025; Georgiev & Ohtaki, 2020; Nazir, Umer & Nawab, April 2018; Karami et al., 2015). The concept of successful project implementation is rooted in the theoretical framework proposed by Pinto and Slevin, who identified its ten critical factors. They are project mission, top management support, project schedule plan, client consultation, personnel recruitment, selection, and training, technical tasks, client acceptance, communication, troubleshooting, and monitoring and feedback (Pinto & Slevin, 1987). In terms of top

management support, Pinto and Slevin (1987) highlighted that it could include aspects such as the allocation of resources (financial, human, and time), as well as project management's confidence in its support in the event of a crisis.

This study adapts the Critical Success Factors (CSF) model to the implementation of oral history programs in Malaysian state public libraries. Although all ten factors are considered, particular emphasis is placed on top management support as the central determinant, with communication, resource allocation, personnel capability, and monitoring mechanisms identified as key interrelated factors.

In line with this, Ou and Zhang (2025) ranked leadership and top management support as the highest probability. They also emphasised that top management support should be the first step before addressing other factors. This opinion is also shared and agreed by other scholars (see, for example, Georgiev & Ohtaki, 2020; Nazir, Umer & Nawab, April 2018; Karami et al., 2015) who drew attention to the significance of top management support by stressing that it is the most important factor for project implementation. The poor leadership quality is identified as a threat to this implementation. Top management has the greatest ability to drive a project and influence other factors during the project's implementation stage.

It is useful to define top management support. According to Pinto and Slevin (1987), top management support means the willingness of top management to provide the required resources and authority for the implementation of a project. Hertati (2021) stressed that top management support is conceptualised as the active involvement and participation of top-level management in every stage of a project.

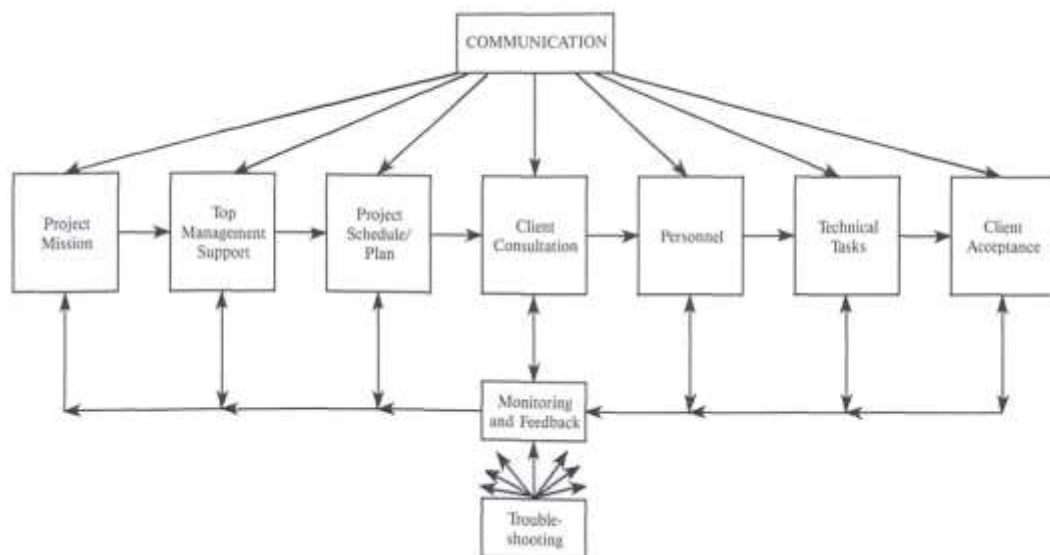


Fig. 1: Ten key factors of the project implementation profile

In line with the aforementioned definition, the literature discusses various forms of support from top management, such as providing the required resources, overcoming challenges that arise during project implementation, and participating in the project from the beginning to the end. Top management must be very supportive and willing to provide the required resources and authority for implementing a project (see, for example, Zada, 2023; Kanwal, Zafar & Bashir, 2017).

The support of top management would guarantee the provision of necessary operating resources, such as time, funding, human skills, and infrastructure (Sicotte & Delerue, 2021; Fareed & Su, 2022). It would also overcome the obstacles that happen within the organisation. Usually, when high-level executives give a commitment to a project, they determine the resources allocated and the time allowed for members to be involved in the project (Ahmed & Noor Azmi, 2016). The successful execution of projects is significantly

hindered by insufficient leadership capabilities and inadequate assistance from senior management (Ahmed & Philbin, 2022)

Besides providing resources, top management closely observing the project is also a significant way to ensure its implementation. Sicotte and Delerue (2021) advised top management to continue supervising each team member, including the project manager, and to provide support. Project managers must act as coaches and motivators, while also having a thorough understanding of the process involved in the project (Zimmer, 1999). The management must also be motivated to run a project (Dwivedula, Bredillet & Müller, 2015).

Top management also have to be project champion or a strong leader who can sturdily support a project by giving motivation and assistance to the team members for examples by providing materials, resources and political support particularly during the case of having obstacles (see, for example, Kloppenborg, Tesch, & Manolis, 2014; Muhammad Zul Fikri & Lee, 2022) thus drive the implementation to the right way (see, for example, Wan Hanim Nadrah et al. 2025; Ahmed, 2022). The approval and support from top management to make decisions to address any arising problems and conflicts are really needed. Top management has to eradicate whatever problems and challenges are faced by an organisation (Muhammad Zul Fikri & Lee, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

The study focuses on the leadership role in implementing oral history in State Public Libraries in Malaysia. Its goal is to examine the organisations' leadership practices and the leaders' experiences working on oral history projects. The qualitative approach, which is inductive, was chosen for the study based on these criteria. Because it examines the leadership strategies used to implement an oral history program, the case study was chosen for its design to provide an in-depth understanding and description of the phenomenon being studied.

The nature of case studies suits itself to this (see, for instance, Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Yin, 2003). Four state public libraries in Malaysia with oral history collections served as the setting for the project. The current study used two data-gathering methods—interviews and documents, which are case studies in nature—to obtain rich data (see, for example, Bloomberg, 2008; Yin, 2003). Because the results come from various cases with varying perspectives and experiences, and because pattern-matching analysis can boost confidence in the theory's robustness (Tellis, 1997), this study used a multiple-case study approach, which is believed to be more robust and to strengthen the results (Yin, 2003).

The criterion sampling approach is the sampling strategy used in this investigation. Criterion sampling requires participants to fulfil one or more requirements established by the investigator (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The completion of the program and the existence of an oral history program are the two criteria selected. Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Kedah, Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Terengganu, Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Melaka, and Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Perlis are the samples based on the criteria.

Two data collection approaches were used in this study: document analysis and interviews. A semi-structured interview was selected for this study. This interview guide is sent to the interviewee via email before the interview (if desired). Written documents were created by transcribing these recorded interviews. To build rapport and stay in touch, the interviews were conducted in several sessions with each interviewee.

Fourteen interviewees participated in this study, representing four Malaysian state public libraries: Kedah (5), Terengganu (3), Melaka (3), and Perlis (3). Cases were selected through criterion sampling based on two requirements: the organisation must have an oral history program, and the program must have been completed. Data saturation was reached after the twelfth interview, when no new codes or themes emerged. Two additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability and consistency of the findings. Data were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included

familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification and review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and report production.

The current study also uses documents as a data collection strategy in addition to interviews. Documents related to oral history initiatives within the suggested organisations were reviewed and analysed. These documents include both printed and non-printed items, such as an organisation's website and organisational charts, quality guides, annual reports, and meeting minutes. These documents are fundamental sources of information about the execution of the oral history program and include more intangible details about the organisations being investigated. Additionally, they provide a preview of the interview questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that top management support is crucial to the successful operation of oral history programmes in Malaysian state public libraries. Without this support, it is difficult to start, maintain, or establish these initiatives. As one respondent said, "If we do not have support from the top, we will feel weak" (Interviewee C1), highlighting both the psychological and practical need for leadership backing. Top management support is more than just giving approval. It includes providing funding, encouragement, infrastructure, and active involvement. Together, these forms of support help ensure that programmes are carried out effectively.

This finding supports the idea that leadership commitment is essential for organisational initiatives, especially for preserving knowledge through oral history. Support from top management helps drive and stabilise these efforts by providing continuity, legitimacy, and motivation for staff. Without this support, oral history programmes can become fragmented and unsustainable.

The support from top management comes in different ways as stated below: -

Financial Support

The libraries' management gives enough funding so that oral history programs can be conducted with minimal bureaucracy. Every time staff members request funding and submit a proposal to conduct an oral history project, the higher authorities promptly authorise the funding. Everything is covered by the approved budget, including lunch and interviewee contributions. The annual budget also includes a particular provision for the oral history department.

Then, approving the budget for lunch and for the contributions to the interviewees. (Interviewee A1)

Normally, we send a proposal to the library director, and she approves it without asking many questions. This is because the budget for an oral history activity is too small to even reach RM 1000. (Interviewee B1)

This shows that financial support does not have to be large, but it should be easy to access, responsive, and well-managed. The findings support resource-based views, showing that even small amounts of funding can make a big difference when used wisely. Cutting bureaucracy also supports adaptive governance, which is important for flexible field-based research such as oral history.

Moral Support

The leaders simplify and streamline the procedures for the oral history project. They will readily approve an oral history project proposal if they receive one. In addition, the department head mentors and counsels the personnel on oral history efforts. Incentives for completing oral history projects are another way upper management encourages its staff.

He always gave us the green light to do an oral history. It is a good commitment from this director. (Interviewee A1)

Top management also sometimes attended our meetings. (Interviewee D1).

This finding highlights the importance of intangible support mechanisms, even though they are often overlooked in organisational studies. Moral support helps create a positive workplace climate and encourages staff to participate in voluntary activities, such as oral history projects. It also demonstrates aspects of transformational leadership, in which leaders inspire, guide, and empower staff to achieve shared goals.

Infrastructure

Upper management provides the manpower, equipment, and transportation needed to carry out the oral history project. When the need arises to use staff vehicles, the directors will provide them. Staff members are permitted to use their own vehicles and make claims if no cars are available on the day. The department head allows staff to use any necessary equipment that is available within the department. Staff members can write a letter requesting equipment from another department if their department does not have it.

Assistance from other departments can take the form of staff members to support the project or the provision of necessary equipment. Furthermore, the department identifies the necessary equipment and purchases the item that is currently unavailable in its inventory. The oral history unit in this library has a dedicated area with all the supplies needed for the personnel and the collections, including desks, chairs, shelving, and stationery. Staff members from various departments occasionally assist the department in managing the oral history project.

Vehicles, right. We use the staff car to go to the place. (Interviewee A1)

This finding highlights the importance of being prepared when starting oral history projects. The right setup makes the work smoother and helps collect reliable, high-quality data.

Participatory Approach

Oral history procedures and techniques are taught to the staff by the department director of this library. When staff members lack a clear understanding of how to conduct oral histories, the elders will provide them with detailed instructions on the necessary procedures. Department heads occasionally collaborate with staff members on oral history projects, which involve creating questionnaires, conducting interviews, and preparing transcripts. The personnel can gain practical experience in conducting oral history procedures in this scenario.

I teach anything needed. As an example of how to write the cover page, insert pictures to make it more attractive, including how to write a transcript. In that way there is a lot of improvement. (Interviewee A1)

I asked subordinate staffs to see the way how I handle interviews; how do I deal with the interviewees. One day, If they replace my position they can continue this oral history. (Interviewee B1)

He (director) participated in the interview. He asked some questions. He added anywhere to be. He delivered speech about what we want to do. Then he will ask questions which we left. Finally, he handed over present to the interviewee. (Interviewee D1).

This participatory approach highlights a leadership style that values sharing knowledge and learning from experience. It helps people develop skills and ensures important know-how is shared, which matters in oral history work that relies on sound methods and clear communication. This finding adds to current research by showing that leaders can do more than manage strategy; in fact, they can also take on daily tasks.

In brief, the presence of top management support and awareness significantly impacts the oral history activities in this library. All the above phenomena signify the integral components of top management competence that culminate in the successful implementation of the oral history project within the library. Figure 2 below summaries the key success factors for oral history development derived from the interviews.

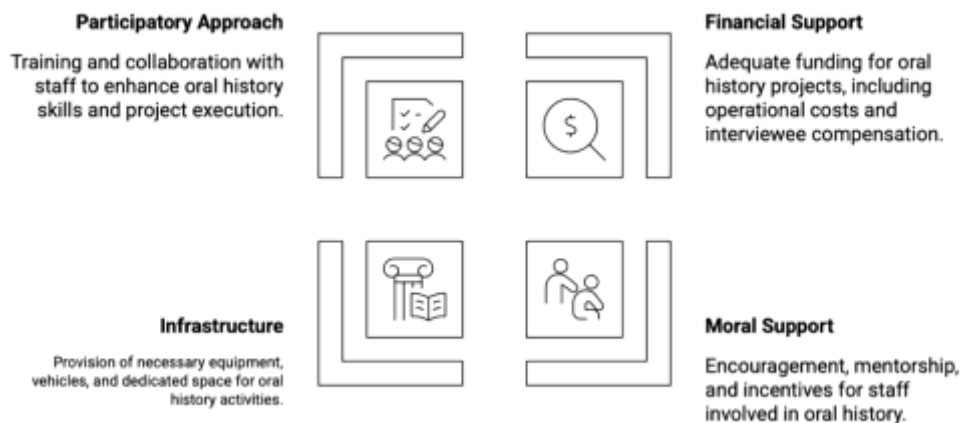


Fig. 2: Key Success Factors in Oral History Development within the Context of Top Management Support

As shown in Figure 2, top management support is essential for sustaining oral history programmes. This support includes financial resources, moral encouragement, infrastructure, and participation in decision-making. These elements improve programme outcomes by increasing organisational readiness, building staff capacity, and promoting effective stakeholder engagement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, top management's competencies in these libraries significantly impact the implementation of oral history projects. The management supports oral history projects in various ways, including financial and moral support, adequate infrastructure, and participation. This support is fundamental to the success of the oral history project implementation in all Malaysian state public libraries. This study promotes a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of top management support in the context of oral history development. The results show that sustainable and effective oral history programmes depend not only on technical expertise and funding but also on strategic leadership, organisational culture, and joint engagement. By extending the Critical Success Factors framework, the analysis offers both theoretical and pragmatic insights for strengthening preservation initiatives in libraries and archives.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Mohd Nazir Ahmad carried out the research, collected and analysed the data, and wrote and revised the manuscript. Wan Satirah Wan Mohd Saman supervised the research, provided overall guidance on the research scope, design, and methodology, and reviewed and revised the manuscript. Hanis Diyana Kamarudin, Mashitah Sulaiman, and Nurrusobah Husin provided guidance on the research methodology and reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final article submission.

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