

A CASE STUDY ON MANAGEMENT  
STRATEGIES INFLUENCING PERFORMANCE  
OUTCOMES IN THE DEVOKALIS UPSI CHOIR

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES IN THE DEVOKALIS UPSI CHOIR

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study analyse the management strategies that contribute to the performance success of the deVokalis UPSI Choir, a university-based ensemble renowned for its international achievements. Using the P-L-O-C framework by Borges et al. (2023), based on Henri Fayol's classical management theory, this qualitative case study was conducted over a three month period. Data were collected through direct observations and semi-structured interviews involving ten participants, including the choir director, assistant conductor, practice manager, and student leaders. Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret the data. Key findings revealed that structured rehearsal planning, clear communication, distributed leadership, and proactive stakeholder engagement were key strategies that supported the choir's artistic excellence and organizational sustainability. The study concludes that effective and strategic management practices significantly influence performance outcomes in choral ensembles within educational institutions. These insights offer practical implications for arts managers, music educators, and choir leaders.

## **SATU KAJIAN KES TENTANG STRATEGI PENGURUSAN YANG MEMPENGARUHI HASIL PRESTASI DALAM KOIR DEVOKALIS UPSI**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini menganalisis strategi pengurusan yang menyumbang kepada kejayaan persembahan Koir deVokalis UPSI, sebuah ensembel universiti yang terkenal dengan pencapaian bertaraf antarabangsa. Berasaskan kerangka P-L-O-C oleh Borges et al. (2023), yang berpaksikan teori pengurusan klasik oleh Henry Fayol, kajian kes kualitatif ini dilaksanakan dalam tempoh tiga bulan. Data dikumpulkan melalui pemerhatian langsung dan temu bual separa berstruktur melibatkan sepuluh orang peserta, termasuk pengarah koir, penolong konduktor, pengurus latihan, dan ketua pelajar. Analisis tematik digunakan bagi mengekod dan mentafsir data. Dapatan utama menunjukkan bahawa perancangan latihan yang teratur, komunikasi yang jelas, kepimpinan yang teragih, serta penglibatan proaktif pihak berkepentingan merupakan strategi utama yang menyokong kecemerlangan artistik dan kelestarian organisasi koir. Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa amalan pengurusan yang berkesan dan strategik memberi pengaruh besar terhadap hasil persembahan ensembel koir dalam institusi pendidikan. Dapatan ini memberikan implikasi praktikal kepada pengurus seni, pendidik muzik, dan pemimpin koir.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ASWARA	Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
FMSP	Fakulti Muzik dan Seni Persembahan
MCE-ICF	Malaysia Choral Eisteddfod - International Choral Festival
P-O-L-C	Planning, Organising, Leadership, Controlling
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Having built an impressive reputation worldwide, the deVokalis UPSI Choir is recognised as one of the leading choral ensembles in the music industry. They exemplify excellent management because they have won over ten international gold medals. However, they do not want such attribution, as the choir cannot achieve all this without choir members who work hard in training, performance preparation, and leadership. The management of the deVokalis UPSI Choir believes the success of their choir, which has led to national and international recognition, is sustainable, and this study intends to explore and discuss management factors that make this choir successful. These achievements have not come about easily, and there are many other choirs which encounter challenges similar to deVokalis in a Malaysian setting, where efficiencies in management strategies are required. This research adds to management literature by addressing best practices within choral management and offers invaluable insights for teachers and practitioners in the field of choral music.

## 1.2 Research Background

The success of a choir is not simply about voices and the selection of repertoire; it requires a multifaceted approach that needs effective management practices to achieve the excellence and sustainable performance of the choir. This study examines the deVokalis UPSI Choir, a show choir based at the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts in Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, as the research subject. This choir was founded to improve student excellence through academic and co-curricular activities such as instrumental ensembles and choir (Saidon, 2024). Over the years, the deVokalis UPSI Choir has established a prominent reputation in the Malaysian choral music landscape and gained international recognition through a series of gold medal victories. These achievements highlight the importance of well-structured planning, organising, effective leadership, and executing organisational strategies towards success. The deVokalis UPSI Choir was chosen as the research subject in this study based on the following factors:

- i. One of the choirs from a higher education institution that has achieved international recognition through its performances, as evidenced by media coverage.
- ii. The competition repertoire primarily features original compositions by the conductor, incorporating elements of Malaysian folk songs. This distinctive artistic approach has significantly contributed to the choir's success, earning them notable recognitions and awards
- iii. The choir has consistently achieved gold medals in both national and international competitions, including the Malaysian Choral Eisteddfod-International Choral Festival, 2023, as documented

through official competition results and recognized by choral experts and media coverage

Despite its remarkable achievements, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies on the management strategies that contribute to its sustained success in the Malaysian choir. Previous research often focuses on vocal techniques and rehearsal methods in a choir. They often overlook the operational aspects that contribute to a choir's success. Researchers such as Fisher et al. (2001) and Sorochyk (2023) highlighted that effective management is important for artistic organisation success. This study seeks to fill the gap by exploring how the deVokalis UPSI Choir implements the Planning, Leading, Organizing, and Controlling frameworks by Borges (2023) to achieve and maintain its excellence.

Planning is fundamental in management, and it's started with suggestions (Saw, 2022). Planning involves a complete plan that covers the selection of choir members, a well-organized rehearsal schedule, and coordinating with all other logistical matters related to the successful performance. The director is very important in setting clear goals that the choir can achieve and also needs to make sure everything the choir does helps them reach them. As Gorel (2001) mentioned, a comprehensive rehearsal plan is essential for developing and maintaining a successful choir program. McDonagh (2008) stated that the success of choral conductors hinges not just on their ability to impart vocal and musical techniques but also on fostering artistic motivation within the choir and executing productive rehearsals. By strategically planning rehearsals and adapting them to the choir's needs, the choir is well-prepared and motivated, leading to consistently high-quality performances that the audience will enjoy.

Following the planning phase, effective organisation is essential, transforming strategic plans into tangible actions (Saw, 2022). Effective choir management usually involves establishing a dedicated committee and fostering a collaborative environment where responsibilities are clearly delegated and defined. This coordinated system enhances efficiency in logistical operations, including scheduling rehearsals, managing communication, and optimising resource allocation. As Borges (2023) emphasised, this division of labour fosters a sense of accountability among committee members while enhancing teamwork and streamlining workflows. By creating a well-defined organisational framework, the choir is better equipped to navigate challenges, adapt to unforeseen challenges, and ensure the choir maintain focus on its artistic vision, as highlighted by Sorochyk (2023). This systematic approach minimises potential disruptions and ensures that the choir consistently delivers high-quality performance that aligns with its artistic objectives.

Leadership within a choir extends beyond conduction, encompassing a multifaceted role that guides members towards achieving their full potential. As Nilsson-Wik (2019) stated, every choir needs someone who can envision the big picture, plan effectively and lead the rehearsals. Maxwell (1998) further elaborates that leaders focus on progress, knowledge and development for themselves and the choir ensemble. This means the choir director will support clear communication and consistent motivation to create a positive and collaborative environment within the choir. Ultimately, leadership involves setting goals, facilitating teamwork, resolving conflicts constructively, and building a sense of community and shared purpose among the choir members.

Furthermore, effective choir management necessitates a comprehensive system for monitoring progress and ensuring quality. According to Borges (2023),

controlling is a manager who involves ongoing monitoring of progress, evaluation of performance, and making necessary adjustments to keep the choir on the right track. Regular assessment of rehearsal quality, attendance, and individual performance provides valuable insights for the choir director. This ongoing evaluation allows for the identification of areas requiring improvement and timely implementation of corrective actions. This proactive approach not only maintains consistency in performance quality but also ensures that the choir effectively achieves its established goals and objectives. By incorporating the controlling function, the choir has the agility to adapt swiftly to challenges and uphold its standard of excellence in every performance.

In conclusion, the success of a choir hinges on a multifaceted approach that extends beyond musical excellence. Effective choir management involves comprehensive planning, a well-organized structure, strong leadership, and a consistent monitoring function. By systematically integrating these key elements, the choir can cultivate a cohesive and successful environment. This study underscores the significance of strategic management principles in the performing arts, demonstrating how a structured approach can enhance performance quality, foster organisational resilience, and ensure long-term sustainability for a choir.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

A review of academic journals and articles reveals that numerous studies have explored choral topics such as vocal techniques, conducting techniques, and rehearsal methodology; studies specifically addressing choir management within the Malaysian context remain relatively limited. Linnis et al. (2022) emphasise the roles and challenges faced by Malaysian choir conductors, highlighting the need for further investigation in this area. Similarly, Parker (2023) acknowledges that every choir surely faces many challenges that require careful consideration and effective solutions. Arkhust et al. (2023) underscore the significance of critical issues such as funding, artistic direction, organisational structure, and audience development. These issues can significantly impact the quality of the performances, as well as the overall morale and cohesion of the ensemble. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by analysing the management practices of the deVokalis UPSI Choir, demonstrating how well-defined strategies are in ensuring sustained success and artistic growth in choral ensembles.

The long-term sustainability of choir success depends on efficient planning and organisational techniques; however, these are frequently not implemented consistently. Antel (2010) emphasises the importance of strategic planning and effective training in attaining high-quality performances, while Fauzila (2018) points out a significant gap in Malaysia due to a lack of trained and experienced choir directors, resulting in ineffective training methods that do not adequately address concerns such as tone production and performance quality. Sorochyk (2023) and Saw (2022) highlight that many Malaysian choir directors face challenges in implementing structured planning and organisational frameworks. This deficiency leads to inconsistencies in rehearsal productivity and event preparation, which

directly affects performance outcomes. In order to attain long-term success, Harikusuma and Sianturi (2020) also emphasise the need to strategically coordinate between rehearsal methods and broader management goals. By exploring the management practices of the deVokalis UPSI Choir, this study aims to provide practical guidance for new choir directors as well as actionable insights into the effective execution of planning and organisational strategies in the choral context.

Leadership is essential for defining a choir's musical vision and encouraging teamwork, yet this important aspect is undeveloped in Malaysia. Fauzila (2018) points out a shortage of specialised choir leadership training among music teachers, limiting their ability to provide effective artistic direction and instruction support. According to McElheran (1989), effective choir directors must have a wide range of skills, including musicality, vocal technique, historical knowledge, and good communication ability. Without these skills, directors may struggle to lead their ensembles to high-quality performances or form strong teams. Although Mykhailova (2024) highlighted the necessity of leadership qualities that foster teamwork and group achievement, there is currently little research on how leadership affects choral groups' cohesiveness. In order to fill these gaps, this study examines how the deVokalis UPSI Choir's leadership drives its mission and directs the group to achieve its objectives. The analysis provides valuable insights into improving leadership techniques in choir management.

In order to keep a choir in line with its goals and maintain a constant level of performance quality, controlling is an essential management function (Borges, 2023). However, many choir directors do not have efficient control systems in place to methodically track, assess, and enhance performance results (McDonagh, 2008). This lack of proper monitoring frequently results in inadequate feedback, which

makes it challenging to pinpoint problem areas and maintain consistently high-quality performances over time. According to Sango and Manatsa (2024), choir directors should regularly monitor their performance and build their competencies. If these procedures are not followed, performance standards may suffer. For choral ensembles to succeed over the long term, consistent evaluation and improvement, systematic control mechanisms must be developed and put into place. By examining the control methods used by the deVokalis UPSI Choir to track and improve performance quality, this study seeks to reveal the secret of maintaining choir management excellence.

In summary, this study examines the important management elements contributing to the deVokalis UPSI Choir's success, emphasising the importance of planning, leadership, organisation and control in maintaining high performance. By filling in the gaps, this study offers useful insights that go beyond traditional research, highlighting the artistic and pedagogical value of efficient choir management. It provides a useful framework for improving the performance of both choral groups and performing arts organisations when seen through this perspective.

#### **1.4 Research Objective**

This study aims to investigate the management factors that contribute to the success of deVokalis UPSI Choir. The researcher prepared the following research objectives to guide this research:

1. To analyse the planning strategies used by the deVokalis UPSI Choir in achieving their performance goals.
2. To determine the organisational structures and processes that support the operations of the deVokalis UPSI Choir.
3. To examine the leadership approaches utilised by the leaders of the deVokalis UPSI Choir and their impact on choir performance.
4. To determine the controlling mechanisms for monitoring and improving the performance and quality of the deVokalis UPSI Choir.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

The following research questions are the researcher's attempts to answer:

1. How do the planning strategies implemented by the deVokalis UPSI Choir contribute to their overall success?
2. What organisational structures and processes are utilised by the deVokalis UPSI Choir to support its operations?
3. What leadership approaches and practices are employed by the leaders of the deVokalis UPSI Choir, and how do these contribute to the choir's success?

4. What controlling mechanisms are in place for the deVokalis UPSI Choir to monitor and improve performance quality?

## **1.6 Operational Definition**

This section defines the key terms used in this study to ensure clarity and consistency in interpretation and analysis.

### **1.6.1 Choir Management**

In this study, choir management refers to the strategic coordination of human, material, and artistic resources within the deVokalis UPSI Choir to achieve both artistic excellence and organisational sustainability. It encompasses planning, leadership, organisation, and control processes as applied by the choir director and management team. This definition is grounded in Sorochyk (2023) and contextualised through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

### **1.6.2 Planning**

Planning refers to the systematic process of setting objectives, developing rehearsal schedules, selecting repertoires, and preparing proposals for performances and competitions. It involves proactive decision-making by the conductor and practice manager, and is evidenced through working papers, budget documents, and rehearsal plans (Carrasco et al., 2024).

### **1.6.3 Organising**

Organising denotes the structuring of responsibilities and roles within the choir, including the formation of committees (e.g., logistics, costumes, performance) and appointment of student leaders and section heads. It ensures clarity of task delegation and resource management for rehearsals and performances, and is analysed through organisational charts, interviews, and observation (Fayol, 1949; Borges et al., 2023).

### **1.6.4 Leadership**

Leadership involves the practices of guiding, motivating, and empowering choir members towards achieving performance goals. It includes decision-making, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication by conductors and student leaders. The leadership dimension is explored through interview transcripts and observed interactions during rehearsals (Maxwell, 1998; Nilsson-Wik, 2019).

### **1.6.5 Controlling**

Controlling is defined as the ongoing process of monitoring rehearsal quality, assessing performance progress, and implementing improvements through feedback. Mechanisms include attendance tracking, video reviews, preview performances, and external jury evaluations. This function ensures alignment with objectives and is supported by document analysis and observational data (Borges et al., 2023; Fayol, 1949).

### **1.6.6 Artistic Success**

Artistic success refers to the measurable and perceived achievements of the deVokalis UPSI Choir in national and international platforms. It includes awards, gold medals, audience engagement, and professional recognition, as documented in programme reports, jury feedback, and media coverage.

### **1.6.7 Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement in this study refers to the collaborative involvement of internal and external parties such as faculty members, university administrators, sponsors, alumni, and parents in supporting the choir's development. This includes financial support, academic exemption approvals, and logistic facilitation as observed in programme documentation and interviews.

## **1.7 Research Limitations**

### **1.7.1 Research Subject**

This research was only conducted with the deVokalis UPSI Choir's conductors, practice manager and selected choir leaders.

### **1.7.2 Research Period**

The researcher completed this research's data collection procedure in three months.

### **1.7.3 Findings**

The deVokalis Choir has its own environment and management style. The study's findings and conclusions might not be directly applicable to other choir groups. Nonetheless, other ensembles looking to improve their performance and organisational techniques may find them to be a valuable reference.

### **1.7.4 Scope of Research**

This study is limited to looking at the management techniques used by the deVokalis UPSI Choir, with an emphasis on the components used to get the best results during the rehearsal and performance stages.

## **1.8 Importance of Research**

This study was developed using the knowledge and experience of key figures in the deVokalis UPSI Choir, including its founder and chief conductor, Mr. Mohd Amri bin Mohd Zin, the assistant conductor Madam Lilis Syafiza binti Mohd Yatim, practice manager Madam Jamilah binti Abu Bakar and current choir student leader student A. This study's comprehensive review is very valuable since it pinpoints the essential

elements that lead to efficient and long-lasting choir management, providing useful information and applications for pertinent stakeholders.

### **1.8.1 deVokalis UPSI Choir**

By thoroughly documenting the deVokalis UPSI Choir's management journey, this study preserves its accomplishments and methods for future use. In addition to being an invaluable historical document, this material is a resource for motivating and directing the choir's future leaders and members.

### **1.8.2 Choir Director**

This study offers insightful information and helpful recommendations for choir directors on how to apply efficient management and leadership strategies, especially in the unique setting of Malaysian choirs. It emphasises how important control, organisational effectiveness, and strategic planning are to reaching artistic excellence. Choir directors can create and carry out more effective training and development programs by tackling the issues and implementing the best practices found in this study. These initiatives can create a cooperative and encouraging atmosphere that helps choir members develop both individually and as a group, which ultimately improves the ensemble's performance and cohesiveness.

### **1.8.3 Researcher**

This research addresses a significant gap in the literature on choir management in Malaysia, exploring the intersection of music education and management practices. It lays the foundation for developing targeted leadership training programs to enhance choir management effectiveness. As emphasised by Fauzila (2018), the limited availability of scholarly studies in this area highlights the need for specialised choir training in choir management despite the abundance of skilled musicians in the country. This study provides useful resources and a strong framework for future scholars by examining the particular difficulties and approaches in the Malaysian setting. It promotes a deeper comprehension of how organisational procedures and leadership contribute to both artistic and operational success by encouraging more research into the subtleties and complexity of choir management.

### **1.8.4 Music Education**

This study fills a knowledge and development gap with neighbouring countries like Singapore and Indonesia by highlighting the critical impact that good choir administration plays in raising the awareness of music education programs in Malaysia (Susanna, 2011). The study intends to influence curriculum development and promote specialised training for aspiring music educators by highlighting important issues in choir instruction and offering workable solutions. Additionally, it gives teachers the skills and information they need to motivate and empower students, promoting all-encompassing education that incorporates leadership, teamwork, and musical artistry. This method not only develops outstanding choir groups but also inspires students to compose distinctive and significant music.