

The Relationship and Influence of Leadership Style Towards Knowledge Management Activities

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ABSTRACT

The study emphasized that the concept of leadership is not confined just to a certain group of individual that is appointed by an organization to handle administrative matters. Researchers from the epistemology of leadership believed that the term leaders refer to everyone from the CEO and board of directors down to unofficial opinion leaders who work on the factory floor. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to propose a framework to identify the individual leadership style of employees regardless of their position within the organization, which is believed to be directly influencing the richness of their daily knowledge management activities in the organization.

Keywords: Leadership style, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management activities.

VI INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades the concept of Knowledge Management (KM) has evolved tremendously to transform the ever changing characteristics of organization's inner working especially in the present age of knowledge economy. Crawford (2005) described this evolution of KM as a true paradigm shift. In short, KM can be seen as a discipline consisting of diverse practices pertaining to the management of knowledge in organization's workforce. Therefore, in the knowledge economy, the interest towards the field of KM has intensify among practitioners and academics (Hislop, 2009), this phenomenon was in regard to the shifting focus towards the knowledge as commodities, and the acknowledgement that knowledge is considered as one of the primary asset for organizations (Sewell, 2005).

Furthermore, knowledge has long been regarded and acknowledged as a valuable organizational commodity in today's economy. Bhatt (2001) posits the belief that academicians and practitioners alike agreed that by leveraging upon knowledge, it could ensure that organizations can sustain its long term competitive advantage. According to Davenport and

Prusak (1998) in the knowledge economy the only sustainable advantage an organization possesses are derived from what it collectively knows, how efficiently it uses what it knows, and how quickly it acquires and uses new knowledge. The fundamental behind KM arose from the awareness towards the importance of managing personal knowledge and diffusing it as a collective knowledge for success and well being of organizations. Stonehouse and Pemberton (1992) suggested that the role of KM is to ensure that individual learning becomes organizational learning. Similarly, Nickols (2000) posits the belief that the basic aim of KM is to leverage individual knowledge to the organization's advantage. KM, therefore, is essential for generating and sustaining competitive advantage as it supports knowledge management activities, specifically leveraging on individual knowledge and effectively transforming into organizational knowledge.

In brief, KM can be defined as the ability of an organization to manage, store, value, and distribute knowledge (Liebowitz & Wilcox, 1997). But however, as simple as it may sound, knowledge itself possesses unique paradoxical characteristics that make it unique to its beholders; it is personal in nature and embedded within individual. Therefore, knowledge is not something that is not easily given away nor can be taken away considering the advantages the owner gains from it. These knowledge bearing individuals and their knowledge activities are believed to be motivated by their individual leadership style. Nevertheless, organizations may provide all the necessary infrastructures and technological advancements to support KM activities, however in the end it all boils down to each and every one individual employees to participate, engage and perform KM activities.

Additionally, Von Krogh et al. (1997), posits the belief that when an individual creates new knowledge, that particular person is progressing in making sense out of a new situation by holding justified beliefs and committing to them. Similarly Sanchez (2005) mentioned that the ultimate source of organizational knowledge is the knowledge that the individuals in the organization develop through their own personal sense-making processes. This

shows that knowledge is created and embedded in individuals, perhaps a specific type of knowledge relating to their work, but nonetheless that knowledge is an accumulation of one's action towards attaining the knowledge whether directly or indirectly; intentionally or unintentionally. And this knowledge bearing individuals are essential building blocks for the productivity and success of an organization. Therefore, the success of KM practices depends upon knowledge management activities of individuals within organizations and the ability to convert it into collective knowledge.

VII PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The fundamental elements of KM and its benefits to the organization is the knowledge management activities, which means that people in the organization have to play their fundamental role in which they need to perform and carry out the KM activities. KM activities are performed by each and everyone in the organization such as identifying and creating knowledge, collecting and capturing knowledge, storing, sharing and applying knowledge that are related to the domain of the organization. These knowledge bearing individuals and their knowledge activities depends upon their unique individual characteristics, particularly their leadership style which naturally embedded in them. In this context, some individuals with their naturally embedded leadership style may contribute positively towards the knowledge management activities in the organizations. This is to mean that, there could be a significant relationship between individual leadership style and knowledge management activities in which if this assumption is true, the knowledge management activities of an individual could be predicted based on one's leadership styles.

Lacking or no studies on this issue has left a gap in the KM domain (Analoui, 2012 & Hislop, 2009). Although there are some studies examining the characteristics of leadership and KM (Politis, 2001; Gloet, 2006; Lakshman, 2007; Singh, 2008; Analoui, 2012; Donate & De Pablo, 2015), but however the focus is on the roles of KM leader who were regarded as persons with administrative authority such as Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO), KM Managers, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Information Officer (CIO) etc. and not on the leadership style of individual employees of the organization. Whereby, DeTienne et al. (2004) believed that the term leader refers to everyone from the CEO and board of directors down to unofficial opinion leaders who work on the factory floor. Therefore, in this present study, individual leadership styles are taken into account to close up the gap left by the previous studies to explain personal knowledge management activities.

VIII LEADERSHIP STYLE

There is no agreed upon definition for the concept of leadership. According to Stogdill (1974, p. 259), "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept." Leadership is a discipline that had received numerous interpretations, and to define leadership itself is not an easy task (Kent, 2005). Some definitions that can be generated from the literature pertaining to leadership are: (1) Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal (Kruse, 2013); (2) A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007); and the list goes on. It could be generated that leadership is a process by which an individual influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Interestingly, it was articulated that leadership within the process of knowledge management can be defined as a process, where other members of the group are supported individually in learning processes needed in order to achieve the goals of the group or the objectives of the organization (Stogdill, 1974; Dfouni, 2002; Vitaala, 2004). Nonetheless, the highlighted definitions were purposely selected to show that leadership usually involved a person influences others through social influence, not power, to get something accomplished and leadership requires others, who are not necessarily direct-reports, to get something accomplished.

As reported earlier, Hislop (2009) articulated that there are still relatively little work has been done to determine which styles of leadership are most effective for influencing knowledge management activities. To show how enormous the discipline is, Fleishman et al. (1991) has analyzed that in the past 50 years that have been as many as 65 different classification systems developed to define the dimensions of leadership. Leadership has been studied by many scholars in many different fields. In general, scholars have different perceptions and preferences. Some leadership studies emphasize the importance of the traits of leaders whereas others stress the importance of behavioral factors and characteristics of the leaders (Yukl, 1989). Hence this study will void the broad spectrum of leadership discipline and shift the focus on the leadership styles as mentioned by Hislop (2009).

The concept of leadership style is that we all have preferences for the way we influence others e.g., relate to others, interact, and learn. Most leadership styles approaches suggest that leadership styles are preferences, and that they can be changed, since they are not fixed. A leadership style is a leader's

style of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people.

Within the context of the leadership styles, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) proposed four style of leadership. The styles are:

1. Directive: This leadership style refers to person who displayed leadership style that is considered to be high on regulating but low on nurturance behavior.
2. Supportive: This leadership style is characterized by leadership who is perceived to be high on both regulation and nurturance behavior.
3. Consulting: This leadership style is characterized by leadership behavior which is low on regulation but high on nurturance.
4. Delegating: This leadership style is characterized by leadership behavior that is low on both regulation and nurturance

Goleman (2000) uncovered six (6) different leadership styles which consist of:

1. Commanding
2. Visionary
3. Affiliative
4. Democratic
5. Pacesetter
6. Coaching

House (1971) identifies four (4) leadership styles that consist of:

1. Directive
2. Supportive
3. Participative
4. Achievement – Oriented

However, according to Analoui (2012), of the studies that have been produced on leadership and KM, none have examined the relationship between Avolio and Bass' (2004) transformational, transactional and passive-avoidant leadership styles and a full range of organizational knowledge management activity. Therefore, in the effort to fulfill this gap, which is empirically true in the Malaysian context, the study will attempt to execute the suggested concept above.

Avolio and Bass' (2004) style of leadership had been widely discussed in literature across diverse fields, and their Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) on determining leadership styles has also been widely utilized by researchers and organization

in identifying and measuring leadership style. Avolio and Bass (2004) state that the transformational leadership style is comprised of five dimensions:

1. Idealized influences (attributes) – whereby leaders are admired, trusted, have high standards of ethical and moral conduct, are held in high regard and engender loyalty from followers.
2. Idealized influence (behaviors) – as above but displaying behaviors including the leader talking about his/her most important values and beliefs, specifying the importance of having a strong sense of purpose and considering the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.
3. Inspire motivation – whereby leaders behave in ways that motivate those around them, providing meaning and challenges for their followers.
4. Intellectual stimulation – whereby leaders stimulate their followers' effort to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems and approaching old situations in new ways.
5. Individualized consideration – whereby leaders pay attention to their followers' needs and concerns as individuals and develop their strengths through behaviors such as coaching and consulting.

The transactional leadership style is comprised of two dimensions:

1. Contingent reward – whereby leaders clarify expectations and offer recognition when goals are achieved. Satisfaction when others meet expectations
2. Management-by-exception (active) – whereby leaders specify the standards for compliance, as well as what constitutes ineffective performance, monitor performance and take corrective action, but only when performance is not as would be expected.

Finally, Avolio and Bass (2004) described passive avoidant leadership as being comprised of two dimensions:

1. Management-by-exception (passive) – which is similar to the active form of the behavior but differs in that leaders only take corrective action when a problem becomes serious.
2. Laissez-faire – it considered to be a form of non-leadership, under this condition individuals avoid leadership, responsibility and

activity, failing to be involved when important issues arise.

IX KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

KM was initially defined as the process of applying a systematic approach to the capture, structuring, management, and dissemination of knowledge throughout an organization to work faster, reuse best practices, and reduce costly rework from project to project (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). According to Newman (1991) KM is a discipline that seeks to improve the performance of individuals and organizations by maintaining and leveraging the present and future value of knowledge assets.

Eventually over the years, KM has been discussed and debated extensively and the field itself developed a solid requirement for a more systematic and deliberate approach to cultivate and distribute an organization's knowledge base; one populated with valid and valuable lessons learned and best practices. But however, regardless of the wealth of documented materials such as monographs, reports, periodicals and thesis, neither researchers nor practitioners have an agreed definition of KM. Up until today, there had been numerous published definitions of KM, each with distinctively unique perspectives but yet related to each others, which indicates that KM is a multidisciplinary field of study that covers diverse areas. Nonetheless, regardless of the term employed to describe it, KM is increasingly seen, not merely as the latest management fashion, but as signaling the development of a more organic and holistic way of understanding and exploiting the role of knowledge in the processes of managing and doing work, and an authentic guide for individuals and organizations in coping with the increasingly complex and shifting environment of the modern economy (Mentzas et al., 2003).

The process of KM is based on the ability of all members of the organization to add value to the basic business processed through creation, communication, codification and coordination of both explicit and tacit knowledge stores (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). This shows that the success of KM is much depended upon the contribution of personal knowledge that resides within individuals, and this distinct knowledge is the building blocks of a successful KM practices in an organization. Similarly, Stonehouse and Pemberton (1992) suggested that the role of KM is to ensure that individual learning becomes organizational learning. Bollinger and Smith (2001) concluded that knowledge management activities is not so much about control as it is about sharing, collaboration, and making the best possible use of a knowledge

resource which emphasize there are needs to understand the KM activities of individuals beforehand. Therefore, various scholars had been discussing and highlighting the activities associated with knowledge management:

Seng, Zannes, and Pace (2002) had proposed five activities of managing knowledge:

1. Capturing knowledge
2. Storing knowledge
3. Processing knowledge
4. Sharing knowledge
5. Using knowledge

Barth (2003) had outlined several distinctive personal knowledge management activities, these includes;

1. Accessing
2. Evaluating
3. Organizing
4. Analyzing
5. Conveying
6. Collaborating
7. Securing

Arthur and Anderson (2001) stresses that KM activities are divided into 7 steps, they are:

1. Knowledge Identification
2. Knowledge Collection
3. Knowledge Adaption
4. Knowledge Organization
5. Knowledge Application
6. Knowledge Sharing
7. Knowledge Creation

Wiig (1993) had proposed 3 categorization of KM activities, which consists of:

1. Knowledge creation
2. Knowledge manifestation
3. Knowledge use and Transfer

Meanwhile Ling (2011) conducted a review on the variations and similarities from the various definitions of KM activities since 1990s with the aim of finding out which is the most suitable one to adopt. Based on the scope of the 55 articles, Ling (2011) identified that there are four frequently highlighted KM activities, these are:

1. Creating knowledge

2. Storing knowledge
3. Sharing knowledge
4. Utilizing knowledge

Maier and Moseley (2003) had proposed their own categorization of KM activities, which been widely used in researches and organizations to assess KM activities. They have categorized KM activities as follows:

1. Knowledge identification and creation
2. Knowledge collection and capture
3. Knowledge storage and organization
4. Knowledge sharing and dissemination
5. Knowledge application and use

Therefore, the study views the categorization of KM activities as proposed by Maier and Moseley (2003) as mostly relevant to examine KM activities. In addition, other KM activities framework that had been discussed will be integrated into the framework. Firstly, knowledge identification and creation examines the effectiveness in transforming data and information into knowledge based assets (Jha, Mahajan and Joshi, 2013); Knowledge collection and capture looks into how well knowledge is captured once it has been identified (Jha, Mahajan and Joshi, 2013); Knowledge storage and organization discusses about how once knowledge is captured, it has to be stored an organized for easy retrieval by the knowledge holder and others (Jha, Mahajan and Joshi, 2013); Knowledge sharing and dissemination scrutinizes the sharing and dissemination of knowledge using both non electronic and electronic methods of sharing such as the use of meetings, memos and email (Singh, 2008); and lastly, knowledge application and use looks into the application and use of knowledge acquired using both technological and non technological processes (Singh, 2008). Therefore, this categorization will serve as a guideline to the personal knowledge management activities of the employees within an organization.

X CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the foregoing discussion, figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study which seeks out to examine leadership styles and the impact towards personal knowledge management activity. For the purpose of the study, the framework will be adopted from leadership style (Avolio and Bass, 2004) and Knowledge Management Activities by Maier and Moseley (2003).

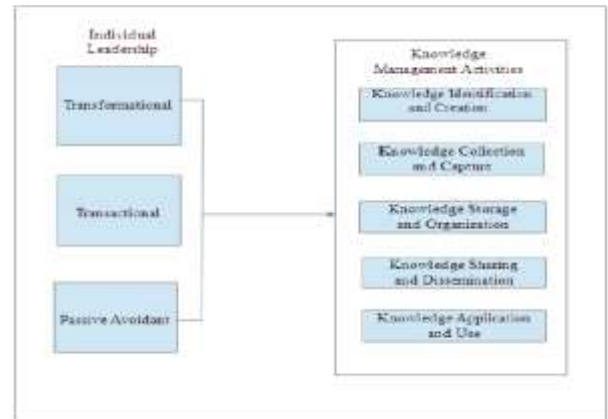


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of Independent Variable namely Individual Leadership Style consisting of Transformational, Transactional, and Passive Avoidant. On the other hand, the Dependent Variables namely Knowledge Management Activities consist of Knowledge Identification and Creation, Knowledge Creation and Capture, Knowledge Storage and Organization, Knowledge Sharing and Organization; lastly Knowledge Application and Use.

XI CONCLUSION

Knowledge are embedded in people, they will over time develop it and when required they will take actions based upon the knowledge that they possesses. Lakshman (2007) emphasizes that knowledge is basically nothing without people. Data can be transmitted, information can be shared, but knowledge is an attribute of people, or communities or societies. While knowledge is increasingly being viewed as a commodity or intellectual asset, there are some paradoxical characteristics of knowledge that are radically different from other valuable commodities. Therefore, this paper contributes to the body of knowledge by highlighting the leadership style of individual employees as the influential factors towards knowledge management activities. Furthermore, it was articulated that there are still relatively little work has been done to determine which styles of leadership are most effective for influencing knowledge management activities.

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