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Emerging Trends in Knowledge-Oriented Organizational Leadership: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Research concerning the linkage between organizational leadership, knowledge management activities, and innovation performance is relatively new. Scholars are investing more time into researching these phenomena, but the rate of innovation developments are occurring at a very rapid pace. The speed at which innovation breakthroughs are taking place poses questions about the relevance of studies that are more than a few years old. This study encompasses a systematic literature review of organizational leadership and the role it plays in knowledge management (KM) activities that lead to innovation performance. Scholarly journal articles from the year 2015 are analyzed for emergent trends concerning knowledge-oriented organizational leadership. Using Herzberg's two-factor theory, leadership factors promoting KM activities that lead to innovation performance (motivation factors), as well as those that suppress KM activities (hygiene factors), are identified. Findings suggest that organizational leaders must adopt a comprehensive and deliberate approach to provoke KM activities that augment innovation performance.

Keywords: Knowledge management; knowledge creation; knowledge-oriented; knowledge sharing; KM leadership; innovation leadership; organizational leadership.

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1. Introduction

Organizational leadership and knowledge management (KM) are well-studied disciplines with implications in professional business settings, public organizations, and institutions of higher education alike. The role of organizational leadership as a moderator of overall firm performance is also thoroughly documented in the seminal and contemporary literature [1] [2]. Over the past thirty years, research efforts related to knowledge management are also gaining substantial momentum, especially regarding the precursor role of KM activities towards firms' innovation performance and potential [3] [4]. Despite the close relationship that exists between organizational leadership and knowledge management, research regarding their linkage and how to provoke it is only recently emerging [5]. Likewise, based on the rapid rate of technology growth and innovation characterizing the global business community of today, defining best practices and KM leadership calls for firm entrenchment in the most contemporary research findings. Since the year 2010, an influx of studies regarding the synthesis of leadership and knowledge management suggest companies and thought leaders ought to quickly consider how they can invoke knowledge-oriented leadership.

1.1 Problem statement

Due to its newness as a form of organizational leadership and its transdisciplinary nature, what constitutes knowledge-oriented leadership may evade many company decision-makers. Moreover, evidence regarding the influence of leadership tactics on KM practices indicates some leaders may be unaware of how their organizational strategies, communication style, and interaction methods potentially stifle KM activities [6] [7]. Unawareness among company decision-makers concerning KM leadership represents a risk and opportunity cost for most firms because innovation opportunities exist across multiple sectors and industries, even though innovation is particularly essential for technologically savvy enterprises. The problem herein is that company decision-makers may not understand what knowledge-oriented leadership is, how to implement it in their organizations, or what they are doing to inadvertently restrain knowledge management activities [8] [2]. The specific problem is that misunderstandings about knowledge-oriented leadership among company leaders could lead to missed opportunities for their firm or contribute to a competitive disadvantage.

1.2 Study Purpose & Research Question

This paper explores emergent scholarly literature on knowledge-oriented organizational leadership. The reason behind this research study is to examine what types of trends exist concerning the role organizational leadership plays in propagating and protecting knowledge management practices according to recent study findings. Knowledge management practices are fundamentally important to innovation in firms and have antecedent effects on companies' innovation capacity and potential [5] [6]. Similarly, organizational leadership characteristics that stifle knowledge management behaviors are also relevant to the study since they may be responsible for suppressing companies' innovation capacity and potential [8].

2. Methodology

To date, available research on knowledge-oriented leadership involves fragments of material relating to multiple

aspects of knowledge management, leadership theories, information-sharing practices, innovation, and organizational performance. In an attempt to bolster the linkage between recent existing studies on knowledge-oriented leadership, a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology is appropriate for the current study. Literature reviews are useful in management and leadership contexts because they assist researchers with organizing and managing diverse interdisciplinary content into meaningful frameworks [9]. Systematic literature reviews differ from traditional literature reviews because they are characteristically objective, repeatable, and structured (2013). Also, SLRs adhere to precise time intervals and contain clearly designated boundaries regarding the methodology used for searching, selecting, and analyzing perspective and chosen studies.

Search Conditions

Published studies for the systematic literature review were located using a library search engine from a regionally and programmatically accredited university where the author has a membership. The search parameters used were set to include only scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles. Database conditions for the search parameters were set to include ABI/INFORM, BioMed Central, Computers & Applied Sciences Complete, Emerald Education Source, Business Source Complete, , Emerging Markets Case Studies Collection, Health Business Full Text, Hospitality & Tourism Complete, CINAHL, IGI Global, JSTOR, MEDLINE Complete, Oxford Journals, ProQuest (Business, Entrepreneurship, Health and Medicine, and Social Sciences), PsycARTICLES/PsycBOOKS, and SAGE Journals.

Search Parameters: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

After establishing the before-mentioned search conditions, search parameters were set to include results published from January 1, 2015, to January 31, 2015. A narrow publication date range was intentionally selected to explore only the most recent literature concerning knowledge oriented-leadership. Keyword parameters were set to include at least one term from each set of keywords, and two sets of keywords were used. The first set included the keywords: knowledge management, knowledge creation, knowledge-oriented, and knowledge sharing, whereas the second set of keywords included: KM leadership, innovation leadership, organizational leadership, or role of leadership in innovation. To be selected for the SLR, candidate articles had to contain one keyword from the first set and one keyword from the second set in their title, author keywords, or abstract.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

As shown in Table 1, using the described search conditions and parameters resulted in the discovery of eight relevant studies. Following the identification of studies relevant to emerging trends in knowledge-oriented organizational leadership, a theoretical framework was needed to summarize succinctly key points, trends, and study design characteristics from the modest collection of articles found. More specifically, the theoretical framework for the study needed to identify organizational leadership characteristics that promote and protect knowledge management activities, as well as those that prevent or threaten KM activities. Herzberg's hygiene-motivation theory, also known as Herzberg's two-factor theory, provides a suitable framework for accomplishing these objectives [11]. According to Herzberg (1966) [10], organizational environments are

populated by two distinct categories of factors. Motivation factors include characteristics and conditions present in work environments that provoke job satisfaction, whereas hygiene factors consist of features and conditions that promote job dissatisfaction [11] [10].

Naturally, organizational leaders are largely responsible for establishing and altering work environment conditions in the organizations they represent. Although the aim of this particular study was to be addressed by a way of examining and investigating all the characteristics that is associated with a knowledge-oriented organizational leadership, as well as organizational leadership tendencies that undermine KM activities, the usefulness of Herzberg's two-factor theory as a method for delineating between KM motivation and hygiene factors is fitting. At the crux of Herzberg's theory is the notion that companies cannot create a work environment filled with highly satisfied and engaged employees by singularly attempting to remove factors that cause dissatisfaction [11]. Likewise, companies will experience limited or mixed levels of employee satisfaction and engagement if factors that cause dissatisfaction are significantly present, even when motivation factors are present as well [10]. Thus, the same paradigm is used in the current study to examine knowledge-oriented organizational leadership dynamics that contribute to the promotion or suppression when it comes to KM activities.

2.2 Findings

Organizational leadership is a vehicle for provisioning clear objectives to employees. For technologically savvy and innovative firms, knowledge-oriented organizational leadership is thought to provide direction on KM initiatives that support innovation. As mentioned earlier, knowledge oriented leadership specifically involves leadership tactics and behaviors that bolster exploratory and exploitative knowledge management activities. A common theme in the emergent literature on knowledge-oriented leadership literature is that motivation and hygiene factors appear to be reasonably consistent across settings, cultures, and industries encompassed within the literature review [12] [8].

2.3 Motivation Factors

Continuously reconfiguring their firms' knowledge assets by balancing KM creation, transfer, and application processes are noted in the relevant studies as an important organizational leadership responsibility. Leadership behaviors in support of reconfiguration promote knowledge exploration and exploitation practices that propagate innovation. Where some organizations fall short by focusing only on the acquisition and storage of knowledge, knowledge-oriented leaders take additional steps to see to it employees are continuously engaging in creative, contributory, and communicative KM behaviors. Promulgating constant reconfigurations of knowledge assets is not necessarily a means to an end, but rather the continuous recycling of knowledge assets is suspected to lead to considerable improvements in processes, workflow, and information retention. Consequently, employees and other internal stakeholders engaged in these activities may be increasingly likely to contribute to innovation breakthroughs from remaining engaged in a state of ongoing but non-deliberate learning. One trend specifically related to the promotion of reconfiguration practices involves the use of assessments that measure and provide key insights into workers' KM perspectives and behaviors [12]. Organizational leaders who

regularly assess and analyze their workforces' KM activities may be in a substantially more viable position to innovate.

Another key characteristic of knowledge oriented leaders is their use of transactional and transformational leadership behaviors in such a way that will inspire and appreciate the rewarding knowledge management activities that support innovation. Emergent studies on knowledge-oriented leadership pose that a KM-centric culture is more likely to encompass individual employees who invoke knowledge sharing and application behaviors on their accord [8] [13]. Transactional leadership encompasses efforts that systematize rewards and expectations for employees who engage in desirable behaviors and perform well. In comparison, transformational leadership encompasses the establishment and maintenance of shared values and strong company visions as a means of rallying and incentivizing employees. Again, knowledge oriented leaders wield both types of leadership appropriately to propagate exploratory and exploitative KM activities [5] [8].

Highly specialized employees with considerable amounts of subject matter expertise are frequently described in connection with hands off management approaches, or specialized employees are given significant freedom and independence to do their work. Although this may be true from a management style perspective, findings from the literature suggest that knowledge-oriented leaders ought to ensure that reward, monitoring, and socialization strategies are in place that provokes learning inertia between subject matter experts. Put simply, creating a work environment where subject matter experts feel compelled to engage in interdisciplinary socialization and knowledge sharing activities is suspected of provoking new ideas that lead to innovation performance [1]. Coupling these types of KM transfer and sharing practices with equally solid KM storage, creation, and application practices are suspect of putting companies in the best possible position to innovate, whether through improvements in internal processes and strategies or new products, services, or market engagement methods [14]. Decision-makers who use organizational leadership as a mechanism for promoting knowledge leveraging among employees appear in the literature as emotionally intelligent, open-minded, visionary, delegating, and inspirational [6] [15].

2.4 Hygiene Factors

Organizational leadership behaviors that suppress KM activities and innovation performance also exist in the emerging literature. Findings from some studies indicated the presence of knowledge hoarding behaviors where internal stakeholders work to protect and cache knowledge instead of sharing it [5]. Knowledge hoarding behaviors may be exhibited by organizational leaders directly. Alternatively, decision-makers' communication and behavioral characteristics may also encourage internal competition and protectionism regarding knowledge. Work environments exemplifying these tendencies may also experience them as a result of systems, policies, and compensation arrangements that oppose knowledge creation, sharing, and management [5]. Workforces populated with employees experiencing career stagnation also emerged from studies in the literature review as a sign of inadequate organizational leadership. [8] "observed this hygiene factor when comparing the knowledge sharing behaviors of university lecturers with those of support staff members". Where lecturers have management and employees coordination responsibilities, staff members are only responsible for themselves, suggesting that a lack of felt control or employee voice may inhibit knowledge sharing behaviors among

affected workers. As a contributory factor, [8] proposed that misalignment between organizational leadership initiatives, KM expectations, and support resources may also exacerbate hygiene factors that demotivate employees from participating in KM activities suspected of augmenting innovation performance. Moreover, rewards surrounding KM behaviors are ineffective or promote negative sentiments towards KM activities when leadership and training are unsupportive [8].

Table 1: Knowledge-Oriented Organizational Leadership Studies from 2015

Author	Type of Study	Methodology	Data Analysis Method(s)	Time Interval
Donate & de Pablo	Quantitative	Survey Questionnaire	Partial Least Squares (PLS)	Cross- Sectional
Idris et al.	Quantitative	Survey Questionnaire	Structural Equation Modeling	Cross- Sectional
Kim & Park	Quantitative	Survey Questionnaire	Structural Equation Modeling	Cross- Sectional
Kivipold	Quantitative	Questionnaire	<i>t</i> -test	Cross Sectional
Micic	Qualitative	Theoretical Analysis	NA	NA
Muchiri & Kiambati	Qualitative	Theoretical Analysis	NA	NA
Pham et al.	Quantitative	Survey Questionnaire	Factor Analysis; Regression Analysis	Multiple Cross- Sectional
Safari & Azadehdel	Quantitative	Survey Questionnaire	Structural Equation Modeling	Cross- Sectional

3. Conclusion

As the forces of globalization, technology, and international business continue to coalesce, the relationship between organizational leadership and KM becomes ever so paramount. Technologically sophisticated companies, in particular, must integrate their organizational leadership and KM efforts to maintain a constant state of innovative vigilance. If not, these companies become increasingly susceptible to stagnation or competing firms. The purpose of this succinct literature review was to investigate trends in the emerging literature on knowledge-oriented leadership concerning its relationship to KM activities and innovation

performance in the workplace. The search conditions and parameters used in the study were very specific, which may have disqualified some studies that were relevant. Studies involving knowledge-oriented leadership may synonymous or alternative terminology compared to the keywords used in the study, especially on account of KM leadership being a relatively contemporary phenomenon. Another key take away from the literature review herein has to do with the number of studies that relied upon cross-sectional time dimension in the research design. Obtaining a snapshot of knowledge oriented leadership and knowledge management activities provides useful insights but future researchers ought to consider a longitudinal study design to measure whether best practices in KM impact innovation performance over time to test empirically their validity.

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