

Organizational Effectiveness: The role of Organizational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual model on organizational effectiveness in the public sector by investigating its relationship with two concepts 1) the importance of knowledge sharing for ensuring organizational effectiveness and 2) the role of organizational leadership in creating knowledge sharing environment to result in organizational effectiveness. Knowledge sharing has been proliferated as a key process to organizational performance improvement. Similar to its counterpart, the public sector is as serious about the effectiveness of their organizations, however not many public managers and employees are receptive to the idea of knowledge sharing and this could be due to their distinctive character of confidentiality. Here, it could be argued that leadership has implication for creating that climate as it has locomotion function (i.e., facilitation of motivation and activation of employees to fulfill the goals) or a cohesion function (i.e., enabling collaboration and interaction). The theoretical contribution is in terms of filling the gap of understanding public organizational effectiveness by integrating several concepts including leadership and knowledge sharing. While, the practical contribution is in terms of the conceptual model suggested in this study which is somewhat new in the Brunei public organizational environment and it can serve as a practical framework for the policy-makers and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Responding quickly to environmental changes, organizational crises, or shifting customer expectations is important to organizations (Daft, 2013) in order for them to achieve high organizational performance and effectiveness. Previous studies (see Amah, 2012; Mills and Smith, 2011) have found that the source of sustainable competitive advantage can result not only from the deployment of tangible resource but also from the employment of intangible resource; for example, effective knowledge sharing can lead to improved organizational performance. The aim of the study is to investigate how organizations can influence the use of knowledge in order to achieve organizational performance.

To answer the research aim, the study will look at three concepts: the concept of organisational effectiveness which is considered to be one way of measuring organisational performance (Lee and Choi, 2003); the concept of knowledge sharing where knowledge is considered the most valuable intangible asset as well as contributor to the creation of organizational capabilities and values (Sohail and Daud, 2009; Olivera, 2000); and lastly, the concept of organisational leadership which is seen as a prominent enabler as leaders are positioned as authority, coach or mentor whom can motivate, inspire and teach employees to participate in knowledge sharing activities for the organisation (Acedo et al., 2006; Denford, 2013; Islam et al., 2011). This study intends to develop a conceptual model for Brunei government organizations in relation to policy development and implementation and considering issues that need to be addressed as a map for the development of organizational effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Organizational effectiveness*

A few studies (see Roy and Dugal, 2005; Lee and Choi, 2003; Kim and Hancer, 2010) have advocated that organizational effectiveness is complex in terms of its description and dimensions and is a hypothetical abstraction existed in people's minds that gives meaning to what organizational effectiveness is. Different constituents such as owners, employees, and customers can have different views on organizational success or effectiveness as it can be value-based and time-specific for its goal attainment and that external environment and strategic orientations of organizational members can determine or influence goal achievement and thus the organizational effectiveness (Roy and Dugal, 2005). Jafari et al. (2007) have mentioned that in achieving goals, an organisation can improve its member's capabilities towards innovation by steering and controlling the intangible resource.

In a similar way, Gold et al. (2001) argued that organizations experiencing a learning effect could improve its member's capabilities over time for creating value. This suggests that working environment can have an effect on organizational effectiveness

and, indeed, several authors (see Gold et al., 2001; Acedo et al., 2006; Denford, 2013; Islam et al., 2011) have believed that knowledge can contribute to organizational effectiveness when it is shared and communicated to the right people at the right time, thus producing organizational competitive advantage. Since today's economy is considered to be a knowledge-based economy (Dess et al., 2012), knowledge management becomes a vital factor for the organization. Thus the need to study knowledge sharing becomes crucial for organizational effectiveness.

2.2. Knowledge Sharing and its relationship with organizational effectiveness

Knowledge is essential to all organizations. It affects the success of an organization where employees who are equipped with the necessary and right information will give the organization a better competitive advantage. Knowledge can be tacit and explicit (Nonaka, 1994); explicit knowledge is formal, systematic and can be codified into records, databases; and tacit knowledge is defined as knowledge that is personal, intangible and embedded in the cognitive minds of people and is obtained through learning and experience. Wang and Noe (2010) defined knowledge sharing as the provision of task information and know how to help others and to collaborate with others to solve problems, develop new ideas, or implement policies or procedures. Others refer it as the “dissemination of information and knowledge through the whole department and/or organization” (Yang, 2004, p.2).

Most of the definitions emphasize the process of transferring knowledge and skills from one individual to another. Knowledge sharing behavior can be fostered at the individual level as well as the organizational level which is useful to increase the long-term sustainable competitive advantage of the company as it encourages creativity and innovation. There are various channels that can be used in knowledge sharing: official (e.g., training) or unofficial (e.g., coffee table discussions), personal (e.g., work rotation) or impersonal (e.g., company databases). The sharing process can occur either explicitly, through direct advisory communication, or implicitly, without the recipient being able to articulate the acquired knowledge.

Knowledge is considered to be a key element in business success and that the exchange of knowledge is a recipe for maintaining competitive advantage (Teh and Sun, 2012). According to Islam et al. (2012), having effective knowledge management within an organization can result in fewer mistakes, less redundancy, quicker problem solving, better decision making, increased worker independence, enhanced customer relations, and improved service. Thus this implies that knowledge sharing has implication for organizational effectiveness where previous authors have integrated the concept of knowledge and “action” (Koh, 2005). Only when information is interpreted and put into action or reciprocity relationship, for example by applying it in decision-making process related to business strategy and implementation, then it becomes knowledge (Adams and Lamont, 2003; Islam et al., 2011; Davenport and Klahr, 1998; Mueller, 2012).

Knowledge sharing is considered to be an antecedent for organizational members to have a better understanding of the know-how and skills of others and making them capable of responding to situational demands even when the task complexity is beyond the cognitive capabilities of the organizational member (Ghobadi and D'Ambra, 2012). Previous studies (see Sohail and Daud, 2009; Olivera, 2000) have shown that the effective application of knowledge sharing has helped companies improve their efficiency and reduce costs through the enhancement of employees' capabilities. According to studies such as (Van Beveren, 2003; Henttonen et al., 2016), the public sector seems to be lagging behind in the deployment of knowledge sharing. Not only that, there are relatively few empirical studies of knowledge sharing in the public sector organization (Amayadh, 2013; Sandhu et al., 2011). The former could be due to lack of competition or little need for improvement in efficiency, a knowledge-gap, or a lack of motivation and/or reward.

Knowledge sharing is widely promoted and researched in the private sector. Studies have shown that employees in the public sector do not share their knowledge and experience as well as their counterparts in the private sector (Zhou, 2004) despite being aware of the benefits of knowledge sharing in improving efficiency and effectiveness. Nevertheless, studies have shown that the concept of knowledge sharing where knowledge is considered the most valuable intangible asset is found to be one of the main contributors to the creation of organizational capabilities and values.

A review of prior studies identify resources that influence knowledge sharing in public sector organizations. As summarized in Table 1, factors that have been found to influence KS in public organizations include 1) Physical resources which include technology and non-IT investment (e.g., KS incentives, KS training) that are usually acquired financially through purchases 2) Organisational resources which include organizational structure and senior management championship that relate to the reporting structure and management mechanisms and 3) Human resources which include social capital and job expertise that focus on interpersonal relationships and human capital.

The review shows that while these resources are pertinent in any sector may it be private or public, senior management championship or organizational leadership is frequently identified as an important resource in the public sector. Currie et al. (2008) observed that political considerations in public-sector organizations inhibited knowledge transfer through technology. Similarly, Butler et al. (2008) suggest that knowledge sharing technologies should be designed to align with the needs of public sector organizations as they are often owned collectively by political entities, and constrained by political demands and regulations rather than competitive forces (Bozeman 1987).

Table 1. A review of key factors influencing knowledge sharing in the public sector (adapted from Pee and Kankanhalli (2016), p.9)

Study	Key Findings related to Knowledge Sharing	Resources Identified
Amayah (2013)	Reward is negatively related to knowledge sharing, while social interaction is positively related	Non-IT KS investment Social capital
Seba et al. (2012)	Organizational structure, leadership, and trust were frequently identified as barriers to knowledge sharing by interviewees	Organizational structure Senior management championship Social capital
Handzic (2011)	Leadership is positively related to activities that generate new or transfer existing knowledge	Senior management championship
Dawes et al (2009)	Technology is necessary but not sufficient for successful sharing in Public Sector Knowledge Networks (PSKN) Lack of sufficient trust can be a powerful inhibitor to PSKNs Barrier related to diverse organizations with different missions, priorities, and goals are serious, but amenable to creative management such as establishing relationships and among key individuals with a shared vision Project success depends on leadership and management practices, and a culture that provides incentives and rewards for knowledge sharing	KS technology Non-IT KS investment Senior management championship Social capital
Currie et al. (2008)	Political considerations in a public hospital inhibited knowledge transfer through technology and rendered the generic replication of KS systems from the private sector ineffective	Senior management championship
Willem and Buekens (2007)	Formal systems (e.g. formal procedures, rules and procedure) is negatively related to the effectiveness of interdepartmental knowledge sharing, while incentive and trust are positively related	Non-IT KS investment Social capital Organisational structure
Seyed-Ikhlās and Roland (2004)	ICT infrastructure and directives from politicians are positively related to individual employees' performance of knowledge transfer	KS technology Senior management championship

2.3. Organizational leadership providing a climate for knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing within an organization can be difficult as knowledge is closely coupled with power (Seba et al., 2012). Knowledge sharing can be seen as multifaceted that involves a complex process of cognitive behavioral changes, as it requires a voluntary act by individuals to participate (Xue et al., 2011). Thus, to promote knowledge sharing, managers need to cultivate a nurturing team climate since they are the most proximal social context for individuals within which they frequently interact with peers (Liang et al., 2010). In providing the climate for knowledge sharing,

organizational leadership has been recognized to play an important role in the process (Xue et al., 2011; Li et al., 2014; Pee and Kankanhalli, 2016, Park and Kim, 2018).

Organizational leadership refers to the process of influencing others towards achieving some desired goals which involve managing change and establishing direction and organizational vision, aligning people with the vision and strategies, and motivating them (Packard, 2009). Considering this view, leadership within an organization can be seen to be an enabler to creating knowledge sharing climate which may lead to organizational effectiveness (Li et al., 2014; Nguyen and Mohamed, 2011; Benson and Blackman, 2011; Park and Kim, 2018). Leaders can have a strong impact on the results of teamwork and the processes in which team members engage due to its locomotion function (i.e., facilitation of motivation and activation of employees to fulfill the goals) or a cohesion function (i.e., enabling collaboration and interaction) (Hunt et al., 2004; Mueller, 2014).

In other words, the directions and guidelines for knowledge sharing process can be done through effective leadership since leaders provide the conceptual framework and translate them into business strategies (business knowledge) to their team members for better sense-making (Islam et al., 2011; Sandhu et al., 2011; Li et al., 2014). Studies of leadership have also shown that the behavior of leaders could have extraordinary effects on collectives including teams, units, and organizations (Contractor et al., 2012). However, according to Chiem (2001), knowledge sharing within the private and public sectors are different due to their distinct structures and roles. For example, Seba et al. (2012) argued that the bureaucratic culture in the public sector often sees knowledge management as a management responsibility rather than employee responsibility.

A variety of leadership styles have been studied, among which transformational and transactional leaderships are found to have an influence on knowledge sharing process (Bryant, 2003; Xue et al., 2011; Park and Kim, 2018; Xiao et al., 2017). According to several authors (Xiao et al., 2017; Han et al., 2016), there is some empirical evidence that suggested transformational leadership can improve performance significantly by enhancing the use of knowledge integration. Transformational leaders create a vision for a change, focus on the various type of exchange among followers, strive to gain commitment from followers and support the change throughout the process by adapting new methods to deal with complex work situations (Park and Kim, 2018). The function of transformational leaders can be explained in terms of enabling collaboration and interaction, where this may be done by influencing employee's interpersonal trust, creating a knowledge sharing climate and encouraging knowledge sharing via supporting, challenging and inspiring employees (Wang et al., 2011; Choudhary et al., 2013; Xiao et al., 2017; Han et al., 2016).

In other words, transformational leaders can demonstrate role-modeling and personal commitment to achieving vision and their employees are likely to gain interpersonal

trust because they have observed it in their leaders and feel the interpersonal ties between employees and between leaders and employees (Goodwin et al., 2011; Xiao et al., 2017; Le and Lei, 2017). This points out that trust is a central feature in a leader-followers relationship in the workplace. A transformational leader can foster emotions and trustworthy culture. The need to create a cohesive group whose members trust one another or that can help the members to develop a favorable attitude toward knowledge sharing. The members might feel obliged to sharing knowledge with others due to normative pressures arising from the strong group cohesion and trust on peers. Several authors (Han et al., 2016; Tung and Chang, 2011) have reported that transformational leaders can directly provide employees with an empowering effect through the employees' social identification within the group. In this view, employees may offer almost no resistance to participating in knowledge sharing. This empowering behavior and strong support from leaders has been considered a critical component in knowledge sharing process in terms of group cohesion, that reflects the shared commitment and pride which emerges from the experience and interactions among employees. Thus, a transformational leader is responsible for promoting the cooperation and integration of in-group and developing a climate of positive knowledge sharing.

In fact, transformational leadership was originally conceptualized based on its focus on enhancing followers and leaders to a higher level of morality and stimulation (Bryan, 2003). This is the opposite of transactional leadership that focus on building an exchange relationship with followers, in which employees work hard in exchange for rewards. Transactional leadership encourages specific exchanges and a close connection between goals and rewards. This can relate to the locomotion of leadership function that facilitates motivation and activation of employees to fulfill the goals. To some extent, transactional leadership can facilitate task-oriented cohesion whereas transformational leadership can foster social-emotional cohesion by gaining trust and empowerment. The transactional leader works by creating clear structures, in terms of work requirements and reward structure, and engages others in the reciprocal activity of exchanging one thing for another (Bryant, 2003; Pieterse et al., 2010). Transactional leaders often use management by exception where they monitor performance and take corrective action when problems arise (Pieterse et al., 2010).

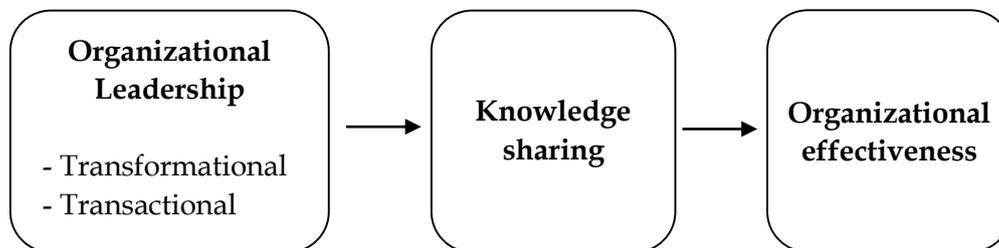
According to Bryant (2003), employees may choose to utilize or exploit their knowledge if they are not challenged and rewarded for extra effort in the organization. Transactional leaders enforce policies and emphasize meeting goals. The fact that transactional leadership clarifies expectations and gives feedback about meeting the expectations, it can be argued that they may be perceived as controlling and demotivating, causing less empowering behavior. Nevertheless, management structures are still very crucial in achieving organizational goals as it gives structure and system that facilitate the sharing of ideas.

Thus, followers and leaders relationship in this situation can also be as participatory and dynamic as transformational leadership. Although transformational and transactional are two different styles, both leadership theories can provide a conducive climate for knowledge sharing within an organization by focusing on different strengths. In other words, both types of leaders are required to implement knowledge sharing process effectively. Thus, for this study, it is fundamental to look at these two leadership styles and considered them as an additive, or integrated, rather than as alternatives. In fact, organizations may require different styles that have different functions (locomotion and cohesion) in managing, creating and sharing knowledge in order to leverage them into a competitive advantage.

3. Conceptual framework

As stated earlier, the study proposed a conceptual model on organizational effectiveness in the public sector by investigating its relationship with two concepts 1) the importance of knowledge sharing for ensuring organizational effectiveness and 2) the role of organizational leadership in creating knowledge sharing environment to result in organizational effectiveness. From the above discussion, on the basis of the literature, we proposed a framework (Figure 1) assuming that organizational effectiveness is affected by organizational leadership through the mediation of knowledge sharing.

Figure 1: The Conceptual Model



To reiterate, although transformational and transactional are two different styles, both leadership theories can provide a conducive climate for knowledge sharing within an organization by focusing on different strengths. In other words, both types of leaders might be required to implement knowledge sharing process effectively. This model provides a framework which seeks to formulate a conceptual framework of organizational effectiveness for the public sector.

4. Implications and future plan

The study will contribute empirical insights into the relationship between leadership roles and knowledge sharing, which is lacking in the literature (Pounder, 2001). Specifically, by looking at the role of knowledge sharing, the study will contribute

more insights into the link between leadership and organizational effectiveness. Having said that, leadership and organizational effectiveness research tend to assume the conventional profit-making business hence the study attempts to build a model of organizational effectiveness specific to public sector organization where attempts have been few and limited (Pounder, 2001). This paper is focused on the rudimentary stage of the research – primarily on the literature review and theoretical framework. The selected public organizations in Brunei will be approached to gain data elaborating the framework.

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