Servant Leadership and the Successful Implementation of Knowledge-management in Organizations

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Abstract

In the 21st century organizations, knowledge is recognized as an organizational resource which can increase organizational competitive advantage and sustainability when fully harnessed. The economic environment of today is based entirely on utilizing knowledge for economic gain; however, the ability to generate economic gain requires utilizing knowledge effectively. Leadership and organizational culture have been shown to be two main factors that influence knowledge-management practices in organizations. Among the leadership styles proposed to influence organizational success, servant leadership has been suggested to be the leadership style of the future. Servant leaders build relationships among followers in order to strengthen organizational behavior and culture towards attaining organization’s goals. This study compares the three main types of leadership style in organizations and their influence on organizational culture and knowledge-management strategy implementation. The conclusion is that servant leadership style, due to its focus on building positive relationships and developing followers to their full potential, can potentially play an important role in determining the extent of knowledge-management implantation by improving the desire of the followers to use such strategies as well as the desire to share knowledge, which is the key factor in knowledge-management.

Introduction

There is high competition among businesses in all sectors of business all over the world to make as much profit as possible, through superior competitive power and the best services (Santora et al. 1999). In order to achieve this, organizations are forced to become innovative and dynamic (Santora et al. 1999). Good leadership is one of the main factors that allow organizations to face these new challenges successfully and become innovative, while improving organizational performance (Teece et al. 1997; Dobbs, 2010). Effective leaders use strategic leadership styles and behavior to mold organizations by facilitating a culture among employees that strives for success (Teece et al. 1997).

The success of an organization is generally viewed as the product of employee productivity and strategic leadership, which is directly reflected in growth and
development, financial performance and organizational expansion (Oliver, 2006; Karamiah et al. 2008). Thus organizations all over the world are finding that there is a growing need to retain knowledge and skills that is found in intangible assets such as the culture of the organization, its leadership styles, the skills and competencies of workers in the organization. To achieve that, the leaders must inspire the collaborative effort of their employees in order to promote organization’s performance, which is dependent on the ability for the “people” and the “process” to combine efficiently (Purcell et al. 2004).

Our contemporary world is built on knowledge-based societies. Knowledge is in very high demand and is valued more than ever before. Knowledge leads to innovation and innovation leads to economic growth. Knowledge is the foundation on which human capital is built. Individuals bring to the organization the knowledge that they have accumulated over the course of their professional and academic careers. For that knowledge to be transferred to the organization, an individual’s skills and knowledge must be aligned to the knowledge already existing within the organization, so that other employees can benefit from it. As a result, organizational performance is enhanced through the generation of ideas and the provision of high quality services, or through the creation of new knowledge (Aktharsa, 2012).

Organizations can be described as systems. According to Prof. Russ Ackoff (TedTalks, 2012), a system consists of parts that affect the behaviors of other parts, and no part of a system can operate independently from the whole. Organizations are the result of the behavior of many parts that work towards one goal.

Organizations of the 21st century recognize knowledge as an asset (Pauleen, Rooney & Holden, 2010). Knowledge is created through interactions between the knower and the receiver, and requires an interchange between individuals. As system is a product of its interactions, an organization is a product of the extent of knowledge shared within that organization. Similarly, building of the relationships in organizations is systematic and requires the establishment of trust as an enabling environment (DeLong & Fahey, 2000).

Leadership style is one of the factors that can drive organizational growth through the development of positive systemic processes, starting with aligning people with the organizational environment, organizational processes and organizational goals. This alignment is necessary for an organization to be successful (Rašula et al. 2012).

Knowledge within an organization is said to have a spiral flow (Nonaka, 1994), flowing from the individual to the organization, being enhanced and amplified through the interactions between individuals and within the organization. The role of a leader in managing knowledge in an organization is critical to its performance (O’Reilley et al. 2010).

Leadership behavior plays a crucial role in the behavior of other individuals within the organization, and in the behavior of the organization itself. Behavior of the leadership sets
the stage for the type of organizational culture that is adopted by the organization (O’Reilley et al. 2010). Leaders should have a vision, and should be able to adapt and respond to changing economic and social environments quickly in achieving that vision, as well as client demands (Alharbi & Yusoff, 2012). Leaders should always try to have competitive advantage through the provision of high quality services that will lead to improved organizational success. Furthermore, leaders should also create a work environment that promotes knowledge-sharing, innovation and mutual respect among employees (Nonaka et al. 2000). This encourages trust, a sense of belonging and loyalty, which further facilitate knowledge-sharing and knowledge-management (Mueller, 2012).

The objective of this current study is to investigate the impact of leadership style on the knowledge-management implementation, with emphasis on servant leadership. The study first evaluates different leadership styles and the link between them. It then examines how servant leadership style can influence the implementation of knowledge-management, particularly in knowledge-creating organizations such as hospitals and academic institutions, where the highly educated knowledge workers need specific type of leadership style that can facilitate knowledge-sharing among employees (Baker & Baker, 2001). The study also discusses the aspects of what makes servant leadership the most effective leadership style in promoting knowledge-sharing and successful knowledge-management.

The influence of a leadership style on employee performance

Leadership style has a significant impact on the behavior of employees within an organization and the way they perceive their work, as well as on the organizational characteristics (Northhouse, 2010; Guillaume, Honeycutt and Cleveland, 2012). Leadership is difficult to define, but it can be said that involves different sets of personal characteristics and behaviors that are used to guide the behavior of others (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). The followers’ attitudes and norms are shaped by the behaviors and characteristics of the leader, which in turn determine the extent to which a follower is influenced by a leader (Yukl, 2010). Therefore, a leader is an individual who demonstrates certain behaviors that influence the attitudes and behaviors of others towards a certain goal (Bass, 1980; Oliver, 2006; Karamiah et al. 2008).

On the other hand, leadership behavior can be defined as behavior that enhances followers’ behavior in a positive way, when the followers are able to follow the characteristics of the leader (Casimir & Li, 2005). However, the attitude of the followers towards the leader can have a strong influence on the establishment of a leader-follower relationship, which means that followers respond to certain attributes of the leader (Casimir
Two styles of leadership behaviors, relational and task-related behavior, are commonly discussed in the literature on leadership. They refer to the extent of the influence of the leadership behavior style on the followers. This is believed to have a direct influence on the organizational performance (Wang & Xin, 2011; Ryan & Tipu, 2013).

The relational behavior is based on the interactions between the leader and the followers (Wang & Xi, 2011), while task-related behavior is based on the effect of the leader to direct followers in task-completion (Thompson, 2010), which is a strong contributor to organizational performance through the increase in productivity (Ryan & Tipu, 2003). Effective leaders combine both types of behaviors when engaging with followers, but can assess, based on the situation as well as the type of follower/subordinate, which behavior will be more useful in ensuring the project’s success.

According to Bass (1998), the leader can cause different kind of behaviors in the followers by enforcing or encouraging them, depending on his leadership style. The role of the leader therefore is to encourage followers to follow the leader’s vision and mission that is centered on the organization (Bass, 1998), while at the same time promoting coherence by generating the right culture in the organization (Kirby, Paradise & King, 1992; Bass & Bass, 2009).

Different leadership styles have been identified and defined in the literature and are well known to many scholars (Bass, 1998; Shamir, 1990):

- Autocratic leadership is the most common type of leadership and uses a top-down approach to manage followers;
- Bureaucratic leadership manages everything by the book, following all procedures and protocols strictly;
- Democratic leadership commonly includes the involvement of followers in decision making and other organizational functions; and
- Laissez-Faire involves a hands free approach to leadership, giving followers free reign (Oliver, 2006; Obiwuru et al. 2011; Chaudhry & Javed, 2012; Mujtaba, 2014). Giving followers free reign yields confidence and a sense of ownership, which can facilitate cohesion (Zareen et al. 2014). The leader must be acutely aware of the different needs of the followers in the organization in order to successfully lead using this type of leadership style (Zareen et al. 2014).

There are many other leadership styles such as creative, pedagogical, corrective, change, intelligence, multicultural, bridging, purposeful, transactional, transformational and servant leadership. The last three types of leadership styles are prevalent in most literature covering cases studying impacts of leadership style on organizational success.
Before focusing on the servant leadership style, we will examine the two other dominant styles.

**The relationship between transactional and transitional types of leadership**

Transactional leadership style involves a hierarchical approach to influence followers’ behavior by rewarding successful task completion or on following the task completion as directed by the leader (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership is a balanced leadership style, where the leader involves the followers by encouraging and motivating them to see the organizational goals as their own (Burns, 1978). These two leadership styles are effective in influencing followers’ behavior to reach organizational goals, although some factors exist that affect the extent of leadership influence.

In transactional leadership, the extent to which the follower can achieve the desired goals of the leader is influenced by how the leader treats the followers. The follower contributes to the organization only as much as has been open to him with regards to the behavioral expectation, as well as the norms and values of the organization as prescribed by the leader.

However, these two leadership styles, however, are influenced by the culture of the organization, with transactional leadership style being more confined by bureaucracy in the organization (Bass, 1985), while the adaptable transformational leader may bring innovation through challenging the culture and norms of the organization (Bass, 1998; Zareen et al. 2014).

Transactional and transformational leadership styles can borrow from each other and can be integrated (Shamir, 1990). Leaders can have these two types of styles emergent in them in directing an organization, thus further having a positive influence on the way followers meet organizational goals. A transformational leader can drive followers because of their own identification with the vision of the organization, which in turn can motivate the followers (Bass, 1999). Characteristics of a transactional leader include the ability to influence followers’ behavior through the specific promise of rewards or compensation for the completed tasks. Reward has been shown to positively influence organizational performance through the increase in positive behaviors among employees (Baskerville & Dupilovici, 2006). Both types of leadership are based on the positive relationship building that includes the process of building trust and aligning all individuals to organizational goals (Bass, 1999). But, they differ significantly based on the response to mistakes done by followers. Transformational leader views mistakes as opportunities to grow and learn, and instead of punishment (i.e. through the removal of compensation) will encourage followers to find ways to correct themselves (Avalio & Bass, 2004). In contrast, transactional leaders
further promote passive leadership style through the lack of engagement with followers by lacking to instill direction. Transactional leaders wait for errors to occur before enforcing corrective actions, instead of identifying areas of potential problems and dealing with them before they can occur (Bass, 1999). However, Lowe, Kroek & Sivasubramaniam (1996) state that, under different circumstances, the two leadership styles are manifested to varying degrees, sometimes even in the same leader. This leads to the development of the new styles of leadership (Bass & Bass, 2009).

Since the organizations of the 21st century are largely knowledge-driven, knowledge affects their ability to achieve both economic and competitive success. For them, it would be ideal to implement the best leadership style to achieve the success of the organization (Bierly et al. 2000). In knowledge-driven organizations, the tendency of hierarchy and authoritative nature of transactional leadership can lead to knowledge-hoarding, which will ultimately influence the extent of knowledge-sharing and knowledge-creation within an organization, to the organization’s detriment (Agussalim, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Moreover, the work ethic of the followers is also affected since they tend to do only what they are paid for, limiting their interaction with the others within the organization (Agussalim, 2013).

On the other hand, the transformational leader uses a combination of both the authoritative nature of the transactional style and their own style, which involves leading the followers towards the organizational goals by motivating them to commit to organization’s success (Yukl, 1998; Northhouse, 2004). In knowledge organizations, the transformational leadership style is considered the most effective style of leadership. Besides the transformational leader’s effort to ensure that the goals are met by being authoritative, he is also encouraging sharing and engaging by motivating followers to work cohesively towards a common goal.

**Servant leadership style**

Servant leadership style is a making waves in the business world as the leadership style of the future (Spears, 2004; Correia de Sousa & Dierendonck, 2010; Guillaume, Honeycutt & Cleveland, 2012). The reason for such interest is the needs of organizations for a specific leadership style, which is capable of respond to a changing world; the world of a knowledge-based economy (Guillaume et al. 2012). The servant leadership style can be defined as a leadership style characterized by serving others. The leader’s aim is to enhance the growth of others as well as himself and to involve all parties in the decision making (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2004). In this way, he offers employees a sense of worth and belonging, motivating them to contribute to the growth and success of the organization (Northhouse, 2010).
Characteristics of a servant leader

Greenleaf has conceived the concept of a servant leadership style in his writings (1977). He defined a servant leader as the leader who first serves others. Servant leadership promotes trust because followers can see that the leader is interested in them by promoting their growth and ideals (Dvir et al. 2002). This type of leader can create a sense of community because of the following characteristics as defined by Greenleaf (1977): the ability to listen, to show empathy towards others, the ability to heal others and self in times of hardship, self-awareness and awareness of the needs of the followers and their environment, ability to persuade others without being authoritative, ability to conceptualize by being aware and able to nurture the goals, ambitions and dreams of the followers and themselves, having foresight by being able to identify and overcome potential setbacks; stewardship by ensuring that the followers always come first, commitment to ensuring the success of the followers by investing in their personal growth at both personal and professional level, and lastly building community by fostering relationships based on trust, which encourages sharing and altruistic behaviors among followers.

Based on the above characteristics, it is clear that this type of leadership style is crucial in the knowledge-dependent environment and can result in increased organizational productivity (Spears, 1998; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010; Sial et al. 2014). By involving followers, servant leaders create a sense of belonging and self-worth among them, making them see that they play a role in creating the organizational culture and contribute to the organizational success (Lapp, 1991). It fosters strong commitment to the organization (Drucker, 1999; Zareen et al. 2014), and provides freedom to be creative and innovative (Fredrickson, 1998). These types of behavior are essential in knowledge-based or learning organizations. Servant leader’s ability to encourage followers to feel part of a whole, as well as accepted and respected will lead them to share their knowledge willingly among employees (Politis, 2005; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010), another important factor in the knowledge-based organizations.

Relationship between different leadership styles and organizational culture

Each leadership style has its advantages and disadvantages in the way they impact organizational culture. In order to understand how important the impact servant leadership style can be on the contemporary organizations and businesses, it is crucial to define what makes it so different from other leadership styles, and how its characteristics influence the culture of the organization, and in consequence, its knowledge-management.

The combination of leadership style and leadership behavior has a direct influence on the ability of a follower to follow a leader. In organizations, the level of engagement and
interaction between individuals facilitates knowledge creation through constant knowledge exchange or knowledge sharing. Through setting basic norms, values and behaviors of the organization, the leader is responsible for creating a culture that is specific to that organization (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010). In comparison with the transactional and transformational leadership styles, servant leadership is the only one solely based on building relationship and trust. In all three leadership styles, the leader attempts to reach a certain predefined goal through motivating the followers to pursue these same goals. Unlike the other two leadership styles, servant leaders attempt to do this by first investing time and the effort in developing the relationship with the follower. Establishing this relationship ensures that the follower feels part of the organization and learns to associate himself with the success of the organizations. In comparison, in the transactional leadership style the followers expect to be rewarded for their input or for following the leader; in the transformational leadership, the followers are encouraged to forget their own ideals, and instead focus on the ideals of the organization. One commonality in all these three leadership styles is that the role of the leader is ultimately to ensure the success of the organization. Depending on the type of organization and the organizational culture, the extent of the influence of these leadership styles varies.

Behavior exhibited by the leader directly influences followers’ behavior. In highly knowledge-centered organizations, where followers are highly knowledgeable, both servant leadership and transformational leadership styles can strongly influence the extent of teamwork and engagement, leading to increased potential for knowledge sharing, which, in turn, leads to knowledge creation. Since knowledge is the capital of the new economy, such organizations can gain significant leverage. In essence, it can be seen that servant leadership derives some of its basis from transformational leadership styles.

According to Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004), there are extensive similarities between the transformational leader and the servant leader (see Figure 2-taken from Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko, 2004). In their study, they evaluated the similarities and contextual applications of both leadership styles on organizational performance and leader-following behavior. They found that that transformational leader has more potential in cultivating organizational culture that could withstand external challenges than the servant leader. The reason for this is that, as much as it is focused on motivating and empowering the follower, the investment in the followers tends to be first towards the benefit of the organization and only then of the followers. In contrast, servant leader puts the followers and their needs first, and is what could ultimately be detrimental to the organization as it could lead to the lack of dynamism in and potentially leading to an organization that does not adapt easily to change.
Models of servant leadership

How is servant leadership perceived? How does it function at the organizational level and how much does it affect the extent of knowledge sharing? The main interest is in what
makes servant leadership the leadership style of the future, and how organizations are implementing this type of leadership style to achieve their organizational goals.

Based on the models developed by Patterson (2003) and Winston (2003), servant leaders humble themselves through their strong care for their followers. By engaging, interacting and building a relationship with them, the leader ensures that the vision of the organization is instilled in the followers and that the followers’ contribution to the success of the organization is highly valued. (Figure 2).

According to Reinke (2004), servant leadership style has an important role to play in organizational success. Since servant leadership is based on trust and stewardship-based relationship, it encourages organizational culture that is success-oriented. In his study, Reinke developed a model that tested the importance of trust, stewardship and vision in servant leadership style. He found that trust is highly regarded by followers and it precedes the establishment of high level of communication within the organization. This leads to high levels of interaction among followers, which positively influences organizational performance. In practice, those organizations that are deeply rooted in the

![Figure 2. A servant leadership model in green, developed by Patterson (2003) depicts the leader-follower relationship; Winston (2003) adds on to the leader-follower relationship attributes. Figure retrieved from Winston and Ryan (2003:6).](image-url)
culture of sharing, engaging and building long lasting relationships based on trust, can look forward to high potential for seamless organizational performance. In knowledge organizations, this would mean increased sharing of knowledge, as well as increased creation of new knowledge, which would ultimately lead to high levels of innovation - the basis for economic growth in contemporary business and organizations.

Leadership and organizational culture are intertwined and affect each other. Effective leadership stems from an organizational culture that is success-oriented. Strong beliefs, values and norms in leadership shape the very values and norms of the followers as well as of the organization itself. On the other hand, organizational culture also plays an important role in servant leadership, and servant leadership essentially creates a culture in the organization to which followers adhere. According to Martins and Martins (2003), organization’s leaders indoctrinate certain behaviors, values and norms on their employees, coupled with certain social behaviors that they foster within the organization; they can then create the type of organizational culture suited to the organization. It is in the process of instilling these values, norms, beliefs, socialization and expectations, that the organizational culture is cultivated. In organizations where the beliefs, values, mission and vision of the organization are aligned with those of the employees, the culture of this organization tends to be strong. When individuals feel part of an organization, they tend to show strong loyalty (Martins & Martins, 2003). As a consequence, the organization benefits because the individuals’ and organizational goals are aligned. Because of the shared vision and inclusivity, all members of the organization tend to show high motivation, and adaptability, learning to share their skill and knowledge and to learn from each other.

**How is servant leadership perceived in the workplace?**

The following two cases show how different leadership styles affect the organizational culture.

**Case # 1**

The first case study looks at leadership styles in Asian people, how they intertwine with the organizational culture, and the similarities between the servant leadership style and leadership styles in most Asian companies and organizations. This study demonstrates the importance of servant leaderships role in promoting organizational cohesion, and shows how the basis of servant leadership behaviors and characteristics are steeped in Asian tradition.

Asian cultures are steeped in tradition and history. This affects all aspects of Asian societies including business (Low, 2012). For instance, Chinese leadership styles have a
strong basis in the traditional culture, similar to most other Asian cultures. They have been criticized in the West, labeled as archaic and domineering, and accused of a strong emphasis on distances in power, collectivism and social relations (see Low, 2012). According to Low (2012), Asian leadership style is overall caring and paternalistic, using a parental approach to lead workers. Indeed, a large number of business organizations in China are family-run with strong social ties (Han et al. 2010). Consequently, the followers of these leaders are obligated to be loyal and devoted, and have strong trust in the leadership. In a sense, organizational relationships can be seen as similar to the relationship between a father and a son (Low, 2012).

Servant leadership, which is typically viewed as a Western construct, has certain commonalities with the way Asian managers lead their followers. In their study, Han et al. (2010) sought to investigate whether servant leadership style has the same meaning in Chinese and Western cultures. They found that Chinese lead by putting people first, having strong ethical behavior, a well-developed sense of morality, good conceptual skills and extensive knowledge of their organizations. The leaders are humble and have strong interest in building relationship with their followers. All this is very similar to what defines servant leaders in the West. However, Chinese leaders are also dutiful, highly diligent and dependable, and are devoted to the party policies that serve as a guide to their moral compass. They are also showing strong uncorrupted behavior and high levels of self-discipline.

According to Han et al. (2010), there are four main types of leadership in the Chinese culture:

- Confucianism, based on obedience, morality and sensitivity to others (see also Low, 2012);
- Guanxi leadership based on giving support and recognition to subordinates;
- Daoist leadership, which includes being visionary and serving the community, and lastly
- Communist leadership, with core values steeped in party rules, which embrace community service, hard work, loyalty, honesty and focus on the collective.

In essence, servant leadership style is viewed the same in both the West and in Asia, even though the Asian leaders practice it with some additions (Low, 2012). The leadership style of business leaders in China and in the West who embrace servant leadership style, is based on trust, respect and empowerment.

Case #2

The second case study examines the importance of servant leadership style in the performance of nurses. The study was conducted in a veterans’ hospital unit, where it
examined the influence of servant leadership on the delivery of service and job satisfaction of nurses, Neil and Saunders (2008). The researchers found that the servant leadership style was critical in improving health care delivery by nurses, because leaders focused on each nurse’s professional growth and encouraged a team approach to health care delivery. They found that servant leadership, where the leaders constantly communicated with nurses, encouraged the level of sharing and trust among them.

Health care services are highly knowledge-centered environments and this study shows how strong influence servant leadership can have on the functioning of such organizations. Servant leadership had direct influence on the team behavior by fostering building of competent relationships, and enhancing employee capabilities in order to achieve better organizational goals and vision.

Austin-Savage and Honeycutt (2011) conducted a phenomenological study of organizational leaders who practice servant leadership in order to examine the effectiveness of this leadership style in improving organizational performance. They evaluated 15 leaders and found that in all 15 servant leadership contributed significantly to the organizational success in terms of the improved decision making process and increased productivity, as a result of employee retention. Employees under the servant leadership were found to be highly motivated and loyal to the organization, because they had better overall morale and were given encouragement to flourish.

However, regardless of the positive effects of the servant leadership, this leadership style met in some cases some significant barriers and resistance, mostly as the result of a particular organizational culture. This can have a negative impact on the ability of servant leaders to engage effectively with followers. The resistance to the servant leadership resulted at times in the formation of cliques and information hoarding, which in turn affected the scale of knowledge-sharing and organization performance. According to Han et al (2011), such employees often lose sight of the big picture and the vision of the organization.

**Servant leadership and knowledge-management implementation**

In contemporary organizations, where knowledge is the capital of the economy, it is imperative that leaders develop the kind of culture that enhances maximum extraction of knowledge from the followers. According to Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995), knowledge-sharing practices are defined as the ability of individuals to share knowledge. This ability is determined by culture and value systems which influence employee behaviors and, in turn, influence the organizational behavior itself (Baskerville & Dupilovici, 2006). The opinion of this author is that servant leaders can implement knowledge-management practices by
showing their own adoption of the initiatives of the organization, first. Their own adoption of organization’s strategies can strongly influence their implementation by the followers (Akhtarsha, 2012).

Positive organizational culture can improve the perceptions of employees about the adoption of knowledge-management strategies. In a cross-sectional study, Ngcamu and Sunyani (2011) show that public service workers’ perceptions of knowledge-management strategies were dependent on the influence of their leaders. Similarly, Connelly and Kelloway (2003) also found evidence that employee perception of knowledge-sharing culture was influenced strongly by the extent to which management supported these behaviors. Consequently, it is clear that the leadership plays a key role in the adoption of knowledge-management strategies and practices, and that the leaders have influence on the extent to which the members in the organizations developed the relationships. Knowledge-management strategies cannot work and cannot bring success to an organization if the members of the organization do not perceive them in a positive light or do not identify with their value (Alavi & Leidner, 1999).

According to Baskerville and Dulipovici (2006), the theory of communities of practice (CoP), which are the core foundation of knowledge-management, can be important tool to use for improving positive perceptions of knowledge-management, as well as the promotion of knowledge-sharing practices. CoPs enable information flow between individuals. They recognize the importance of social networks (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006) and thus play an important role facilitating knowledge-creation, as depicted in Nonaka and Takeuchi (1994) SECI models.

Management practices therefore have an important role in shaping employee perceptions of knowledge-management strategies, particularly because knowledge-management strategies are often coupled with organizational change in structure (Ngcamu & Sanjana, 2011). In their study, Ngcamu and Sanjana (2011) found that the barriers to adoption of knowledge-management strategies and negative perceptions of knowledge-management practices in public sector employees were caused by the lack of dialogue between the knowledge-management community and the managers. Communication is the essential component in all knowledge-related activities, because, ultimately, organizations want to prevent knowledge hoarding and encourage sharing. Furthermore, Ngcamu and Sanjana (2011 also found that employees in their study sample did not attribute any value to human capital. This highlights an important need to equip the knowledge carriers in the organization so that they can enhance their sense of self-value with regards to the importance of knowledge (tacit) that is within them. This shows that a servant leader plays the most important role in facilitating the flow of tacit knowledge in the organization and
can be the potential key role player in knowledge-creation activities in the organization.

Essentially, knowledge-management involves the creation, sharing and exploitation of knowledge. The role of servant leaders can be significant on the outcome of knowledge-management practices. Leaders play an important role in harnessing, directing and effectively using this knowledge for the greater good of the organization (Heirdani et al. 2011).

Since servant leadership is about creating trust and building relationships, it allows the followers to have a platform where they can freely exchange their knowledge and engage with each other, instead of hoarding it (Baker & Baker, 2001). According to Baker and Baker (2001), knowledge is created by the interactions between people; the greater the level of trust between people, the more knowledge they share. There are several discipline-wide researches that have shown that knowledge sharing is highly dependent on the type of leadership in an organization (Lee, Gillespie, Mann and Wearing, 2010).

The extent of knowledge sharing among team members was shown to be wide-ranging and dependent on the attitudes, personality traits and different communication styles of the individuals within the team (Lee et al. 2010). This can be related to the organizational culture and the dynamic interactions among the members of an organization. Lee et al. (2010) investigated the influence of trust and leadership style on the extent of knowledge-sharing within an organization. They found that trust is essential to the knowledge-sharing within an organization. These findings are similar to the findings of another study (Farrel et al. 2005) that found a direct effect of transformational leadership style and management trust on levels of knowledge-sharing among employees. However, it appears that there are very few studies that investigate the same type of relationship using servant leadership style (see Lee et al. 2010).

Successful knowledge-management implementation is dependent on five key factors:
1. Leadership: leadership can influence the successful implementation of any initiatives within an organization by modeling positive behaviors (Davenport et al. 1998)
2. Culture: organizational culture, which is based on the organization’s core values, mission and vision, can also influence the extent of knowledge-sharing and in this way influence knowledge-sharing within the organization (Davenport et al. 1998).
3. Structure, Roles, and Responsibilities: an organization that implements a system where individuals are aware of their specific role, and how they contribute to the organization as an individual, is structurally more effective. In an organization where knowledge-sharing is fostered, this will give better opportunities for creativity and innovation.
4. Information Technology Infrastructure: having the correct infrastructure to facilitate
knowledge-sharing is critical to knowledge-management. This ensures that the right information reaches the right person at the right time.

5. Performance Measurement: with successful implementation of knowledge-management, it is important to assess exactly how well the management structure or system is contributing to the organization. The best way to do so is to use performance measures that will allow the leader to identify issues and how they can be resolved.

From these five main success factors of knowledge-management we can see that the key characteristics of a servant leader are contributing to each success factor. Therefore, servant leadership is the ideal leadership style for the successful implementation of knowledge-management strategies in the organization.

In today’s knowledge-driven society, knowledge has become a commodity and servant leadership has an important role to play. To properly channel and harness the knowledge in an organization, the organization requires good leadership and good organizational culture (Bierly et al. 2000). Information is enhanced and amplified through the interactions between employees across all organizational levels (Inkpen & Dinur, 1990; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). To achieve better organizational performance, leaders should strive to improve knowledge-management strategies among employees and create effective working environments where employees can align their skills and knowledge with the vision of their leader (Nonaka et al. 2000; Alharbi&Yusoff, 2012). It is crucial that employees feel highly valued and made aware that they are the knowledge assets. Thus, the effectiveness of a leader, in terms of vision, adaptability, knowledge-management strategies and relationships with employees on all levels, can have a direct influence on the organization’s performance.

In any organization, knowledge exists everywhere, from employee engagements with organizational procedures and routines, to physically stored knowledge in document repositories (Aktharsha, 2011). In this way, knowledge can be accessed and repackaged in such a way to stimulate the innovative capacity of an organization (Aktharsha, 2011).

**The importance of servant leadership for the knowledge creation, sharing and exploitation**

Leaders of an organization can adopt different leadership styles, depending on the type of culture the leader wants to foster in the organization. For knowledge creation and sharing, transformational leadership style may be required because it fosters creativity through the motivation of followers, forcing them to identify with the vision of the organization (Guillaume et al. 2012). Transactional leadership style may be most effective in harnessing the knowledge in the organization for the purpose of improving organizational success. This style of leadership only requires followers to apply the knowledge as
effectively as possible in order to be rewarded for doing their best in applying the knowledge (Spears, 1998). In contrast, servant leaders encourage, motivate, and build identity, unity and, most importantly, trust. This type of leader can influence people and processes by treating followers as equal, leading among the people (Dehaven, 2008; Thomson, 2010). In conclusion, servant leadership style can be considered the most effective leadership style in knowledge-centered environments (Correia & Dierendonck, 2010).

Servant leader is altruistic in nature (Russell & Stone, 2004). His trustworthiness and good and caring nature are the constructs that shape the behavior and attitudes of the followers (Patterson, 2003; Thomson, 2010). According to the study by Thompson (2010) in his thesis on the impact of servant leadership on the success of project management, he found that the key success component was that the servant leader created and encouraged an environment for knowledge-sharing. As a result, simply changing leadership could successfully complete projects.

Correia de Sousa and Dierendonck (2010) developed an exploratory model that showed a strong link between the need for knowledge workers to have a meaning and their motivation for working. A servant leader is an enabler of the creation of that meaning for knowledge workers. In knowledge-driven organization, knowledge workers seek fulfillment from their work. Servant leadership is suited for such organizations because of their potential to increase the sense of purpose and growth that knowledge workers seek from their work. Examples of knowledge workers are health care workers, who deal with patients daily, stakeholders and other medical personnel (Trastek et al. 2014). Moreover, health care workers often choose this career because of its fulfillment as a life calling and often for their need to serve others. According to Trastek et al. (2014), this overlaps with some of the characteristics of a servant leader. Moreover, they also state that the adoption of a servant leadership in healthcare is likely to improve health care delivery and minimize problems of knowledge exchange among health care workers significantly because of the improved trust and empowerment that comes with servant leadership.

Conclusion

A major aim of this study is to attempt to advance the understanding of how servant leaders influence the extent of knowledge-sharing and the quality of knowledge-management in organizations. Knowledge has become the commodity of the 21st century. The role of a leader in harnessing and directing this knowledge is crucial and knowledge-sharing is critical for the success of any organization. The review of the literature for this study showed that there are many studies about the role of transformational leadership in knowledge-sharing and some aspects of knowledge-management, but far fewer studies that
investigate the role of servant leadership in knowledge-management.

On many levels, knowledge-management involves the need for organizations to create the infrastructure for knowledge-sharing, and to facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms by encouraging interaction among workers, particularly those in knowledge-driven organization. In knowledge workers, those that have specialist or expert knowledge, it is easier to become isolated and independent. Servant leadership in such organizations can be critical in helping to facilitate knowledge sharing.

The comparative study by Smith et al (2004) suggested that transformational leadership style is the most effective style of leadership because it encourages dynamism and an organizational culture that allows organizations to be productive, while still being able to withstand external impact. The study concludes that the servant leadership style encourages the organization to become static due to its extreme focus on individuals above the organization. Although this may be true in some cases, individuals in organizations require that some level of trust be established between themselves and their leaders, as well as among their peers. Establishing these kinds of relationships has been shown to improve knowledge-sharing (Lee et al, 2004), as well as the extent of social interaction among workers in the same knowledge space (Pearce and Barkus, 2004). Contrary to Smith et al (2004), we can conclude that servant leadership style effectively promotes employee work behavior. By encouraging the employees to develop and to improve themselves, the servant leader grooms leaders, and not followers. This enhances the creativity levels that come with knowledge-sharing based on trust and openness, which can hugely benefit organizations and promote their growth extensively. People do not feel the need to be rewarded in order to contribute something to the organization, simply because they see and know how much they are valued. They know that they can trust their leader to have their best interest at heart. This allows them to give back to the organization to their fullest capacity.

Servant leadership style can be seen as a style capable of overcoming leadership challenges because the leader assumes a highly supportive role and is extremely service-orientated towards his followers by building their skill sets and empowering them (Greenleaf, 19977; Spears, 1998; Thomson, 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that this is the best leadership style in knowledge-management implementation as it creates an environment for knowledge-sharing, which leads to knowledge-creation (Dehaven, 2008). Servant leaders can play important role in the adoption of knowledge-management by using their core values and perceptions of the system to influence followers through building of relationships and in supporting their development (Dehaven, 2008). Servant leadership is about building relationships based on openness, stewardship and trust.
The knowledge is created by the interactions between individuals (Baker & Baker, 2001). When it comes to knowledge-management implementation, servant leadership can be considered the best leadership style because it gives knowledge workers a platform for sharing knowledge in an environment (culture) built on trust and ethics. Stewardship has been shown to have a powerful effect on trust building, highlighting the importance of ethical behavior in establishing trust between leaders and followers. The Chinese models of servant leadership are particularly effective because of the traditional relational trust as well as the strong morality of Chinese leaders.

Reference


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