The Mediating Role of Intrapreneurial Orientation between Leadership Style, Knowledge Sharing Behaviour and Performance of Malaysian Academic Leaders: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Although significant relationships have been documented between the variables of leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance, still their relationships remain less studied particularly as they relate to academic leaders' performance. To address this paucity and to explain these linkages further, authors have continued to propose a mediating role in the relationship among these variables. As a result, this paper develops and proposes intrapreneurial orientation as a mediator on the relationships between leadership styles (transformational and transactional), knowledge sharing behaviour, and performance of academic leaders in Malaysian universities. First it argues that transformational and transactional leadership styles and knowledge sharing behaviour should influence intrapreneurial orientation and performance, second, intrapreneurial orientation would also affect performance. Next, it argues that by acting as a mediator, intrapreneurial orientation may act as a conduit that will better explain the relationships amongst these variables.

Keywords: Leadership style, knowledge sharing, intrapreneurial orientation, performance

Abstrak

Walaupun perhubungan signifikan telah didokumentasikan di antara pemboleh ubah-pemboleh ubah gaya kepimpinan, gelagat perkongsian ilmu dan prestasi, namun perhubungan-perhubungan ini masih kurang dikaji terutamanya apabila dikaitkan dengan prestasi para pemimpin akademik. Justeru, bagi membantu mengisi jurang ini dan untuk menerangkan perhubungan antara pemboleh ubah-pemboleh ubah ini dengan lebih lanjut, para pengkaji berterusan mencadangkan peranan satu pemboleh ubah sebagai pengantara di antara mereka. Oleh itu, kertas ini membangun dan mencadangkan orientasi keusahawanan dalam sebagai pengantara dalam perhubungan di antara gaya kepimpinan (transformasional dan transaksional), gelagat perkongsian ilmu, dan prestasi pemimpin akademik di universiti-universiti Malaysia. Pertama kertas ini mencadangkan yang gaya kepimpinan transformasi dan transaksional akan mempengaruhi orientasi keusahawanan dalam dan prestasi, kedua, orientasi keusahawanan dalam akan pula mempengaruhi prestasi. Seterusnya, dicadangkan bahawa apabila beraksi sebagai pengantara, orientasi keusahawanan dalam akan bertindak sebagai pengalir yang akan menerangkan dengan lebih baik perhubungan-perhubungan di antara pemboleh ubah-pemboleh ubah ini.

Kata kunci: Gaya kepimpinan; perkongsian ilmu; orientasi keusahawanan dalam; prestasi

■1.0 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the role of the universities across the globe has always been that of teaching, research and services as their core responsibilities (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). However, the present economic pressure has tend to alter their role as an important instrument to support social restructuring, national unity and inclusiveness as well as functioning as a mean for social upward mobility to result in better quality of life (Brown & Lauder, 2004). In Malaysian context, universities have also been entrusted to play a role in the national transformation, competitiveness and to support the country's push for innovation-led growth through knowledge creation and sharing to result in economic and entrepreneurial activities (MOHE, 2009). In essence, the present government connected its transformation effort to infusion of entrepreneurial mindset and behaviours to enhance public sector performance (Najib, 2010). In the context of higher educational service providers, several government's initiatives such as the Economic Transformation Plan (ETP), the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) and the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) bring to the fore the critical role of universities' leaders to adopt appropriate style and to share knowledge as well as to embrace intrapreneurship in order to perform better so as to meet stakeholders' growing expectations.

■2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Abdullah, Che Rose and Kumar (2007), Singh, Schapper and Mayson (2010) Malaysian public universities are witnessing debates concerning their roles and performances. The government as well as the general public are insisting that public universities' should increase their performance to help spur the country's transformation drives. Many scholars suggest that leadership in universities need to exhibit the right kind of leadership style (Spendlove, 2007; Glanz, 2002) coupled with high level of knowledge sharing behaviour (Munir & Rohendi, 2012; Kim & Ju, 2008) and at the same time to be more intrapreneurial (Nik Ismail, Mahmood & Ab Rahim, 2012; Hayat & Riaz, 2011) to meet the challenges to perform better. As a result, this paper examines the effect of the relationship between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and academic leaders' performance. Gathering evidences from the literature and past studies, the paper develops a conceptual framework proposing intrapreneurial orientation as a potential mediating variable in these relationships among the academic leaders in Malaysia. It also argues that intrapreneurial orientation will adequately explain the linkages between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance variables among Malaysian academic leaders.

2.1 Importance of Leaders' Performance

To ensure success, organizations need individuals who perform well in order to meet their goals to deliver products and services (Sonnentag and Frese, 2002). As people are organization's most valued assets and since the performance and success of the organization are realized through them, people's performance is a major concern to organizations (Armstrong, 2006). For key employees such as leaders at every level and position, their performance is a matter of greater importance because it reflects not only their own effectiveness in performing the roles and duties but it significantly impacts on the performance of their followers, peers and teams which ultimately influences the performance of the organization (Bass & Bass, 2008; Northouse, 2012). Leaders perform a central role by setting visions and directions, formulating policy, developing strategy, directing, coordinating, facilitating and monitoring the performance of others as well as maintaining a culture healthy for the general wellbeing of their constituencies (Yukl, 2010). At the same time, empirical research has consistently found that while performing their leadership roles and functions, leaders' style as manifested by their actions or behaviours reflect their own effectiveness and performances (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Rao, 2003).

2.2 Academic Leaders' Performance

It is commonly accepted that the tasks of transforming universities to greater performance can be significantly facilitated through their leadership because leaders are in the positions of power as they control, allocate and manage organizational resources and priorities (Bento, 2011). Leaders also provide the vision, leadership, academic decision making, and support crucial toward universities' success. Arguably, by virtue of the status and positions as well as their role as coaches, mentors and role models, leaders' own performances can significantly affect the overall performances of others within the university (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Consequently, academic leaders' performances significantly influence university's performance (Smith, 2007; Voon, Lo, Ngui & Ayob, 2011) as well as universities' reputation, prominence, and prestige (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007).

Since university's performance is significantly influenced by its leadership, issue regarding the performance of university boils down to the question of how well do academic leaders perform their jobs. This is so because to ensure success, universities need leaders who perform well in order to meet their goals, to deliver excellent services and to achieve prominence and competitiveness (Gappa *et al*., 2007). As people are organization's most valued assets and since the performance and success of organizations are realized through its people, the performance of the key workforce, especially of leaders is a major concern to every organization (Armstrong, 2006; Avery & Jing, 2008). Hence, in higher educational setting, to achieve the desired excellence, academic leaders' performance is an important factor that practically all universities are striving to enhance (Altbach & Salmi, 2011).

Generally, there is a lack of consensus and consistency on the definition of the term academic leadership (Wisdom, 2007) despite its frequent used and widely acknowledged as critical factor to the success of universities (Hecht, 2006; Smith, 2007; Elham, Daud, Ismi Arif, Bahaman & Jamilah, 2011). Previous studies by Gmelch and Miskin (1993) and Leaming (1998) described academic leadership as a "collection of tasks or duties performed by individuals appointed to a formal position of responsibility within a university" as cited in Wisdom (2007, p. 12). In this respect, higher education leadership literature suggests that the majority of universities' activities are mostly occupied and significantly influenced by their middle-level leaders as they directly oversee various academic departments and units (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Kremer-Hayon & Avi-Itzhak, 1986).

In university setting, the middle-level leadership are traditionally occupied by academics in the positions of deans, heads of department, chairpersons, coordinators or directors of faculties, schools, programmes, academies, or centres (Montez & Wolverton, 2000; Harman, 2002; Smith, 2007; Wisdom, 2007). These groups of leaders share more similarities rather than differences because they are academics entrusted to leadership and management roles with both administrative and scholarship duties (Koen & Bitzer, 2010; Harman, 2002; Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch & Tucker, 1999; Leaming, 1998). Generally, academic leaders are faced with numerous duties such as maintaining "infrastructures that address both user needs and budgetary constraints; recruiting and retaining students well-matched to their institutional missions; creating environments that value student diversity; finding new sources of revenue as traditional sources of support decline; responding effectively to increasing accountability requirements; and continually enhancing the prestige and prominence of the institutions" (Gappa *et al*., 2007, p. 3). At the same time, they are also entrusted with the traditional works of the academics such as teaching, research, publications, community involvement, professional services related to their disciplines, and other academic decision making and problem-solving activities (Koen & Bitzer, 2010; Gappa *et al*., 2007).

Clearly, academic leaders are linked to various responsibilities. Some studies have listed a range of 18 to 97 different tasks associated to them (Buffone, 2009). Altbach and Salmi (2011) opine that today's academic leaders spend most of their working time on managerial and scholarship matters. Goodall (2006) in supporting this point argue that academic leaders in best performing universities are those that are able to combine successful scholarship career with good managerial and administrative skills. Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) categorize academic deans' roles into 6 main areas, namely; resource management, academic personnel management, internal productivity, personal

scholarship, leadership and external and political relations. Singh *et al*. (2009) in their study on academic leaders consisting of 348 deans, deputy deans, heads of department and programme coordinators in 9 Malaysian public universities listed 5 major KPIs (key performance indicators) in relation to their roles and duties namely: academic leadership; academic scholarship; internationalization; academic economics; and academic enterprise. Meanwhile, Hecht *et al*. (1999) categorize academic head of department and programme chairperson's duties into 8 core scopes; department governance and office management; curriculum and program development; faculty matters; student matters; communication with external publics; financial and facilities management; data management; and institutional support. Ostendorf et al. (2005) suggest that academic leaders' performance largely falls into three areas namely research, educational and administrative duties. In summary, Tucker (1993) and Fox, Burns and Adams (2005) suggest five major performance roles of academic leaders namely: managerial, interpersonal, communication, academic, and political.

2.3 Leadership Styles

As key employees, leaders are often recognized as organization's most valued asset (Armstrong, 2006; Avery & Jing, 2008). According to Hellriegel and Slocum (2006), leadership is a skill of influencing, motivating and guiding members to meet organizational goals. Northouse (2012) conceptualized leadership as a person's ability or capacity to lead. Meanwhile leadership style is defined as a relatively consistent pattern of behaviour that characterizes a leader (DuBrin, 2007). Leadership style has several core dimensions of which transformational and transactional leadership are recognized by scholars as the two widely researched and adopted styles (Avolio & Bass, 2002). In addition, both styles are found to be positive and significantly related to leaders' performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Bass, Avolio, Jung & Bersen, 2003). Since leadership style correlates directly to leaders' performance, it implies that leaders' styles not only affect their own performance, but also the performance of others, and ultimately the performance of the organization they lead (Yang, 2008; Avolio & Bass, 2002).

Both theoretical and empirical literature show evidences of strong linkage between leadership style and performance (Bass *et al*., 2003; Jing & Avery, 2008). For instance, a study by Bass (1985) shows evidence of strong correlation between leadership style and values at work place, satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and other performance variables. In parallel, Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramaniam (1996) in their meta-analysis on 39 empirical studies found that leaders' styles correlate with performance irrespective of hierarchical levels, in public as well as in private settings. In transformational and transactional leadership literature, many outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment, efficiency, effectiveness, motivation and performance are contributed to leadership styles (Nguni, Sleegers & Denessen, 2006; Lowe *et al*., 1996) and these findings have also been validated across settings and cultures (Al-Dmour & Awamleh, 2002).

Within the context of higher education setting, evidences from the literature show that both styles are prevalent and positively related to academic leaders' performance as respectively reported by Tucker (1991) and Kirby, King and Paradise (1992) for transformational style, and Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum (1989) for transactional style. In essence, practicing appropriate leadership styles in combination with proper skills facilitate academic leaders to perform better (Ramsden, 1998; Spendlove, 2007). Hence, numerous studies have found that academics assigned with leadership role overseeing faculties and departments tried hard to adopt suitable leadership style to be effective in discharging duties (Spendlove, 2007), failing which, Bess and Goldman (2001) warn that their performance may be severely affected. This implies that if they fail to adopt the right styles or approaches accordingly while leading, over time their performances will suffer. Hence, Glanz (2002) for instance, stresses the importance for leaders in educational sector to actualise their leadership potential by finding the correct leadership styles to affect better performance.

2.4 Knowledge Sharing Behavior

According to Bordia, Irmer, Garden, Phaire and Abusah, (2004), knowledge sharing behaviour refers to "an individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal rewards system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization (p. 130)". Knowledge sharing is a set of behaviours involving information exchange or assisting others (Connelly & Kelloway, 2003) or the provision of task related information and know-how to help and collaborate with others to solve problems, develop new ideas, or implement policies or procedures (Cummings, 2004; Pulakos, Dorsey & Borman, 2003). Knowledge sharing happens when individuals voluntarily and mutually exchange their tacit and explicit knowledge to jointly create new knowledge (Wiig, 2002; Van den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004) and it is a critical factor that affects individuals, teams and organizational performance (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Yang, 2007). Higher level of knowledge sharing behaviour in itself creates greater and better access to newer knowledge which then significantly enables job related problems to be solved faster and cheaper (Alhammad, Al-Faori & Abu Husan, 2009).

Literature often suggests that knowledge sharing behaviour within the organizations leads to application of new competencies and experiences that enhance problem-solving and decision-making skills, opportunity recognition, and innovation which in turn results in better performance and ultimately gains organizational competitive advantage (Jackson, Chuang, Harden, Jiang & Joseph, 2006). By combining the knowledge via sharing, leaders can improve their skills, knowledge and abilities needed to solve complicated problems which may result in improvement of their own performances (Augier, Shariq & Vendelo, 2001).

■3.0 THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INTRAPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION (IO)

Even though many researchers such as Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999), Davenport and Prusak (2000), Bartol and Srivastava (2002), Rao (2003), Kim and Ju (2008) have reported significant relationships between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance, still the interactions among these variables remain less understood particularly as they relate to performances of academic leaders in public universities. While on one hand there are strong relationships between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and intrapreneurial orientation, previous studies on the other hand also show significant relationship between intrapreneurial orientation and performance (as we will discuss below). With respect to this, authors have continued to propose intrapreneurial orientation variable as

a mediator as it is expected that this construct may mediate the interactions between the said variables (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003, Antoncic & Zorn, 2004; Yang, 2008, Kreiser & Davis, 2010).

Intrapreneurial orientation (IO) or corporate entrepreneurship refers to employees' predisposition to accept entrepreneurial practices as characterised by their preferences for innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking (Stewart, 2009). IO is an individual-level strategic behaviour rooted from the concept of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) which is an organizational-level strategic behaviour, a resource important not only for exploitation of opportunities (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Lee, Lee & Pennings, 2001) but also for enhancing performance of everyone (Guth & Ginsburg, 1990). Innovativeness refers to a tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation and creative process that may result in new products, services, or processes while proactiveness refers to a posture of anticipating and acting on future wants and needs to exploit opportunities, and risk-taking refers to a tendency to take steps to venture with uncertain outcomes (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003).

The style that leader adopts at workplace is critical for intrapreneurship behaviours to thrive (Zhao & George, 2003). Past research has shown that one of the most crucial factors that impact intrapreneurship is management and leadership supports (Hornsby, Kuratko, Shepherd & Bott, 2009). Leaders' support manifested in the forms of their approaches or style in leading and championing workplace innovations, proactive actions, allowing some degree of risk-taking, experimenting and tolerating mistakes are considered crucial factors for intrapreneurship to prosper (Holt, Rutherford & Clohessy, 2007). In this sense, as they lead by example, the style they adopt is critical for intrapreneurship behaviours to flourish because their own creativity, innovativeness, proactiveness, personal initiative, risk-taking, and flexibility are essences of leaders' success at workplace (Foba & De Villiers, 2007; Zhou & George, 2003).

According to Alhammad *et al.* (2009), studies have also shown that knowledge sharing is the main factor in creating entrepreneurial behaviour in organizations. Drejer, Christensen & Ulhoi (2004), Stull (2005) and Lumpkin (2007) for examples suggest that sharing of knowledge is crucial for intrapreneurship because it leads to modification of skills, habits and attitudes which in turn increases ones' innovativeness and capacities to recognize and select opportunities. Academic leaders as intrapreneurs and key workers operating amongst knowledge workers in knowledge-intensive university environment, often manipulate knowledge rather than other resources in order to create the necessary innovations to attain better performance and competitiveness (Drejer *et al.*, 2004).

By cooperating and collaborating while sharing knowledge, leaders generate synergies from existing knowledge as well as the newly created knowledge (Leidner, 2006). Clearly, knowledge sharing enable leaders to better harness knowledge, talents, ideas and competencies to result in enhanced performance (Yang, 2007; Cummings, 2004). Leaders can also lead and perform better by acting entrepreneurially (Stewart, 2009; Antoncic & Zorn, 2004). In this respect, Alhammad *et al.* (2009), Lumpkin (2007) and Tsai (2001) confirm that knowledge sharing enhances intrapreneurial behaviour because the higher the levels of knowledge sharing, the more they know, hence the better the ability of them to proactively initiate new ideas, to innovate and to tolerate risks, ultimately leading to enhanced performance. By virtue of being providers, integrators and distributors of knowledge, leaders play a vital role to leverage knowledge for performance enhancement via their intrapreneurial orientation and actions (Drejer *et al.*, 2004).

■4.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the discussion above, it is apparent that the variables of transformational and transactional leadership styles as well as knowledge sharing behaviour are strongly affecting the intrapreneurial orientation and performance variables. In addition, the variable of intrapreneurial orientation also proves to exert a strong influence on academic leader's performance. According to Baron and Kenny (1986) a mediator is a variable which must be related to a criterion variable (dependent variable) while at the same time is also related to a predictor variable (independent variable). Having shown the presence of association amongst these variables, this paper argues that intrapreneurial orientation may act as a mediator on the relationship between the independent variables of transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, and knowledge sharing behaviour, and the dependent variable in the form of academic leader's performance. Specifically, a mediator is an intervening mechanism that acts as a conduit through which an independent variable is able to influence a dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Hence, the conceptual framework as in Figure 1 below is proposed.
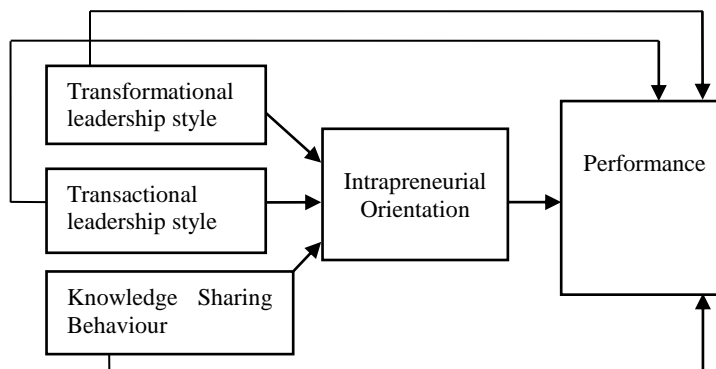

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Mediating Role of Intrapreneurial Orientation on the relationships between leadership styles (transformational and transactional), knowledge sharing behaviour, and performance of academic leaders

■5.0 CONCLUSION

The paper examined the potential mediating role of intrapreneurial orientation in the relationship between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance among the academic leaders in Malaysia. It examined past literature regarding the association of intrapreneurial orientation with performance, leadership style and knowledge sharing behaviour. The paper also scrutinized the effects of the relationship between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance. Based on this, we argued that in Malaysian context too, intrapreneurial orientation will play a significant role in mediating the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance of academic leaders operating in Malaysian universities. It can also be assumed that the presence of intrapreneurial orientation would also give better explanation in terms of direct and indirect effects of the relationship between leadership styles, knowledge sharing behaviour and performance of Malaysian academic leaders. On this note, we reasoned that it is important for Malaysian academic leaders to be intrapreneurially orientated at work while actively sharing their knowledge and displaying appropriately transformational and transactional leadership style in order to enhance their performances.

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