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Effective leadership styles influence on knowledge sharing behaviour among employees of SME's in Nigeria

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Abstract

Earlier researchers acknowledge the significance of knowledge sharing among employees in improving their responsiveness when dealing with unpredicted situations. Effective leadership styles have been known to impact employee knowledge-sharing behaviour within an organisation positively. The role of influential leaders in knowledge sharing is accomplished through enhanced social networks and technology. However, preliminary research pointed to a lack of clear conclusions from recently published studies on the impact of effective leadership styles on knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. The present study addressed this problem through a structured literature review. The review demonstrated that knowledge managers incorporate incentives and rewards systems with their leadership styles to influence knowledge sharing behaviour among employees positively. There was ample evidence that rational, innovative, stability and participatory organisational cultures combined with supportive and command leadership enhance employee intention for knowledge sharing in the organisation. The analysis revealed that transformational, transactional, and mentor leadership styles enhance employees' knowledge sharing behaviour. Overall, it was resolved that the relationship between knowledge sharing behaviour among employees and leadership styles is mediated by the ability of the organisation to priorities employee development.

Keywords: Leadership styles, knowledge sharing, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, mentor leadership, team performance, team productivity, motivation and creativity

Introduction

The present research addressed the influence of effective leadership styles on knowledge sharing behaviour among line managers in organisations. Jolaee *et al.*, (2014) ^[15] postulated that knowledge is an essential organisational asset (). Therefore, Luring and Selmer, (2012) ^[16] contended that knowledge sharing is considered information flow among organisational employees, facilitating the development of new information and knowledge within the organisation (). Knowledge aids employees in being more responsive in dealing with unpredicted situations. Jolaee *et al.* (2014) ^[15] suggest that organisational functions are hindered from functioning effectively as knowledge based organisations are impacted by their limited abilities of sharing knowledge. Knowledge sharing behaviour as argued by researchers increases positive outcomes in organisations, such as improving organisational performance (Witherspoon *et al.*, 2013) ^[29], reduced production costs (Ritala *et al.*, 2015) ^[24], improved team performance (Liu *et al.*, 2020) ^[19], increased creativity (Lei *et al.*, 2021) ^[18], and enhanced firm innovative behaviour (Vandavasi *et al.*, 2020) ^[26]. Organisations in different sectors and industries leverage knowledge sharing to increase their competitive advantage within the markets they serve. The overall organisational performance is hinged on the effectiveness of knowledge sharing between teams, individuals, and organisations. Knowledge sharing is considered indispensable in organisational operations, as Anand *et al.* (2020) ^[3] suggest that conversion of individual knowledge into organisational knowledge is a challenge due to employee unwillingness to sharing knowledge. Therefore, the inclusion of effective leadership styles that encompass knowledge management allows organisations to solve complex issues they face through collaboration. Nevertheless, effective leadership by line managers involves provision of guidance, inspiration and direction to their employees in

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relation to knowledge sharing by nurturing the talents and strengths of their employees, thus building committed teams to achieve organisational goals.

Effective leadership is significant for increasing and improving organisational knowledge sharing behaviour by shaping how employees perceive the process. Leadership styles can detract from or improve employees' willingness to share knowledge among themselves or with the organisation.

Organisations often fail to efficiently manage their knowledge resources (Darwin, 2017; Yukl, 2012) ^[9, 30]. Supportive leadership styles have been positively linked with knowledge management practices by Frost (2014) ^[10], in which delegating and accessing the different leadership styles is considered effective to encourage knowledge sharing among the organisational employees, thus improving the business's competitive advantage. Frost (2014) ^[10] and Intezari *et al.* (2017) ^[13] agree that the role of influential leaders in knowledge sharing is accomplished through enhanced social networks and technology. Strategic leadership behaviour depends on the level of understanding the leader has of the core issues of the business and their relation to the organisational values (Castañeda & Ignacio, 2015) ^[5]. Effective leadership is expected to operate on a bi-level, futuristic and tactical approach with the aim of increasing the energy, drive, and enthusiasm of leaders within the organisation play a crucial role in creating employee commitment, as the structural equation modelling used conducted by Le and Lei (2018) ^[17] revealed. Peet (2012) ^[23] also notes that influential and visionary leaders influence the organisational climate positively and are significant in providing clear direction. Hence, effective leadership is paramount in influencing knowledge sharing behaviour among organisational employees by providing continuous support and ensuring that all parties involved know the outcomes and value of the knowledge management process.

Literature Review

Initial research found that although researchers have a proper comprehension of leadership style concepts, their interpretation varied across different elements in human endeavours such as social work, academics, businesses, politics et cetera. For instance, Veliu *et al.* (2017) ^[27] suggest that leadership styles depend not only on individual personal attributes and characteristics but also on situational and environmental characteristics they are in. Pauliené (2012) agrees with Veliu *et al.* (2017) ^[27] while further arguing that variations in leadership styles are majorly influenced by cultural differences, as individuals have different assumptions and beliefs concerning characteristics considered effective for good leadership. Amanchukwu *et al.* (2015) ^[2] contradict the argument by Veliu *et al.* (2017) ^[27] and Pauliené (2012) by suggesting that good leadership is defined by selfless devotion and strong character towards an organisation. Amanchukwu *et al.*'s (2015) ^[2] research are relevant to the present study as it introduces different leadership theories distinguishing leaders from non-leaders. Like Amanchukwu *et al.* (2015) ^[2], Clinebell *et al.* (2013) ^[8] regard leadership styles such as transactional and transformational leaders as effective in improving the overall commitment of employees towards the organisation. Iqbal *et al.* (2015) ^[14] provided an almost identical definition.

They refer to effective leadership styles as the ability to adopt a style meeting the situational demands they are operating within. Łukowski (2017) ^[20] agree with Clinebell *et al.* (2013) ^[8] that innovation management is influenced by the adopted leadership style within the organisation, such as transformational leadership, as it allows employees to contribute their sentiments and ideas freely. Based on these views, it can be argued that adopting the right leadership style within an organisation improves employee commitment.

Current literature shows that leadership styles significantly influence employees' performance, growth, and attitude in achieving organisational goals. Mohiuddin (2017) ^[21] highlights that the transformational leadership style positively influences employee execution compared to the transactional approach, which is focused on the top management. In agreement, Saad *et al.* (2018) ^[25] likened effective leadership style as one increasing employee engagement, which majorly influences employees' overall commitment, loyalty, performance, and productivity. Although Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014) ^[22] agree with Mohiuddin (2017) ^[21] and Saad *et al.* (2018) ^[25], they approached the leadership styles concept from a wider perspective as they viewed job satisfaction and work environment as major factors of leadership style selection, leading to increased employee engagement and performance. Chandra (2016) ^[6] mirrors the findings by Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014) ^[22] through a quantitative study linking employee performance, knowledge sharing, and job satisfaction to effective leadership styles. Organisations must improve the workplace environment through proactive and effective leadership styles to positively impact employee development (Chandra, 2016) ^[6]. Wakabi (2016) ^[28] present a similar argument as Chandra (2016) ^[6] as they also regard leadership as a relationship in which individual influences the actions and behaviours of other people, making it vital for organisations to attract and retain talented employees. Therefore, as Wakabi (2016) ^[28] argued, it is imperative for organisational leadership to encourage employees to work towards achieving organisational objectives. The findings presented in the above studies expose a direct association between effective employee functioning and leadership styles.

The rise of globalisation has led to an increasingly difficult, multi-faceted, and complex concept, leading to new challenges and questions regarding effective leadership styles in organisations. Gandolfi and Stone (2016) suggest that despite numerous leadership styles available, the philosophical servant leadership position is more effective in generating acceptable outcomes in organisations. Igbaekemen (2014) ^[12] has similar arguments as Gandolfi and Stone (2016), noting that leadership style selection depends on the level and type of power the leader has over the employees. Igbaekemen (2014) ^[12] considers power as an individual's capacity to influence others through controlling necessary resources. Differing from the argument presented by Gandolfi and Stone (2016) and Igbaekemen (2014) ^[12], Ahmad and Umrani (2019) ^[11] allude that ethical leaders are considered moral, fair, trustworthy, and honest, embodying humane intentions, character, and personality traits of the leader in shaping employee behaviour through intentionally promoting moral modelling, while punishing the contrary and rewarding exhibitions.

The research by Ahmad and Umrani (2019) ^[1] is appropriate to the current research study as it addresses the mediation role of green human resources management (HRM) and employee psychological safety influenced by leadership styles, which is linked to the research problem. Like Ahmad and Umrani (2019) ^[1], Appelbaum *et al.* (2015) ^[4] posit that organisations should adapt rapidly to the dynamic environments through change, from small adjustments to major transformations, by adapting to the appropriate leadership styles. Chaudhuri *et al.* (2016) ^[7] agree with Appelbaum *et al.* (2015) ^[4] and Ahmad and Umrani (2019) ^[1] that leadership styles, directly and indirectly, influence organisational outcomes through shaping employee behaviour and attitude through change and regulating the mediators and experiences predisposing the employees to change respectively. Based on these arguments, it can be inferred that interactions between the leadership style and the organisational environment determine the outcomes of the change initiative.

Methodology

This study aims to examine how effective leadership styles influence knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees in an organisation. The problem addressed throughout the current study is that although other factors influencing knowledge sharing among employees have been discussed in depth, the leadership style's role in influencing employee knowledge sharing is still lacking enough coverage by scholars. The current study adopted an inductive research approach that an inductive research approach allows the researcher to search for themes and patterns within literature and offer justifications for the research problem being addressed.

The current study adopt an interpretive philosophy to interpret the varied elements within the research. earlier researchers have identified incentives, interpersonal trust, organisational support, and culture as factors influencing knowledge sharing among employees, the present study alludes to different leadership styles influence how employees manage and share knowledge in an organisation. The current study is secondary research. The researcher conducted a desk-based search strategy on published peer-reviewed articles addressing leadership styles' influence on organisational employee knowledge-sharing behaviour. The researcher deemed secondary data appropriate for the research as both the researcher and intended readers can approach the problem researched based on perspective of other researchers and compare their findings to draw credible and reliable conclusions on the effectiveness of leadership styles in organisations and knowledge sharing behaviour on employees. This is supported by Daas and Arends-Tóth (2012), who alluded that the use of secondary data in research eases the development of new information from already published literature and makes conclusions that can be applied to the research problem identified.

The major areas evaluated by the researcher while performing the literature search process included the different leadership styles used by organisations and their impacts on knowledge sharing behaviour of employees, the perspective of employees on knowledge-sharing, and the influence of knowledge-sharing on the overall organisational performance and productivity.

Findings

The findings presents an in-depth, critical, and structured analysis of the findings collected from the identified studies

aligned with the research objectives. The main emergent themes from the analysis is Leadership styles to increase knowledge sharing behavior among employees of SME's. The researcher presents an interpretation of the presented results in relations to the literature review to determine the success of the study in achieving the study objectives.

Leadership Styles to Increase Knowledge Sharing Behaviour

Son *et al.* (2020) ^[31] positively acknowledged the significant impacts of transformational leadership on employee knowledge sharing behaviour on the financial and operational performance of organisations. The findings by Son *et al.* (2020) ^[31] are valuable to the current study as they sample 263 participants from 112 service and manufacturing companies and conducted an Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) of the research variables. Despite Son *et al.* (2020) ^[31] focusing on Chinese firms, the reporting of the study findings made them generalisable to other areas. According to Son *et al.* (2020) ^[31], transformational leadership has a significance influence onyu organisational financial performance while operational performance is influenced by knowledge sharing behaviour of employees. While Farooqi (2017) agree with Son *et al.* (2020) ^[31] on the role of transformational leadership in promoting internalisation, externalisation, and socialisation of knowledge sharing behaviour among employees in an organisation, an interesting approach to the study. Evidence presented by Farooqi (2017) ^[32] provided deeper insights into transformational and transactional leadership styles as a preferred approach in enhancing employee knowledge sharing behaviour. Further, Farooqi (2017) ^[32] findings indicated that intensive-knowledge organisations are high predictors of knowledge management in organisations. Despite both studies focusing on the relationship between transformational leadership styles and employee knowledge sharing behaviour, Farooqi (2017) ^[32] conducted a more thorough analysis, rendering their study outcomes more applicable to the current study. Nevertheless, the absence of ethical approval in both studies raised concerns about the ethical nature of the methodological process adopted by the researchers.

Like Farooqi (2017) ^[32] above, Widodo *et al.* (2022) ^[33] demonstrated the mediating role of leadership styles on the impacts of information technology adoption on employee knowledge sharing behaviour. However, executing this study in a single sector hinders the generalisability of the study findings by Widodo *et al.* (2022) ^[33] as they may fail to apply across other organisations in different sectors. Based on the findings, leadership styles adopted by managers is a significant mediator increasing employee knowledge sharing intention. Okoh *et al.* (2021) ^[34] agrees with Widodo *et al.* (2022) ^[33] on the influence of leadership skills and styles on enhancing the efficiency of knowledge management. Transactional and democratic leadership styles have been identified to be significant in improving knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees, with commitment, creative, and communication skills improving tax administration performance and knowledge management efficiency (Okoh *et al.*, 2021) ^[34]. However, Okoh *et al.* (2021) ^[334] addressed leadership styles from the finance perspective, alluding that motivated leaders perform optimally thus improving the efficiency of knowledge sharing. Sharifkhani *et al.* (2016) presented similar findings

as they also found that leader-member exchange leadership style influences organisational performance and employee knowledge sharing behaviour positively. However, Sharifkhani *et al.* (2016) did not delve deeper into the relationship between organisational culture and leader-member exchange leadership style. Overall, the study findings presented by Akhavan *et al.* (2014) are more applicable to the current study as they conducted a large-scale survey in four identified research centres involving 224 participants. Regardless of the failure of the five reviewed studies to address research ethics, they presented vital evidence indicating leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidance positively influences knowledge sharing behaviour among employees.

Conclusion

This review examined the influence of effective leadership styles on knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees in an organisation. A review of nine studies revealed that the effective incorporation of incentive and reward systems in leadership styles increases employee intention for knowledge sharing in organisations. The association between leadership styles and knowledge sharing behaviour among employees revealed that rational, innovative, stable and participatory organisational culture positively influences employee knowledge-sharing intention. Additionally, the study findings revealed that transactional, mentor, and transformational leadership styles increase employee knowledge-sharing behaviour. The review also concludes that effective adoption of the right leadership style is significant in the organisation's competitive advantage, acting as an indicator of high employee performance.

Recommendation

In line with the limitations to the study presented in the preceding section, the researcher recommends future researchers to incorporate additional studies from various other databases. In addition to more studies, future researchers should conduct additional investigation on the influence of individual leader attributes on the knowledge-sharing behaviour of employees. Lastly, future researchers should consider collecting empirical data from managers and employees in various organisations to examine the influence of effective leadership styles on knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees

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