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Leadership and organizational culture as the normative influence of top management on employee's behaviour in the innovation process

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Abstract

Companies with a strong entrepreneurial orientation usually possess distinctive competencies and innovative outlooks, and have a managerial vision and innovative organisational culture that aims to achieve the company's objectives through operations. Corporate culture plays the main role in motivating and shaping creative behaviour in organisations. Establishing and nurturing entrepreneurial behaviour and practices so that they become part of an organisation's culture and ethos can provide the opportunity to initiate renewal and create innovation. One of the major factors repeatedly suggested to affect innovation is also leadership. The leaders of organizations help define and shape work contexts that contribute to organizational innovation, can create and manage an organizational culture that promotes innovation. This study examines the relationships between organisational culture, leadership and innovation. Although the innovation literature base is extensive, the research in this area is rather restricted. The paper presents the findings of the research conducted in Polish private companies.

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1. Introduction

In recent scholarly and managerial literature, there is considerable evidence that innovation is essential to achieve the long term success of a company in modern competitive markets. In the relevant literature (Schumpeter (1960), Porter (1990) and Drucker (1992) et al.), there are many definitions of innovation. The reason why the definitions are diversified is putting an emphasis on different aspects and elements of innovation, which are a combination of

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processes of creation, new ideas creation, implementation and current changes implementation (Flynn, Chatman, 2001). Such an understanding of innovation results in diversity and multi-faceted exploration of innovation determinants. They can be classified on three levels: individual, group and system. At the individual level, key determinants of innovation include: personality, learning and commitment. At the group level, innovation is determined by the team attributes: its standards, durability, cohesiveness, diversity, size, as well as leadership and communication (Flynn, Chatman 2001). At the system level, determinants that are the most frequently mentioned include structure and corporate culture.

Companies with a strong entrepreneurial orientation usually possess distinctive competencies and innovative outlooks, and have a managerial vision and innovative organisational culture that aims to achieve the company's objectives through operations (Calantone, Gonzalez-Padron, and Hult 2008; Bina 2012). According to Kanter (1985), corporate culture plays the main role in motivating and shaping entrepreneurial behaviour in organisations. Establishing and nurturing entrepreneurial behaviour and practices so that they become part of an organisation's culture and ethos can provide the opportunity to initiate renewal and create innovation (Hsu, Tan, Jayaram, Laosirihongthong 2014).

One of the major factors repeatedly suggested to affect innovation is also leadership (King, 1990; Osborne, 1998; Schein, 2004). Leaders can create and manage an organizational culture that promotes innovation, can be product champions or heroic innovators who support innovation throughout the process of its implementation, and can create organizational structure needed to support innovativeness (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Damanpour and Schneider (2006) asserted that strategic leadership research indicates that top managers influence organizational outcomes by establishing organizational culture, influencing organizational climate, and building the capacity for change and innovation.

This study examines the relationships between organisational culture, leadership and innovation, identifies the factors i.e., the culture values that mostly affect or influence the performance of the organisations. Although the innovation literature base is extensive, the research in this area is rather restricted. The paper presents the findings of the research conducted in Polish companies.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Organizational culture and innovation

Positive cultural characteristics can provide an organisation with the necessary ingredients to innovate. Innovation and culture are intimately linked (West, 2000). Culture is very important in bringing the organisations towards success; provided that all staff in the organisations is fully committed on this matter. Each organisation has its own vision and mission of being a kind of guide on the way to achieving organizational excellence. Organizational culture is the element which bonds the aims of employees to achieve the subsequent levels of excellence while reflecting the image of the organization. On the other hand, as research indicates, innovation fails to thrive in organisations (and individuals) if the environment and organisational culture are not conducive to nurturing these capabilities. This has been proven in numerous studies and specific inhibitors have been identified (Bina, 2012). These include: employee complacency and cynicism, fear of failure and change, bureaucratic, top-down decision making, lack of leadership advocacy, empire building and office politics, lack of diversity, a focus on financial controls and mitigation of risk (Andrews, 2006).

It is obvious that cultures of various types of organisations will vary (Smircich, 1983). On the one hand, this diversity of culture is deepened by the values and attitudes brought to the organisation by new employees from the first day of work, on the other hand, cultural norms are a guide for new employees to facilitate their adaptation to new working environment. Culture is regarded as a potential (Cormican and O'Sullivan 2004) when it contributes to the organisation. For organizations that care about their image and reputation, attention to the organizational culture is a major element of the strategy.

According to Ahmed (1998), culture has many characteristics, which can serve to enhance or inhibit the tendency to innovate. Johannessen et al (1999) note that innovative organisations are (a) proactive; (b) take risks (c) create commitment and (d) initiate change.

Organizational culture can be both a stimulus and a barrier to the acquisition, accumulation and use of

knowledge, and consequently, to innovation. In the process of adaptation to a particular culture, members of the organisation acquire many valuable elements of knowledge that are part of this culture, however, bad habits and incompetence occur as well. An example would be frequent reluctance to share knowledge. Banks (1999) notes that it is possible to create such culture in the organisation that motivates to create, transfer and use knowledge by motivating and engaging people, "blending in" and consolidating the activities of knowledge management to daily practice of business processes, internal systems and structures of the organisation. Organizational culture supporting innovation processes will be focused on the ability to cope with uncertainty, improving the system of communication and decision-making, perceiving information coming from the environment not as a threat but rather as an opportunity possible to use, introducing a management style that would help employees to become independent and that would be favourable to their cooperation, creativity and innovative activities (Smolarek 2009). The characteristics of pro-innovation organizational culture include: creating a climate conducive to organizational changes, broadening knowledge and improving skills and sharing knowledge and information, developing tolerance to risks, uncertainties and exploration, strengthening respect for non-conformist attitudes, implementing democratic principles of decision-making and conflict resolution, supporting group activities, building an atmosphere of recognition and respect for innovators, supporting creative ways of thinking and problem solving, and developing awareness of the changes and promoting direct contacts (Gadomska-Lila, 2010).

Building such a culture should be supported by appropriate organizational conditions, which include: corporate strategy, a human resources management system, a pro-innovation management system and an appropriate organizational structure. Innovative organisations emphasize commitment (i.e. they seek to arouse a sense of pride in the organization, support the development of employees at the social and technical level). They do not stigmatize mistakes when things do not go according to the plan. It is also important to systematically build a structure of a system that, when the organisation exceeds the size in which informal relationships were sufficient, it directs the activities of individual organization members in the same direction. The adoption of a formal system should not interfere with responsiveness and flexibility of the organization. (Cormican, O'Sullivan 2004). Creating a pro-innovation culture requires a focus on three important aspects of human resources management: (1) making all employees involve in the pursuit of the common goal of action, which is possible if the common objectives of the organization comply with the individual objectives of its members, (2) rewarding professionalism, which positively affects the concentration of effort, (3) consistency in action (especially in terms of the above activities) by creating a system whose mission is to attract, maintain and train the right people (Gadomska-Lila, 2010).

Among the factors influencing organizational culture, in addition to categories like: the type of environment (national culture, the system of values of society and communities in the region, the local system of values) and the type of organization (the market situation, products and technology, the industry), Koźminski also mentions the characteristics of the organisation (its history, size, leadership, administrative system, policy and strategy of action, management procedures and structure) and the characteristics of participants (values, attitudes, education, gender, age, work experience, life experience, emotional ties). Undoubtedly, the shape of cultural patterns of the organization is influenced by top managers, whose duties include the development of policies and strategies as well as management procedures. Organizational culture becomes a tool in the hands of managers, who, through the personnel policy, can affect the participants of the organisation in such a way that the goals of the organization are achieved. Using the appropriate criteria of recruiting and selecting employees for various positions (including management), the organisation selects people with specific characteristics. The behaviour of managers shapes the image of the organization world in the minds of subordinates, and this in turn affects the behaviour and actions within the organization as a whole. Top managers determine the attitudes and behaviours of managers at lower levels, and all managers influence the development of desirable attitudes and values of subordinates. A good leader creates a vision, communicates and cultivates it and leads to its fulfillment (Sloane 2007). You may state that top managers, their style of management and communication, preferred incentive systems, etc. become some of the key determinants of pro-innovation organizational culture.

2.2. The impact of leadership on employee behaviour

An appropriate leadership style is one of the challenges for most organisations operating in today's world of rapid change and the need for continuous development of human potential of the organisation. Some organisations change

their structure from hierarchical "network organisations" (Drucker 1988) or "smart businesses" (Quinn 1992). In such conditions, it is insufficient to be a manager performing management functions. Organisations need leaders who will not only manage people, but who primarily will work with them to achieve common goals, who will inform about changes in the organisation and participate in analyzing and solving individual and group problems (Borkowska 1998 p.79).

In the processes of innovation, where innovation is a consequence of the company's strategy and not a one-time accidental incident, leaders make people aware of the goal, communicate and justify the reasons for taken action and related benefits. They also show the direction of the action and tips related to searching innovative solutions. It is also important to focus. The leader must answer the question what a priority of the team is and what the team should focus on. It is leaders who can make innovation both the ability and corporate value and penetrate all organizational structures to create solutions that go beyond clichés.

There is evidence that individual leadership style is an important determinant of innovation. The leaders of organizations help define and shape work contexts that contribute to organizational innovation (Sarros, Cooper, Santora, 2008). Participative leadership is associated with cultures of innovation and high-performing companies (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). Available research on the relationship between the behaviour of leaders and creativity of individuals has examined the transformational leadership, participative leadership, and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Several studies indicate that transformational leaders empower their followers (e.g., Jung and Sosik 2002), create an innovative climate (Jung *et al.* 2003), change the personal values and self-concepts of their followers, move them to higher levels of needs and aspirations (Jung 2001), as well as raise the performance expectations of their followers (Bass 1995). Furthermore, transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual follower's needs by empowering them and by aligning objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group and the larger organisations (Bass and Riggio, 2006). This leadership consists of four components: charismatic role modelling, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Gumusluoğlu and Ilsev 2009). The Transformational Leadership Scale by Podsakoff *et al.* (1990) consist of the six transformational factors of (a) articulates vision, (b) provides appropriate role model, (c) fosters the acceptance of goals, (d) sets high performance expectations, (e) provides individual support, and (f) provides intellectual stimulation. The transformational leadership, which includes creating vision and inspiration has a significant influence on followers' creativity because the leader motivates employees, shapes organizational culture and creates organizational climate necessary for organizational change (Wehrich *et al.* 2010).

Participative leadership involves the use of various decision-making procedures that determine the extent to which people can influence the leader's decisions and have the autonomy to design and perform their own tasks. Participative leadership can take different forms, including consultation, joint decision making and delegation (Yukl, 2002). Such leadership is considered to precede individual innovation.

The LMX theory focuses on the social exchange relationships between leaders and employees. It says that the quality of the relationship between a leader and follower has an impact on outcomes such as subordinate satisfaction, supervisor satisfaction, performance, commitment, role conflict, role clarity and turnover intentions (Yukl, 2002). Some suggest that the quality of the relationship between a leader and follower is also related to innovativeness (Graen and Scandura, 1987). High-quality exchange relationships involve giving employees challenging tasks, supporting in risky situations and providing with task-related resources and recognition, all favourable to individual innovation.

In general, leaders have a powerful source of impact on employees' work behaviours (Yukl, 2002). The most effective leaders help individuals to coordinate and integrate their varying styles through a process of applied creativity that involves continuously discovering and defining new problems, solving those problems and introducing new solutions (De Jong, and Den Hartog 2007).

2.3. Method

The data for this study were drawn from a random sample of private sector managers. Excluding those respondents who described themselves as self-employed left a sample of 120 private sector managers. The majority of respondents were male (63.3%), between 31 and 40 years of age (41.7%), with a mean 12.73 years of experience as a manager. Of the respondents, 11.7 described themselves as top-level managers, 20.0% as executives, and 68.4%

as upper-middle managers. Most of the managers (56,7%) worked in organizations with fewer than 250 employees. A direct survey was used. Prospective respondents were informed that the survey was confidential. A questionnaire consisting of 10 questions with a mixture of Likert-scale and closed-ended questions with one answer was developed. A five-point Likert scale was employed to gather responses, 5 indicating "maximum agreement" and 1 "no agreement".

3. Results

Evaluating the role that managers and operational staff fulfill in the innovation processes, the respondents divided the tasks in the following way:

- the role of the manager is to: stimulate / trigger innovation of employees (4.30), monitor the innovation process (4.27), motivate others to be creative (4.19), be a leader in implementing innovative processes (4.07), organize the different stages and conduct the process of introducing specific innovation (4.07), plan and initiate the innovation process (4.04),
- the role of both managers and employees to the same extent is to: build, create an innovation-oriented culture (an innovative "climate") (3.76),
- the role of employees is to look for sources of innovation (3.40).

Support and encouragement for every employee to seek and discover non-conventional, non-standard ways of achieving the goals and performing tasks are essential for the development of innovation in an organisation. 43.3% of the respondents believe that the new ideas of employees are supported by the organization.. As the literature studies indicate, an element of innovation-oriented culture is the appropriate organization of work and working conditions that encourage employees to be creative. In the companies surveyed, the following are appreciated: the appropriate range of responsibilities and allocation of activities of employees (61.7% of the respondents), access to facilities and social benefits (very highly and highly rated by 58.3% of the respondents), the right equipment at the workstation (46.6%).

An important characteristic of innovation-oriented culture is change. Employees are willing to take risks that change entails, which may be related to, for example, changing jobs. Adjustment processes also include employment, implying the need for its flexibility. It should be noted that in times of high unemployment, stabilization of employment (a secure work contract) may be a more important motivating factor to work. Each innovation may be a threat to employees because the current state of balance is violated, which can result in employees' reluctance to introduce innovation and even boycott and sabotage change. Among the respondents, 10% feel threatened by risks resulting from the implementation of innovation in the company. They fear that the scope of their duties will be changed, they might be made redundant, work will be reorganized or they will have new responsibilities. Almost every second respondent (43.3%) felt the danger in a moderate degree, which indicates that the implementation of innovation in the company may violate balance felt by employees, therefore neutralizing activities are needed.

As regards the companies the respondents were connected with, an integrated management style can be mentioned (a huge emphasis on tasks and interpersonal relationships – in the opinion of 79.2% of the respondents). Managers focus on both the technical process and performance, as well as on employees, instilling enthusiasm for work in them, helping them to meet the challenges, trying to find the difficulties at work and outside, taking care of their development, which results in increased productivity. Managers believe that people are willing and able to work well. They engage them adequately to their capabilities, ensuring they are satisfied from the tasks they perform. They try to involve everyone in the process of planning tasks and they will be engaged in their implementation. (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna, 2014)

4. Discussion

The paper presents theoretical reflections on the influence of leadership and organizational culture on employee behaviour in the processes of innovation, also verified by empirical studies conducted among managers in private

companies. The findings of the studies contribute to understanding the connections between these theoretical constructs. The findings are consistent with research that indicates that transformational leadership is associated with organizational culture (Übuis, Vanhala, 2011; Antonakis, House, 2002; Scott, Bruce, 1994; Deal, Kennedy, 1982; Trice, Beyer, 1993) and (Amabile, 1996; Mumford et al., 2002). A leader with vision creates a culture of change that is conducive to the adoption of innovation (Damanpour, Schneider 2006). The elements constituting a culture that supports innovation have been specified. They occur in most companies, with varying intensity, namely: the management style emphasizing tasks and interpersonal relationships; an important role of managers in stimulating innovation and triggering innovation of employees; motivating employees to be creative; a low level of sense of danger felt by employees, arising from changes introduced in the company; proper organization of work and working conditions aimed at stimulating employees' creativity; support for new concepts and ideas; a possibility to express their opinion freely by employees, to propose and support new ideas, cooperation of employees from different organizational units. The findings support the accepted wisdom that innovation is associated with strong and visionary leadership and supportive cultures, (Scott, Bruce, 1994).

5. Conclusion

Organizational culture may be an element favourable to the development of innovative activity. The values, norms and beliefs that play role in creativity and innovation in organizations can either support or inhibit creativity and innovation, depending on how they influence the behaviour of individuals and groups. In general, leaders also have a powerful source of influence on employees' work behaviours. These findings are consistent with, and extend, existing research (Schein, 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Scott, Bruce, 1994) and provide evidence of the capacity of vision as a culture builder in organizations. Individual innovation was thought to be influenced by co-workers and leaders and was more recently identified as a multistage process between these agents and organisational components such as culture and climate.

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