Leadership Social Power as a Component of KMS Success

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationships between a leader’s Leadership Social Power (LSP) profile and Knowledge Management Systems (KMS). Previous research has established that KMS success is positively impacted by leadership commitment to KMS, knowledge quality, and knowledge use. Yet how little we know about the constructs of leadership that may impact KM. The goals of this research focused on discovering how the manner in which leaders exert power – their LSP profile – influenced each of these KM success factors. This research was able to empirically demonstrate that LSP is a factor of that success and was able to effectively predict Leadership Commitment to KMS, Knowledge Content Quality, and Knowledge Use based upon predominate manner of Leadership Social Power used by the KM leaders.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management Systems, Knowledge Quality, Knowledge Use, Leadership, Leadership Social Power, Success Factors

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management (KM) is a discipline that has demonstrated its importance to the success of a knowledge economy (Jennex, 2008). This importance is due, in part, to KM’s capacity to increase an organization’s competitive edge and maximize its value (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Liebowitz, 2008). While researchers have explored the constructs that influence the success of KM (DeLone & McLean, 2003; Kulkarni, et al., 2006), it is not adequate, to merely draw those conclusions without an in-depth exploration into each of the constructs in terms of how it is observed, measured, and constituted (Scovetta & Ellis, 2013). We therefore focused our study on securing a better understanding of the social influences that organizational leadership may have on the constructs of Knowledge Management success. Our investigation focused on Leadership Social Power (LSP) and its influence on three major factors of KM success (Leadership Commitment KMS Systems (LCKMS), Knowledge Quality (KQ), and Knowledge Use (KU)). Empirical results demonstrated Expert LSP was a positive and significant influence on each of the KM constructs. Therefore, KM related organizations should secure those leaders viewed as experts. We also discovered Reward LSP was a positive and significant influence on KQ and KU.

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This suggests follower’s belief in LCKMS is positively affected by providing a reward system that will encourage the use of knowledge. Surprisingly, we discovered Referent LSP was a negative and significant influence to both KU and KQ suggesting leader admiration was a negative influence. Legitimate LSP was a positive and significant influence on KQ. Legitimate power is the most difficult of the five LSPs as it is derived from the follower’s values (i.e. cultural) that dictate both the perceived legitimacy of the influence and obligation to accept its influence.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Because organizational success largely depends on its leader’s effectiveness and subsequently has become increasingly important to understand the subconstructs and measures of leadership that influence this success (Drucker, 2006). Researchers have argued that while studies in KM success have clearly identified leadership as an important component of a successful Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) implementation, there has not been adequate attention paid to clearly characterizing the aspects of leadership that are most strongly associated with its success (Scovetta & Ellis, 2013). Lacking a deeper understanding of leadership relegates organizations to designate leaders that may not bring about successful KMS results.

GOALS

This study sought to extend researchers understanding of leadership as an influence on KM success by exploring LSP as a predictor of the success of a KMS implementation. Those who study leadership have noted the importance of understanding the influences among leader and follower, but have cautioned that a simple laundry list of influences (e.g. power, behavior, skills, etc.) does not provide a guarantee of leadership’s ability to promote organizational success (Yukl, 2012). Bowerman & Van Wart (2011) argued the importance of investigating the constructs of leadership to provide leaders with an understanding of individual behaviors that positively affect organizational outcomes. We therefore define LSP as a leader’s social ability to influence or control the behavior and/or attitudes of followers (Yukl, 2012). LSP included leader dimensions of Expert, Reward, Coercive, Legitimate, and Referent powers as perceived by knowledge workers.

Researchers have indicated successful leaders pay careful attention to establishing and championing organizational goals (Kulkarni, et al., 2006). For the purpose of our study, LCKMS is characterized as the degree to which an organizational leader is believed to be committed to the success of KM. Measures included the degree to which leaders exhibited behaviors that would positively affect KM in business, strategy, and goals (Kulkarni, et al., 2006). KQ is the quality of knowledge as determined by its ability to present an accurate and useful representation of its content and included measures of relevance, timeliness, and comprehensibility (Halawi, et al., 2007). KU is the implementation, analysis, and development of knowledge in a form knowledge workers can use to learn and generate new knowledge that promotes better decisions making (Halawi, et al., 2007). Knowledge use was measured according to a knowledge worker’s belief that he/she had incorporated procedures for the capture and use of knowledge of various types into decision-making activities.

The fundamental goal of this research was to determine the degree different types of LSP were able to predict KMS success by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How predictive is LSP on LCKMS?
RQ2: How predictive is LSP on Knowledge Quality?
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