

Enhancing Organization Demand for Innovation through Entrepreneurial Leadership and Social Networks

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Abstract – *This study aims to investigate the direct and indirect effect of entrepreneurial leadership on organization demand for innovation. Over the past years academic debates have mostly focused on individual's demand for innovation while emphasizing on the organization's success in producing new products and services to individual customers. However the organizational customers and organization's demand to use innovation in day to day work has been generally neglected. Since previous studies identified leadership as an important determinant of innovation in the organization, this research proposes a conceptual framework to explore the effect of entrepreneurial leadership on organization's demand for innovation. The success of entrepreneurial leadership depends not only on the behaviors of the leader, but also on the characteristics of their followers in demonstrating entrepreneurial behaviors. Therefore this study aims to examine the moderating role of follower's reliance on social networks to recognize new opportunities on the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and organization's demand for innovation. A sample of Malaysia Top 100 Companies participates in this research and the hypotheses are evaluated using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis. This research makes an important contribution by providing empirical evidences that may support entrepreneurial leaders and their firms to identify and generate more opportunities and enact them in ways that increase the organization's receptivity towards innovation. Copyright © 2015 Penerbit Akademia Baru - All rights reserved.*

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Leadership, Receptivity of Innovation, Organizational Innovation Confidence, Social Networks, PLS-SEM

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Leading innovation is one of the most challenging aspects of organization's life. Innovation is more complex than it looks and a unifying general theory did not merged on this issue. At the beginning of the 20 century, the work of Schumpeter [1] was a prominent stage in innovations' evolution. Schumpeter [1] argued that innovation denotes the dynamic force of economic development and ensures the economic expansion through recession phases and a cyclic interchange of prosperity. In compare to Schumpeter's time, today the economic prospect has changed and according to several scholars innovation is now inevitable for companies' development and competitive advantages [2]. The extraordinary economic growth of a country can be first and for most attributed to innovation. Innovation is a vital factor, with a direct relation to the changing environment, economic growth and life of any

organization. Although many definitions are available for innovation, but all of them share a common way of thinking in which innovation is creating something new, including products, services or ideas and it is a beneficial factor for all economies and organizations.

Innovation can be studied at the individual, group, organizational, industry or national level. The conceptualization, scope of innovation definition, research objectives and researcher approaches will be affected based on these levels of analysis [3]. Previous studies on innovation have focused on different levels of analyses. According to Slappendel [4] and Hage [5] much of the early literature concentrated on innovation at the individual level and addressed the adoption of new ideas and practices by individuals. Since 1980s studies conducted to identify how organizations adopt innovations and examined the relationship between specific organizational variables and organizational innovativeness. This was the beginning of a mounting interest in innovation within, and by, organizations, i.e. organizational innovation. This research also deals with the organizational level of analyses and per se, it draws on the research literature for innovation in the organization.

Recently, organizational innovation has been receiving extensive attention and characteristics of organizational innovation have been studied in various researches. Today, due to raises in customers' expectations, lack of resources and business environment complexities, organizations have left with innovation as a single choice [6]. Therefore, issues concerning organizational innovation are receiving extensive attention in order to reach the higher level of competitive position in the organizations [7]. Most of the earlier studies determined organizational innovation either as a prerequisite for successful product or process innovation or as an adoption to the introduction of new technologies [3]. However more recent definitions of organizational innovation have expanded to include themes of "demand toward innovation" and "receptivity to innovation". This represents an increasing movement among organizational innovation researchers to understand hidden behavioral preferences of organizations [8].

In recording the levels and the stimulants for innovation in the organization, the demand-side factors have been generally neglected in favour of supply-side factors. According to Ashby and Mahdon [9], "the distinction between supply and demand-side factors is not always clear-cut: demand and supply represent opposite ends of a continuum." This might be the reason to explain the scarcity of studies on demand-side factors in organizational innovation to show how receptive organizations are to new products and services. Muscio *et al.* [34] stated that organization demand for innovation is yet to be manifested especially for a traditional industry. Therefore increasing the latent interest in organization's demand for innovations that might generate benefits to the organization and improve the work life is the main focus of this research.

Previous studies revealed that leadership with its dominant role in the organization is one of the key factors that affect organizational innovation [10]. The interrelationships among the three aspects creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, are recognized as critical stimulants for social-economic development and entrepreneurial culture cultivation [41]. Organizations can be well-prepared to enroot innovation if leaders are trained to be creative in problem solving, thinking skills and generating a productive learning environment [42]. In spite of agreement on the importance of leadership for innovation, previous studies in the field of innovation and leadership are not sufficiently benefited by each other and mostly studied in separate areas. Thus, more systematic understanding of the relationship between these constructs is not only timely but even essential [11]. One of the desired outcomes of this study is the influence of leadership role towards organization demand for innovation. Beside

the significance of leadership for organizational innovation, the paramount importance is having the right type of leadership to effectively drive innovation in the organization [12].

Over the past few years, some research findings have presented the positive influence of particular leadership styles on innovation in the organization (e.g. supportive leadership) [16], participative and democratic leadership [17] and so many on transformational leadership [10,23-24,27,32-33]. While these studies have reported valuable insights, but recent studies believe that beside participative, supportive and transformational behaviors, entrepreneurial behaviors are increasingly important in a variety of contexts. In organizations, these behaviors foster innovation and adaptation to changing environments. Recent literatures suggest that organizations must be more entrepreneurial to enrich their capacity for long-term survival in the complex and explosive environments with rising competition for critical resources [18]. Therefore, researchers have begun to investigate “how to champion entrepreneurial behaviors in organizations and the idea of entrepreneurial leadership is one of the approaches introduced in the literature” [19]. However due to lack of conceptual development and inadequate tools to measure leaders’ entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviors research on entrepreneurial leadership has been hindered over past years [19]. Hence this research aims to address these critical gaps by reviewing the existing research on entrepreneurial leadership and the key elements of this leadership style.

The attributes, behaviours and actions that distinguish entrepreneurial leadership from other leadership styles, focus on opportunity recognition and exploitation as entrepreneurial goals for such leadership. The opportunity-focused actions of leaders result in recognition and exploitation of new opportunities in an organization, and more importantly, from a leadership perspective, seeing their leaders behave entrepreneurially creates follower’s commitment to do the same. Leaders influence and direct their followers by acting as role models and openly encourage followers to work toward entrepreneurial goals [19,36]. Organization’s demand for innovation is the first step to generate or adopt innovation by organization. This places an additional burden on organizational leaders to constantly be alert for, test and propose the use of new products and processes in their organization. Innovation par excellence would be achieved via a continually high level of commercial alertness to opportunities but also a willingness to gather and develop the knowledge and information required exploiting those opportunities [31]. To achieve this goal, every level of an organization need to constantly grab new business opportunities to embrace entrepreneurial behaviours and attitudes. Entrepreneurial leaders themselves engage in opportunity-focused activities, and in so doing, they also influence their followers, motivating and encouraging them to pursue entrepreneurial opportunity-focused behaviors. The success of entrepreneurial leadership depends not only on the behaviors of the leader, but also on the characteristics of their followers in demonstrating entrepreneurial behaviours [19]. Acknowledgement of the followers’ contribution who make dynamic leadership has progressively turned urgent as new forms of leadership approach is undertaken. Therefore this study intends to examine the moderating role of follower’s reliance on social sources of information to recognize new opportunities on the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and organization’s demand for innovation.

A common theme in much research on opportunity recognition has been emphasized that information plays a crucial role in this process. Many different perspectives and theories converge on the view that in order to identify opportunities, individuals must somehow gather, interpret, and apply information about specific industries, technologies, markets, government policies, and other factors. Such information, it has been suggested, plays a role both in the initial recognition of opportunities and in the subsequent feasibility checks [38].

Over and above a focus on the key dimensions of information and improved efficiency of information processing, knowledgeable individuals create categories of information based on a deep structure that involves more, stronger, and richer links between concepts [30]. These deeper and richer connections can enhance an individual's ability to identify opportunities that are more innovative. Therefore this research introduces four social networks as important sources of information including Mentors, Business networks, Professional Forums and Personal networks which may follower's reliance on these sources enhance opportunity recognitions and interact with entrepreneurial leadership in affecting organization's demand for innovation. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature followed by a framework for future empirical research. Finally a research methodology is proposed.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Demand for Innovation in Organization

Levie [20] defined organization demand for innovation as the degree to which organizations are willing to engage with and perceive benefit from new products or services, or products or services that embody new technology. Organization demand for innovation is about receptivity toward innovation in organizations. Individual and organizations have different level of desire and existing opportunities to express their innovation preference. Organization demand for innovation is a type of business demand for business innovation [9]. For the boudless of innovations, science and technology appeared to be the sources and demand was the best element that served as counterpart which propelled the innovation in the organizational directions as well as the competitive industry [40]. According to Bhidé [21] while many supply-side indicators of innovation exist, global demand-side indicators are markedly absent from the literature. Also Levie [20] emphasized that there are many measures of the supply-side of innovation, but there are no global measures of demand for innovation. Therefore the organization's demand-side factors have been generally neglected in favor of supply-side outputs. Yet, organizations cannot succeed in producing innovation without using innovation in day-to-day work.

Since organizational customers are so important in innovation adoption, a measure of Organizational Innovation Confidence (OIC) was developed and funded by the Institute for Innovation & Information Productivity (IIIP) by the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK in association with the Global Entrepreneurship Research Association [20]. Organizational innovation confidence (OIC) is a multi-faceted construct that measures the organization demand for innovation based on three items including the willingness to buy products or services that are new to the organization, willingness to try products or services that use new technologies in daily work for the first time, and belief that new products or services will improve one's working life [20]. Based on IIIP report after a successful pilot in the United Kingdom in 2008, Organizational Innovation Confidence (OIC) was measured in 18 different nations and the reliability and validity of the index were acceptable over a three year period of study.

Studying the antecedents and stimulants of innovation in the organization was one of the main streams of research over the past years. Previous studies attempt to identify the factors that enhance and facilitate innovation in organization. Organization's characteristics, behaviors of organizational members, and extra-organizational factors were identified as three main antecedents [8]. Among the three categories, behaviors and characteristics of

organizational members had been one of the extensive standing research areas in the field of innovation [22]. As a result, some researchers investigated the importance of leadership in relation with innovation and identified related factors such as leader's behaviors or characteristics that significantly affect innovation in organization [23-25].

While there are only few studies on organization demand for innovation the existing literature discuss the importance of communal values and human orientations on how receptive organizations are to new products and services. Previous studies suggest that leaders of paternalistic organization should take additional burden to propose and test the use of new products and services in their organization [20]. In spite of agreement on the importance of leadership for innovation, previous studies in the field of innovation and leadership are not sufficiently benefited by each other and more systematic research is required [11].

2.2 Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership is a distinctive leadership style that can be presented in any organization [18]. The attributes, behaviors and actions that distinguish entrepreneurial leadership from other leadership styles, focus on opportunity recognition and exploitation as entrepreneurial goals for such leaders [19]. No matter organizations are in volatile or stable industry, providing services or selling products, in order to remain viable they need to constantly grab new opportunities. In this regard, entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors must be embrace at every level of organization. Based on the abovementioned challenges in business environment, researchers have begun to identify how to support and champion entrepreneurial behaviors in organizations. Entrepreneurial leadership is the intersection of leadership and entrepreneurship [19]. Emphasis on opportunity-oriented behaviors, both by leaders and followers is the key to understand entrepreneurial leadership. Entrepreneurial leaders enhance followers' beliefs in their own entrepreneurial abilities and skills and increase their passion for innovation and creativity. The typical entrepreneurial leadership is encouraging and motivating others, and showing the way to complete a task. Entrepreneurial leaders are obliged in coping with uncertainty, recognize opportunities and evaluate them through the increment of information flow [44].

According to Gupta *et al.* [18], entrepreneurial leadership has some similarities with transformational leadership in a way that both leaders consider the higher needs of followers and evoke their performance. However the ability of entrepreneurial leaders to evoke followers' performance is based on the organization's need to adapt the changing environment and the main challenge is to create the willingness in followers and organizations to do creative entrepreneurial actions rather than current conservative activities. Due to the lack of conceptual development and the inadequate knowledge of entrepreneurial leadership [19], this paper aims to review the existing perspectives on entrepreneurial leadership and its interaction with the followers to enhance the demand of innovation in the organization.

Gupta *et al.* [18] conceptualized entrepreneurial leadership based on two main challenges faced by entrepreneurial leaders. According to them the first challenge is creating a scenario of possible opportunities to transform the current situation which is called *scenario enactment*. The second challenge is convincing the stakeholders and followers that the objectives of the scenario might be accomplished through recruiting additional cast and appropriate resources to execute the transformation. This is called *cast enactment*. Gupta *et al.* [18] suggest that aforementioned challenges requires entrepreneurial leaders to play five important roles including framing, absorbing uncertainty, path clearing, building commitment

and specifying limits and these five roles under the two dimensions of enactment provide the theoretical framework of entrepreneurial leadership.

Chen [26] described entrepreneurial leadership as a combined construct of risk-taking, pro-activeness and innovativeness. This perspective was in line with Gupta *et al.* [18] conceptualization of entrepreneurial leadership. Risk-taking considered as the willingness to absorb uncertainty, pro-activeness is about encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives and innovativeness in fostering creativity and innovation among team members. Therefore it can be concluded that the convergence of leadership and entrepreneurship has merged some attributes for entrepreneurial leadership. Influencing and motivating others, focusing on opportunities, vision, risk-taking, creativity and innovation are among afore mentioned attributes.

Renko *et al.* [19] adopted a wider focus on conceptualizing entrepreneurial leadership and considered the attributes, behaviors and actions of entrepreneurial leaders. They believe that entrepreneurial goals such as exploitation and opportunity recognition is the main focus of entrepreneurial leaders and characterizes the behaviors, attributes and actions of this leadership style. Entrepreneurial leaders encourage and influence followers to try new ways of doing work and think more innovative. Comparing to previous studies, Renko *et al.* [19] treated entrepreneurial leadership as a leadership style rather than a strategic management construct. They suggested innovativeness, creativity, passion, vision and risk-taking as the elements of entrepreneurial leadership which compromised both leader attributes and behaviors. Also an eight-item ENTRLEAD scale was developed and empirically tested to measure the perception of employees from their immediate manager's (leader) entrepreneurial leadership style and indicated a good construct validity and reliability.

Therefore this research aims to employ the eight-item ENTRLEAD scale developed by Renko *et al.* [19] to define and measure entrepreneurial leadership as a construct that influence and direct the performance of group members towards recognizing and exploiting new opportunities. However the main focus of this research is on innovative opportunities within the organization which may help the employees and the organization to use innovation in day to day work and improve the organization life. This may lead to an organization that is open to change, try new technologies, find new ways of doing things and has demand for innovation.

2.3 Social Networks

Previous studies crucially indicated that besides the direct relationship of leadership and innovation, several factors may influence this relationship. It must be considered that leadership behaviors occurs in the context of the organization and analyzing a bivariate relationship would be incomplete without considering the organizational context in which organizational innovation take place [10,12]. Leaders have to be proactive in addressing innovation and other critical issues around the followers and culture in organization if they see these as a critical growth imperative to succeed. The responsibility for influencing the organization and its members to embrace innovation is ultimately pointed to leaders, from there everyone nurture a development of culture that cultivates innovation and intelligent risk-taking [43]. Therefore it is necessary to identify and examine factors that may interact with leadership behaviors in affecting organizational innovation [24]. As mentioned earlier, the success of entrepreneurial leadership depends not only on the behaviors of the leader, but also on the characteristics of their followers in demonstrating entrepreneurial behaviours [19]. Shane and Venkataraman [15] suggests that access to relevant information plays a

crucial role in opportunity recognition and many other researchers note that specific persons discover opportunities because they gather and process information differently—perhaps more effectively—than other persons. In this regard, current study aims to identify whether recognizing new opportunities through the reliance of followers on social sources of information may enhance the impact of entrepreneurial leadership on organization’s demand for innovation.

Wang *et al.* [39] stated that “recognizing the importance of social networks by forming relationships with others who can share information and stimulate creative thinking about potential opportunities becomes a critical endeavour.” Social networks might create access of diverse information; encourage better cooperation and developing competency within the industry. Ozgen and Baron [38] found that mentors, informal industry networks, and participation in professional forums exerted direct, positive effects on opportunity recognition. Results obtained from the study by Fernandez-Perez *et al.* [37] also highlighted the positive roles played by the perceived support of social networks. Therefore in line with Fernandez-Perez *et al.* [37] this study introduces four main social networks namely mentors, professional forums, business and personal networks as important sources of opportunity-relevant information. Mentors refer to more formal relations maintained from business sector—potential customers, suppliers, competitors or investors. On the other hand, the term “professional forums” is from the information sharing through the attendance at forums, conferences and seminars, mostly relevant to business. While “business networks” are the close interaction with business partners. It has suggested that employees who form business networks have access to business-related information and positive recommendations. The last ties, “personal networks” is in the sense of relationship with those in immediate environment, such as relatives, friends and colleagues which formed a more friendly relationship.

Wang *et al.* [39] reported that social networks had positive effects on entrepreneurial opportunity recognition, either weak-tie or strong-tie networks. They facilitate information exchange, benefits learning and circulate information processes to further discover opportunities. The creation of an organization is impossible without opportunities [35].

3.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Previous studies mostly investigated the influence of leadership on supply-side innovation while it is not clear how organizations can increase their own demand and receptivity toward innovation. Based on the literature, opportunity recognition and exploitation are major factors in producing innovation. To achieve this, employees at every level of an organization have to embrace entrepreneurial behaviors and attitudes. Reflecting these developments in the corporate world, researchers have begun to investigate how to champion entrepreneurial behaviors in organizations. Therefore the purpose of this research is to address the critical gaps by reviewing the existing research on organization demand for innovation and present the key elements of entrepreneurial leadership style while providing a framework to measure the influence of this leadership style on organization receptivity toward innovation. This research contributes to the body of knowledge via developing a conceptual framework to examine the moderating effect of social networks on the relationship of entrepreneurial leadership and organization’s demand for innovation, in order to bring more insight into this relationship. The first hypothesis of this research examines the direct relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and organization demand for innovation. Additionally, the moderator effects of followers’ reliance on social networks on the relationship served as the

second hypothesis.

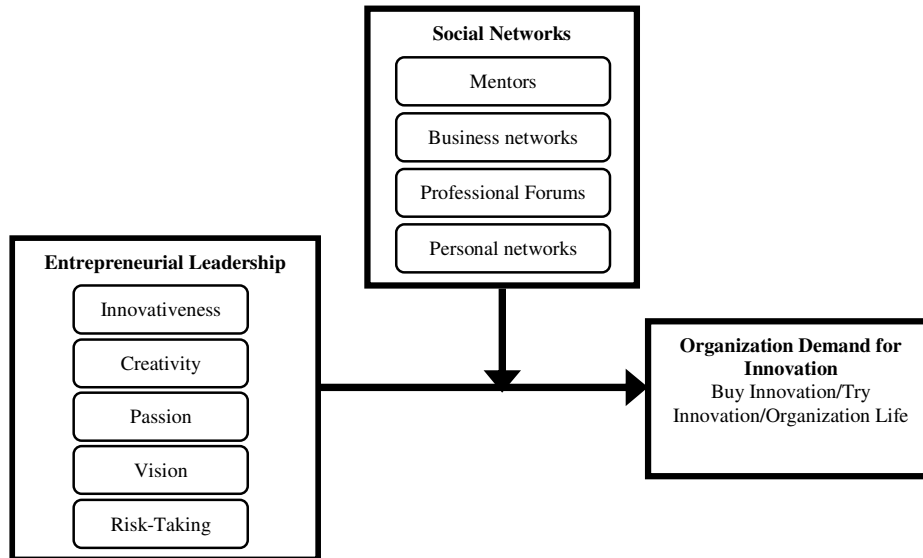


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study and quantitative research techniques will be used to measure the relationship between variables. The questionnaire designed for the purpose of this research consists of four parts; First part is general information about respondents. Second part measures the perception of employees about their immediate manager's entrepreneurial leadership style through eight-item ENTRELEAD scale similar to other leadership instruments [27-29]. The third part measures Organizational Innovation Confidence (OIC), a measure of organization's demand for innovation, through questions adopted from international survey of Innovation Confidence [20]. The last part is to determine the likelihood of followers' reliance on social networks, from their daily workplace activities. A Likert-type seven-point scale (ranging from 1 "totally disagree" to 7 "totally agree") of four items is adopted from Fernandez-Perez *et al.* [37]. The OIC Index is derived from three different dimensions of innovation confidence including organization's willingness to buy new products and services, willingness to try new products and services that involve new technology and the belief that new products or services will improve organization's life.

Malaysia Top 100 companies are the target population of this research and the sample will be identified based on the simple random sampling method. Data collection will be conducted through email or face to face. The unit of analysis is organizations and the employee's perception will be measured to identify the quality of entrepreneurial leadership and the level of organization demand for innovation. Partial least squares (PLS-SEM) analysis technique will be employed to test the hypotheses and SmartPLS software package 3 will be used to analyse measurement and structural model.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of organization demand for innovation, the entrepreneurial leadership and the moderator roles of followers' reliance on social networks. Besides the typical focus on leaders, a deeper understanding of the role of employee dependency on social networks is obtained. By providing empirical evidences on these perceptions, this research may support entrepreneurial leaders and their firms to identify and generate more opportunities and enact them in ways that expand the capabilities of their organizations and demand for innovation. The strong influences of social networks should not be disregarded since they are the key social connection establishment which may help in opportunity recognition. Leaders and followers share their interests, make real-life connections and identify potentially valuable opportunities via the knowledge platforms. Specific persons discover opportunities because they gather and process information differently or perhaps more effectively than others. In conclusion this study propose that followers ability to recognize opportunities through social sources of information plays a crucial role in the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and organization's demand for innovation, and suggest that individuals often obtain such information from other persons—that is, from various social networks. Linking the enhancement of organization's demand for innovation through entrepreneurial leadership and employees' identification of opportunities is reflected in this study.

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