

The Influence of Leadership Style on Organizational Sustainability: the Mediating Role of Knowledge

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Abstract: *The influence of leadership style on organizational sustainability is a research area that has received much attention. A leader's style, behavior, and values can influence an organization's economic, social, and environmental performance. Studying the relationship between leadership and sustainability is important for advancing sustainability and helps guide the efforts of leaders and organizations in this area. Leadership styles and knowledge management have attracted extensive research interest as key elements of organizational success. The intersection of these two fields, especially in the literature on organizational sustainability, has attracted considerable attention from researchers. Although leadership styles and knowledge management have been extensively studied separately, their interactions and their combined impact on organizational sustainability are still relatively new areas of research. Abusive and exploitative leadership can inhibit knowledge sharing and innovation among employees, leading to knowledge hiding, which can negatively impact organizational sustainability. On the contrary, transformational and supportive leadership may promote knowledge sharing, improve the organization's ability to learn and innovate, and contribute to the realization of sustainability. This study aims to fill a research gap on the relationship between leadership styles, knowledge management, and organizational sustainability to explore in depth the role of different leadership styles on knowledge intermediation and how they collectively influence organizational sustainability. Through this research, organisational leaders, policy makers and academics will be provided with a deeper understanding, providing useful insights for practical practice and future research.*

Keywords: Leadership style, Organizational sustainability, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge hiding.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized and ever-changing business environment, organizational sustainability becomes a critical factor for an organization's success and continued existence (Choi, 2021). Organizational sustainability is not only about economic performance, but also covers important aspects such as social responsibility and environmental protection. The pursuit of sustainability has become a core goal of many organizations and a common understanding of the international community. However, achieving organizational sustainability does not depend solely on strategic decision making and execution; leadership also plays a crucial role (Yang & Lew, 2020).

Leadership style and knowledge management are critical to the success and sustainability of an organization. The behaviors and attitudes of leaders have a profound impact on employee performance and organizational performance, and the management and transfer of knowledge has become a key factor in modern organizations (Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2023). This raises a question that deserves further investigation: How do different types of leadership styles affect organizational sustainability, especially in the context of the role mediation of knowledge? Past research has highlighted the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance (Malik et al., 2020). Abusive and exploitative leadership are often associated with employee dissatisfaction, high turnover, and low performance, while transformational and supportive leadership are often associated with higher employee satisfaction and organizational performance. However, the mediating factors between this leadership style and sustainability, especially the role of knowledge, have not been fully explored. Therefore, this research aims to explore the impact of different leadership styles (abusive, exploitative, transformational, and supportive) on organizational sustainability, with a particular focus on the

mediating role of knowledge. This paper proposes a theoretical model that posits that abusive and exploitative leadership negatively impacts organizational sustainability through knowledge hiding, while transformational and supportive leadership positively impacts organizational sustainability through knowledge sharing. This model helps to understand the complex relationship between leadership style, knowledge management and organizational sustainability.

Through this research, it is not only expected to increase the understanding of the relationship between leadership style and organizational sustainability, but also to provide practical recommendations on how to improve organizational management practices to promote sustainability. In addition, the research will explore how to address the challenges in knowledge management to better leverage the role of knowledge in organizations. This research will provide policymakers, leaders, and academics with important insights into the interplay between leadership, knowledge, and organizational performance.

2. Key Definitions and Concepts

2.1 Abusive Leadership

Abusive leadership refers to a style of management or leadership in which the leader uses bad and unethical means to dominate and control subordinates, often accompanied by insults, abuse, intimidation, bullying, or other negative behavior, in order to satisfy the leader's desire for power or ensure his or her own authority.

Abusive leadership negatively affects the physical and mental health of employees and can lead to dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, and decreased productivity (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). This style of leadership often damages an

organization's reputation and leads to high employee turnover. Abusive leadership is undesirable and violates ethical and moral principles. Organizations often need to take steps to stop this behavior, such as training leaders, establishing a good work environment, and setting up mechanisms to report and deal with misconduct to protect employees' rights and promote a healthy organizational culture.

The theoretical background of the study of abusive leadership includes psychology, organizational behavior and leadership research. Research in this area often explores the causes, effects, and consequences of abusive leadership. Research on abusive leadership also draws on research on abusive behavior and workplace violence (Fischer et al., 2021). In conclusion, abusive leadership is a harmful leadership style that emphasizes abusive behavior by the leader toward employees, which has a negative impact on employees and the organization. Research on abusive leadership is helpful to understand and solve leadership and employee relations problems in organizations.

2.2 Exploitative Leadership

Exploitative leadership, also known as exploitative management or exploitative leadership style, is a style of leadership. Leaders view subordinates as tools or resources and are primarily concerned with meeting their own needs and interests rather than the well-being or development of their subordinates. Exploitative leaders often use their power and status to manipulate, exploit, and extract subordinates without providing reasonable compensation or opportunity, while ignoring the needs and rights of employees (Abdulmuhsin et al., 2021). Exploitative leadership often leads to employee dissatisfaction, fatigue, and disappointment. This leadership style negatively affects the atmosphere and reputation of the organization and can lead to high employee turnover and lower employee performance (Guo et al., 2021). Therefore, establishing a healthy leadership style that cares about the well-being of employees is a key factor in the success and sustainability of an organization.

The research background of exploitative leadership includes organizational behavior, moral philosophy and leadership studies. In theory, this leadership style is often explained by the leader's egotism, lack of moral and ethical behavior, and disregard for employee rights. In short, exploitative leadership is an unethical and self-serving leadership style characterized by the exploitation and neglect of employees' rights. Studying this leadership style provides insight into the ethical and moral issues in the leader-employee relationship.

2.3 Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge hiding is when, within an organization or within a work team, employees intentionally or unintentionally do not share important information, knowledge, experiences, or insights they possess, but keep these resources to themselves or a few others (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). This phenomenon can occur for a variety of reasons, including personal motivation, fear, distrust, competition, cultural factors, or problems within the organization. Knowledge hiding can negatively impact an organization's performance, innovation, decision making, and collaboration.

Knowledge hiding is often detrimental to an organization's innovation and decision making, as key information and insights may not be fully considered (He et al., 2021). Solutions to the problem of knowledge hiding may include improving organizational culture, building trust, providing incentives, establishing mechanisms for knowledge sharing, and training employees in the skills to share knowledge. By reducing knowledge hiding, organizations can make better use of internal resources, improve performance, and encourage employee development. The theoretical background of knowledge hiding includes social cognitive theory, organizational political theory, organizational silence theory and knowledge management theory. These theories help to understand the hidden motives and consequences of knowledge.

2.4 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a type of positive leadership in which leaders promote organizational change and growth by encouraging subordinates to strive for excellence, providing incentives, and stimulating innovation (Iqbal et al., 2021). This leadership style emphasizes vision and focuses on building a positive organizational culture to drive personal and organizational growth and development. Transformational leadership emphasizes trust, empathy, and goal-oriented leadership to influence employees through positive inspiration, drive change, and achieve the organization's long-term goals (Farahnak et al., 2020). This leadership style is often associated with employee job satisfaction, creativity, and improved performance, and is therefore critical to the success and sustainability of an organization.

2.5 Supportive Leadership

Supportive leadership is a style of leadership that emphasizes supporting and caring for subordinates. Supportive leaders focus on the needs, emotions, and professional development of their employees and provide support, feedback, and resources to help employees succeed. This leadership style emphasizes building positive working relationships, providing support, and encouraging employees to succeed. Supportive leadership helps build a positive work atmosphere, increases employee job satisfaction, and promotes creativity and performance improvement (Stein et al., 2020). Employees often prefer to work in this supportive environment because they feel respected and supported and able to achieve their potential. This style of leadership is important to both the success of the organization and the well-being of its employees.

The theoretical background of supportive leadership includes supportive leadership theory, relational leadership theory and interpersonal relationship theory in the field of psychology. This leadership style emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence, interaction, and affinity to improve employee job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment (Hauff et al., 2022). Research on supportive leadership generally focuses on the impact of leaders' supportive behaviors on employees, such as employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and turnover intention. This leadership style has been shown to produce

positive results in a variety of organizational Settings, including increasing employee loyalty, reducing employee turnover, and promoting team collaboration and innovation.

2.6 Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is a process of communication within an organization that involves sharing information, experiences, expertise, and insights with others to facilitate learning, collaboration, and the growth of the organization (Wang & Noe, 2010). Knowledge sharing aims to create a positive work environment, improve organizational performance, encourage employees to share their knowledge and experiences, and thereby help organizations better respond to challenges, innovate and succeed. Knowledge sharing facilitates innovation, improves performance and enhances organizational resilience. By sharing knowledge, organizations are better able to respond to market changes, solve problems, improve quality, and encourage the personal and professional growth of their employees (Akram et al., 2020). Knowledge sharing also helps to avoid knowledge isolation, in which knowledge is confined to individual employees and cannot be fully circulated and utilized. Therefore, knowledge sharing is often recognized as one of the key factors for organizational success and sustainability.

2.7 Organizational Sustainability

Organizational sustainability is a multi-dimensional concept that includes economic, social and environmental sustainability (Dzhengiz, 2020). Economic sustainability emphasizes the organization's profitability and economic growth, social sustainability emphasizes the organization's social responsibility and social impact, and environmental sustainability emphasizes the organization's impact on and protection of the natural environment. These three dimensions are interrelated and interdependent. This concept of sustainability aims to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of an organization to ensure that its operations are not only profitable, but also socially beneficial and environmentally friendly. Organizational sustainability is an effort to strike a balance between maintaining ecological balance, social responsibility and economic profitability (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2021). It recognizes that short-term decisions and profitability cannot be made at the expense of future sustainability. Sustainability is also a growing concern for investors, governments, consumers and employees, so more and more organizations are embracing sustainability as part of their core values and strategies.

3. The Relationship between Leadership Style, Knowledge Management and Organizational Sustainability

3.1 Abusive Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

Abusive leadership is perceived by employees as persistent verbal or non-verbal hostility by their superiors in addition to physical contact. As a destructive leadership style, criticizing and forcing subordinates in public are common forms of abusive leadership. At present, in the field of knowledge management, some scholars have studied the impact of abusive leadership on employees' knowledge sharing

willingness and behavior. For example, Le, Kim, and Yun (2017) point out that abusive leadership leads to emotional exhaustion and inhibits knowledge-sharing. According to the theory of resource conservation, individuals always strive to maintain, protect and construct resources, such as material resources, individual characteristic resources, condition resources, energy resources and means to achieve goals, and the potential or actual loss of these resources poses a threat to individuals. Supervisors not only guide and evaluate employees within the scope of their roles, but also hold the responsibility of assigning employees work. Therefore, for employees, supervisors are an important resource for completing work tasks and achieving career development. When employees are subjected to abusive management for a long time, they feel that they have lost the trust and recognition of the supervisor, and they have lost the resources that the supervisor can give them. According to the primitiveness of resource protection, when individuals face resource loss, they often give priority to take measures to prevent further loss of resources, such as hoarding knowledge, reducing work input and avoiding voice behavior. Knowledge is often regarded as personal property by employees, and it is a resource acquired by investing a lot of energy and time. Owning and controlling knowledge can bring power and status to employees. Therefore, in order to maintain and protect the remaining resources, employees who are subjected to abusive management by superiors may hide knowledge in the face of knowledge requests by withholding, pretending to be stupid, rationalizing, etc.

3.2 Exploitative Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge hiding is defined as a set of negative techniques designed to conceal information from others. There are three types of it, namely evasive hiding, pretending to be mute and rationalizing hiding. Evasive hiders offer an ambiguous assurance that detailed answers will be given later, though they have no plans to follow through on their promises (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Playing dumb is admitting that the person is incapable of helping, even though this is a false assertion.

Based on social exchange theory, exploitative leaders continually violate norms of reciprocity, which should normally produce positive exchange between superiors and subordinates. In the face of such negative events, subordinates feel obligated to respond to such unfair treatment by their superiors. However, the fear of reprisals may compel recipients of exploitative leadership to take revenge on the wrongdoers with whom they have influence (Aquino et al., 2006). Despite the incentive to respond to their abuse and mitigate the risk of further intensifying counter-reprisals, aid recipients tend to deploy displaced reprisals rather than seek revenge against the immediate root causes of their exploitation. Mistreated subordinates often choose to conceal rather than explicitly retaliate. Thus, workers who hold companies accountable for exploitation tend to choose less dangerous, and thus a hidden negative reward (for example, hidden through knowledge).

3.3 Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing

Transformational leadership is one of the well-known styles

of senior leadership. It describes leaders who have the ability to motivate individuals to reach the highest degree of achievement and results, motivate employees to achieve goals beyond expectations, convince employees to turn their self-interest into a common cause for the organization, act as a major force in the business, care about encouraging employees to develop new skills, and constantly seek out new opportunities - opportunities for business growth (Riggio & Bass, 2006). According to Le and Lei (2019), "The theory attracted much scholarly observation and became one of the most powerful theories of leadership." These scholars affirm that learning has a significant impact on an organization's intellectual capital and key outcomes. Therefore, the study of the impact of transformational leadership on specific types of knowledge sharing is of great significance for scholars and practitioners to understand the specific conditions that enhance employees' knowledge sharing behavior in organizations.

The knowledge sharing process of employees plays a crucial role in enriching the knowledge capital of enterprises. However, this does not happen by chance. Previous research has shown that this process occurs only under certain or appropriate conditions, where leadership influence and support has a potentially decisive impact on the degree and intensity of knowledge shared by employees (Le & Lei, 2017). Relevant research has shown that transformational leaders create a positive culture by expanding a set of values and expectations associated with knowledge and knowledge to encourage learning. Transformational leaders are very focused on creating a supportive atmosphere to foster knowledge sharing among employees, focus on articulating a vision and sense of purpose, or develop a culture of trust and organizational justice. Xiao et al. (2017) argue that under transformational leaders, employees become more innovative and more willing to share expertise with others. Le and Lei (2019) emphasize that "transformational leadership creates a supportive work atmosphere and provides sufficient resources to facilitate knowledge-sharing activities among employees." According to relevant research results, transformational leaders have a positive impact on both knowledge donation and knowledge collection by building trust among employees.

3.4 Supportive Leadership and Knowledge Sharing

A large body of existing literature emphasizes the importance of supportive leadership and its positive impact on desirable individual behaviors in organizations, especially those oriented toward knowledge sharing. In the context of management teams, Srivastava et al. (2006) found that supportive leadership has a positive impact on the effectiveness of knowledge sharing and ultimately affects team performance. More recently, Le and Lei (2019) found that transformational leadership has a positive impact on knowledge sharing and product and process innovation. Similarly, research on leadership support from different perspectives - such as ethical leadership, respectful leadership, supervisor support, management support, and organizational support - has been found to positively impact knowledge sharing in organizational contexts.

In a review by Mishra and Pandey (2019), various leadership styles were found to have a positive impact on knowledge

sharing. Effective leadership has a strong potential to increase the degree and quality of peer knowledge sharing by creating a knowledge-friendly atmosphere, providing shared goals and a clear vision, improving trust-based relationships, using motivators and removing barriers such as lack of communication or mutual misunderstanding. Similarly, Jiang and Chen (2018) found that supportive leadership has a positive impact on knowledge sharing among team members. In the minds of employees, supervisors and direct managers are often seen as agents of the organization (Metz et al., 2017). The support and cues they provide are interpreted as organizational values and can significantly influence how employees share knowledge with their peers. From a social capital perspective, leadership support can play an important role in facilitating the structures, relationships, and perceptions that individuals need to share knowledge with their peers.

3.5 Knowledge Hiding and Organizational Sustainability

Knowledge hiding may bring about some negative effects and adversely affect the sustainability of the organization. First, the sustainability of an organization depends on the learning and development of its employees. Knowledge hiding may hinder employees' opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills, making them less able to adapt in a changing environment. Employees may feel limited and unable to reach their full potential, leading to dissatisfaction with the organization. This can drive high-performing employees out of the organization, creating a brain drain that poses a threat to sustainability. At the same time, knowledge hiding may limit employees' ability to innovate. Innovation often involves access to a variety of information and ideas, and if knowledge is restricted, employees may have difficulty coming up with new ideas or approaches, which can affect an organization's ability to innovate.

In addition to causing a brain drain, knowledge hiding can lead to communication barriers between internal teams. Effective teamwork often requires open sharing of information, and excessive hiding of knowledge may hinder cooperation and collaboration among team members. If critical information is withheld or restricted to a small group of people, decision makers may not have access to comprehensive data, affecting the quality of decisions. This can lead to unwise strategic choices, with negative implications for sustainability. In addition, knowledge hiding may hinder effective communication with external partners, customers, or stakeholders. In today's connected business environment, transparency and collaboration with external entities is critical, and knowledge hiding can negatively impact these relationships, resulting in missing out on some potential business opportunities. In some cases, sharing some information can lead to new business collaborations or innovation opportunities, and excessive hiding of knowledge can result in organizations failing to seize these opportunities.

3.6 Knowledge Sharing and Organizational Sustainability

There is a close relationship between knowledge sharing and organizational sustainability, and this relationship is usually positive, that is, knowledge sharing helps to improve organizational sustainability. First, knowledge sharing

encourages innovation and learning within the organization. By sharing experiences, insights and best practices, organizations are better able to adapt to changing circumstances and remain flexible, thereby enhancing sustainability. In terms of teamwork and cooperation, when employees share information, it is easier for team members to work together to solve problems together, improve work efficiency and quality, and contribute to the sustainability of the organization. In addition, knowledge sharing provides opportunities for employees to learn and develop. Knowledge transfer and training within the organization can help employees continuously upgrade their skills, making them more competitive and contributing to the long-term talent development and sustainability of the organization.

Open knowledge sharing makes it easier for decision makers to access comprehensive information to make more informed, fact-based decisions. High-quality decision making helps organizations respond effectively to challenges and improve sustainability. Active knowledge sharing helps build an organization's sense of social responsibility. When an organization shares knowledge and resources in the community, it helps build a good reputation, enhances brand value, and is beneficial for the sustainability of the organization. An organizational culture that encourages knowledge sharing can attract more talent. Employees are more willing to join and stay in an organization that offers learning and development opportunities, which helps the organization attract and retain talent in the long term. In general, knowledge sharing is critical to organizational sustainability. Not only does it make the organization more competitive, it also helps build a strong internal culture that drives innovation and increases employee satisfaction, thereby laying a strong foundation for the long-term success and sustainability of the organization.

3.7 Knowledge Hiding Plays a Significant Mediating Role between Leadership Style and Organizational Sustainability

Both abusive leadership and exploitative leadership are generally regarded as negative leadership styles, and knowledge hiding plays an intermediary role between the two and affects the sustainability of the organization. First, abusive and exploitative leaders tend to undermine employees' trust in their leaders. In such a work environment, employees may be reluctant to share knowledge for fear of punishment or abuse. Employee trust is a key factor in knowledge sharing, and its reduction may lead to knowledge hiding. In addition, abusive and exploitative leadership often leads to employee dissatisfaction, which can have a negative impact on organizational culture. Existing research suggests that dissatisfied employees may be more inclined to hide key information about their jobs and organizations, which further exacerbates knowledge hiding and adversely affects organizational sustainability. These two negative leadership styles can inhibit innovation and learning cultures within an organization. Abusive and exploitative leaders often do not encourage new ideas and do not support learning and development. The lack of a culture of innovation and learning can lead to the hiding of knowledge and limit the sustainability of an organization. At the same time, abusive and exploitative leadership can lead to increased employee

turnover, which negatively impacts organizational stability and sustainability. Employee turnover can be accompanied by the loss of key knowledge and organizational instability, making it difficult for the organization to continue operating.

3.8 Knowledge Sharing Plays a Significant Mediating Role between Leadership Style and Organizational Sustainability

Transformational leadership and supportive leadership are generally regarded as positive leadership styles and have a positive relationship with organizational sustainability. Knowledge sharing plays a mediating role between the two, influencing the organization's sustainability by influencing the culture and processes within the organization. Transformational and supportive leaders often promote a positive organizational culture that includes encouraging learning, open communication, and knowledge sharing. This culture helps create an atmosphere that supports employees to share ideas and knowledge. Both leadership styles often inspire employee engagement and engagement. Employees are more willing to share knowledge when they feel their contributions are valued and supported.

Transformational and supportive leaders advocate teamwork and shared success. This team culture helps to create an environment that supports knowledge sharing and thus promotes organizational sustainability. These two leadership styles are often associated with organizational learning cultures. Existing research shows that an atmosphere that supports employee participation in learning and knowledge sharing is critical to the accumulation of knowledge and experience learned from within an organization. This culture helps employees share new ideas and knowledge, driving organizational innovation and thus enhancing sustainability. Knowledge sharing helps disseminate and leverage key information within an organization, promotes team collaboration, increases employee satisfaction, and creates a culture that supports innovation and learning. This ultimately helps to improve the adaptability and sustainability of the organization.

4. Conclusion

This research aims to explore the impact of different leadership styles on organizational sustainability, with a particular focus on the mediating role of knowledge. It is found that abusive leadership and exploitative leadership have a negative impact on organizational sustainability through knowledge hiding, while transformational leadership and supportive leadership have a positive impact on organizational sustainability through knowledge sharing. The findings highlight the critical role of knowledge as a mediator between leadership style and organizational sustainability. This further highlights the need for organizations to focus on knowledge management and leadership development when promoting sustainability.

Through this research, it is not only expected to increase the understanding of the relationship between leadership style and organizational sustainability, but also to provide practical recommendations on how to improve organizational management practices to promote sustainability. The findings

can provide organizational leaders with practical recommendations to help them choose and develop a leadership style appropriate to the needs of the organization to promote sustainability. This may also include an emphasis on knowledge management and leadership development in training and development programs. Overall, this research is expected to provide organizational leaders with an in-depth understanding that will enable them to more effectively shape and adapt leadership styles to promote organizational sustainability.

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