The Conceptual Relationship between
Work Values Ethics, Innovation and Leadership

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Abstract

Several researchers have revealed a huge impact of national cultures and their implications on management such as leadership styles. Few studies, however, have explored the relationships between work values at the individual level and its link to leadership behaviour and workplace innovation. The current paper aims to present a conceptual framework that represents the relationship between work values ethics, workplace innovation and leadership. It is expected that the conceptual relationships would be tested in a further stage of the study. The testing of the conceptual relationships will assist researchers to gain a better understanding of the relationships of these key organisational variables.

Keywords: Leadership, Workplace innovation, Work values ethic

Introduction

It has been revealed that national culture is one of factors that could have a huge impact on the way managers lead their subordinates and therefore requires managers to adopt or adjust their style of leadership. For example, Australians and Thais are identified as having different cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, 1984) which influence their leadership styles. Australian leaders tend to be participative, direct and willing to take more risk than their Thai counterparts (see Muenjohn et al 2012). However, few studies have explored the relationships between values at the individual level and links to leadership behaviour. In particular, using leadership as a moderating factor on the relationships between work values ethic and workplace innovation.

Design Leadership is a new emerging concept of leadership. Design leadership can be defined simply as the '…means both to design and to lead - to lead design and to lead business by design' (Design Management Institute, 2006, p.2) and is also described as a form of leadership that creates and sustains innovative design solutions (Turner and Topalian, 2002). While the quality of design leadership is believed to contribute to the success or failure of designed and innovative outcomes, the notion of design leadership is still highly ambiguous.

The current paper aims to investigate the relationship between work value ethic, leadership and workplace innovation in Thai and Vietnamese SMEs. The findings will not only contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of leadership and innovation but will also provide empirical evidence and will advance our understanding of the impact of work values on leadership behaviour and workplace innovation.

Literature Review

Work value ethic (WVE) is defined as a constellation of work related values and attitude (Miller, Woehr & Hudspeth 2002). Meriac et al. (2010) further explain that WVE is an individual construct which is characterized by "a set of beliefs and attitudes reflecting the fundamental value of work" (Meriac et al. 2010).   Miller et al. (2002) developed the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) which includes six dimensions: hard work, self-reliance, morality/ethics, delay of gratification centrality of work dimensions, leisure, and wasted time. Hark work refers to the increased level of effort is the key to effective task accomplishment. Self-reliance refers to a drive toward independence in task accomplishment.

To nurture the innovation in workplace and improve the team performance, design leadership has been drawing increasingly attention by researchers and practitioners in industries in these two decades (Hoozée & Bruggeman 2010; Lee & Cassidy 2007; Muenjohn, Armstrong & Hoare 2013). However, there is no clear definition for the term. Design Management Institute (2006) mention that the importance of leadership in design functions, however, how leadership style influence the performance of design team was not clearly defined (Muenjohn, Armstrong & Hoare 2013). Further, how leadership nurture the innovation in workplace and improve the performance of design team were not rigorously investigated (Bruce & Bessant 2002; Cooper & Press 1995).
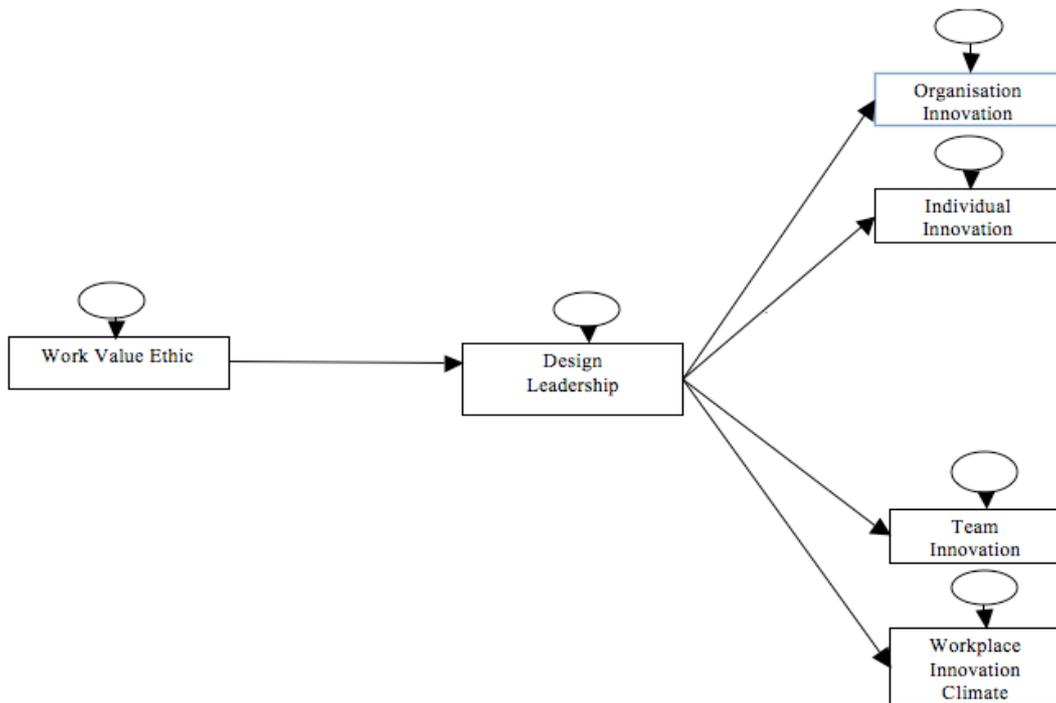
Workplace innovation is defined as the implementation of new and combined interventions in the fields of work organisation, human resource management and supportive technologies (Pot 2011). The diffusion of innovative workplace practices has been found to help organization to develop capabilities and improve performance (Damanpour, Walker & Avellaneda 2009). According to the research conducted by the Economic Institute for SMEs in Netherlands, workplace development projects can help company to achieve higher productivity and financial results compared with those who do not implement (Pot 2011). Majority of SMEs have some constraints such as lack of finance, resources, and skilled labours, workplace innovation become even more important for SMEs to achieve competitive advantage.

Conceptual Framework

A number of studies (Koonmee et al. 2010; Li & Madsen 2010; McMurray & Scott 2012) have identified WVE is one of key indicators to improve relationships with employees and increase commitment of productivities of organizations. Several studies (e.g., (Hunt, Wood & Chonko 1989; Jose & MS 1999; Singhapakdi & Vitell 2007; Valentine & Fleischman 2008) have found that positive relationship between WVE and quality of work life, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and team spirit. A number of studies (e.g., (Butcher 1987; Hitt 1990; Klenke 2005) confirm that ethics and effective leadership are positively related. Hitt (1990) suggests that ethical conduct and leadership are cause and effect relationship. Klenke (2005) supports that work values including protestant work ethic and work involvement are multi-level multi-domain antecedents of leader behaviour.

The link between leadership and innovation has being increasingly drawn attention in current research (García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez 2012; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev 2009; Humphreys, McAdam & leckey 2005; Makri & Scandura 2010). However, regarding the relationships between design leadership and workplace innovation, limited research was conducted in this area (McMurray et al. 2012). Majority of studies (e.g. (Aragón-Correa, García-Morales & Cordón-Pozo 2007; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev 2009; Kissi, Dainty & Tuuli 2013) investigate the positive effects of transformational leadership on innovation and organizational performance.

Figure 1: Research Framework

Conclusion

The framework and propositions proposed in the current paper should provide researchers with some understanding of the role of the three key variables and their relationships. However, the relationships are needed be tested and confirmed. It would also be interesting to develop hypotheses based on the propositions and explore the results of testing the hypotheses.

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