THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND EMPLOYEE INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR (IWB)

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Abstract

This research was conducted in order to examine the relationship between self-leadership skills and employee innovative work behaviour at one prominent corporate company in Malaysia located in Johor Bharu. Self-leadership skills comprised of behavioural focused strategy, natural reward strategy and constructive thought position. 152 questionnaires were distributed among the middle level employees by using simple random sampling. The findings appeared to support two hypotheses that behaviour focused and natural reward strategies have positively associated with employee innovative work behaviour. The findings indicated that two elements of self-leadership skills lead to encourage employees to be more innovative in their work role performance. Further studies, need to be conducted at different sector with larger population as to compare the self- leadership skills possessed by the employees and how does it influence the innovative work behaviour.

Keywords: Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), Self-Leadership Skills, Behavioral Focus Strategy, Natural Reward Strategy, Constructive Thought Position.

Introduction

This study aims to examine the relationship between self- leadership skills and employees innovative work behaviour at the workplace. Self-leadership is a process through which people influence themselves to achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to behave and perform in desirable ways (Manz and Sims, 2001). It is also an influence related process through which individual and working group navigate, motivate and lead themselves towards achieving desired behaviours and outcomes.

Several self-leadership theorists have suggested that creativity and innovation are the anticipated outcomes of individual self-leadership (DiLiello & Houghton, 2006; Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Neck & Houghton, 2006). Creativity is defined as the individual's ability and capacity to create and develop new, novel and useful ideas about firm's products, practices, services or procedure (Mumford, 2003; Shalley and Gilson 2004). When the ideas generated in creativity are successfully implemented, it becomes innovation. An individual with higher ability to generate new, novel and useful ideas is more likely to create innovation (Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin 1993), which in turn contributes to group and organizational innovation.

Many studies have associated innovation with the organization ability to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and long-term improvement performance, however

there is very little attention had been given to study this topic (Jong and Hartog, 2007). Mohd Khairuddin and Sa'ari Ahmad (2008) further claimed that, the empirical study on this area is not just only limited but has also been neglected in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study is conducted to assess the association of the three dimensions of self-leadership skills namely; behavioural focused strategy, natural reward strategy and constructive thought position with employees innovative work behaviour.

2. Literature review

2.1 Innovative Work Behaviour

Innovative work behaviour (IWB) is typically seen to encompass a broad set of behaviours related to the generation of ideas, creating support for them, and helping their implementation (Jansen, 2000). It also includes exploration of opportunities and the generation of new ideas which are creativity that related with behaviour. IWB could also include behaviours directed towards implementing change, applying new knowledge or improving processes to enhance personal or business performance that are implementation oriented behaviour (Mumford, Zhou and Shalley, 2003). According to West (2002) creativity can be seen as a crucial component of IWB. It is evident in the beginning of the innovation process, when problems or performance gaps are recognized and ideas are generated in response to a perceived need for innovation. Despite the differences between IWB and creativity, the overlap is clear and the application processes has also started to receive attention in the creativity literature. The distinction between IWB and creativity thus seems to be one of emphasis rather than substance.

There are four types of IWB which are opportunity exploration, idea generation, championing and application. Identifying new opportunities refer to realization of something new begins with a person (Basadur, 2004). Drucker (1985) identified seven sources of opportunities including unexpected successes, failures or outside events, incongruities or gaps between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’, process needs in reaction to identified problems or causes of failure, changes in industrial or market structures, changes in demographics such as birth rate or labor force composition, change in perception and new knowledge.

Second element in IWB is the idea generation which according to Mumford (2000) it is the individual is the source of any new idea. Idea generation refers to generating concepts for the purpose of improvement. The generation of ideas may relate to new products, services or processes, the entry of new markets, improvements in current work processes or in general term and solutions to identified problems (Amabil, 1988).

Once the ideas are generated, championing is the relevant aspect of IWB. Although ideas may have some legitimacy and appear to fill a performance gap, for most ideas it is uncertain whether their benefits will exceed the cost of developing and implementing them, and resistance to change is to be expected (Kanter, 1988). A champion has been described as someone in an informal role that pushes a creative idea beyond roadblocks within the organization or as someone who emerges to put efforts into realizing creative ideas and bringing them to life (Klesyen and Street, 2001).

Finally, the last types of IWB are application or implemented and put into practice. Implementation can mean improving existing products or procedures or developing new ones. Application behaviour relates to the efforts individuals must put forth to develop an idea selected for implementation into a practical proposition. Application often implies making innovations a regular part of work processes and include behaviours like developing new products or work processes and testing and modifying them (Kanter, 1988).

2.2 Self-Leadership Skills

Self-leadership is a known for leading oneself across challenging and performing situations that precede goal achievement and request goal setting and goal striving (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Earlier researches that have been conducted in relation to self-leadership topic have indicated that self-leadership has a strong positive effect on innovation and work role performance (Neubert and Wu 2006; Carmeli, Meitar, and Weisberg, 2006 ; and DiLiello and Houghton, 2006). Self-leadership encompasses a set of three complementary cognitive and behavioural strategies, which impact subsequent outcomes. These are behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies.

2.2.1 Behaviour Focused Strategy

Behaviour focused strategies are about enhancing one's self perception of personal performance during task resolution, in order to adjust self-behaviour towards task achievement. Moreover, behaviour focused strategic are aimed at increasing self-awareness, leading to the management of behaviours involving necessary but perhaps unpleasant tasks (Manz and Neck, 1999). These strategies include self-observation, self-goal setting, self-motivation, positive self-feedback and reward, self-punishment, and self-coaching. Self-observation stands for one's self-consciousness and reflection concerning why and how specific behaviours impact individual, team or organizational performance, leading individuals to suppress or promote such behaviours (Neck and Houghton, 2006).

2.2.2 Natural Reward Strategy

Natural reward can be defined as the enjoyable aspect of a given task or activity. It is natural if intrinsic reward appears when encouragement or incentive is put together into the task and a person is motivated or rewarded by the task. It also encourages the competencies, self-control and purpose (Manz and Neck, 1999). There are two major natural reward strategies recognized in the self- leadership. First involve building more pleasant and enjoyable characteristics into a given activity so that the task becomes naturally rewarding (Manz and Neck, 2004). Second strategy involves focusing attention away from the unpleasant aspect of a task and refocusing it on those aspects the person finds engaging. These strategies assume that once activities and task can be chosen, structured or perceived in ways that lead to increased feelings of competence and self-determination, the enjoyment of the task and the intrinsic motivation to engage will be enhance, thus, result to higher task performance (Neck and Houghton, 2006).

2.2.3 Constructive thought Strategy

Through the evaluation of one's values and beliefs, self-talk and self-mental imagery individuals develop and facilitate more constructive and adaptable though patterns, minimizing destructive and ineffective thinking (Neck & Houghton, 2006). They further claimed that based upon positive thought, positivity or a positive mental attitude, constructive thinking becomes the direct result of the resulting pro-activity directed toward the possibility for the release of potential power. Evaluation of one's values and beliefs implies the self-monitoring of how personal values and beliefs are positively or negatively affecting performance and the necessary modifications that need to be done in order to adjust them to targets and goals and maximizing performance. Self-talk allows for the individual to mentally speak to himself and develop better reflecting thought patterns, in order to compare and understand the nature of the relationships between values, beliefs, targets and goals. Self-mental imagery is a fundamental issue on the processes, because it leads to the mental testing of the hypothesis developed through the self-talk process and their impact on performance

2.4 Relationship between Self-Leadership Skills with Innovative Work Behaviour

Innovation in business nowadays has becomes a foundation of any high performance organization. Many studies have been conducted showing that a workforce with strong self-leadership skill working in environments that support innovation and creativity could synergistically assist organizations in maintaining an all-important competitive advantage. Previous work has indicated that employees' innovative behaviour depends greatly on their interaction with others in the workplace (Anderson et al., 2004; Zhou and Shalley, 2003). In general, self-leadership has a powerful source of influence on employees' work behaviours (Yukl,
2002). Innovative behavior is no exception. Because creative problem solving requires extensive efforts on the part of organizational members, creative and innovative outcomes are unlikely to occur without a significant amount of organizational support for creative processes (Reiter-Palmon and Illies, 2004). From a practical standpoint, organizations often need to actively facilitate a climate that supports creativity and innovation.

3. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

Based on the literature review on self-leadership and employee innovative work behavior, we proposed a conceptual model based on Houghton and Neck, 2002 and also John and Hartog, (2010). Houghton and Neck (2002) suggested that self-leadership skills consisted of 3 elements; behavioral focused strategy, natural reward strategy and constructive thought position have a positive association with the employees Innovative Work Behavior. Therefore, this study is trying to look at the relationship between self-leadership skills and employee innovative work behavior.

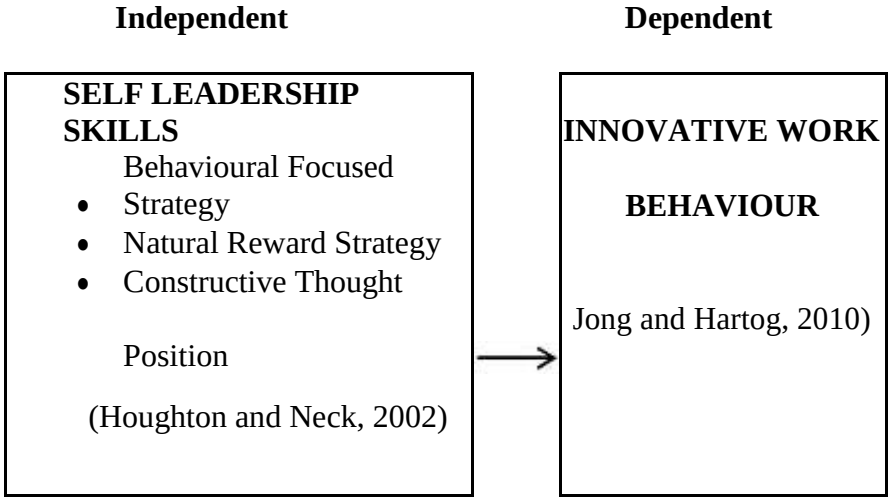

Fig. 1: Theoretical framework

From the framework, three hypotheses were drawn:

H1 There is significant relationship between behavioral focused strategies with employees' innovative work behaviour.
H2 There is significant relationship between natural reward strategies with employees' innovative work behaviour
H3 There is significant relationship between constructive thought patterns with employees' innovative work behavior

4. Research methodology

Middle level employees were chosen as the subject of the study because their job scope encourages them in innovation activity in which that they need to apply in their daily work. Innovation in the workplace include recognizing problems, generating new ideas and solutions, promoting and building coalitions of supporters and producing productive applicable models (Scott and Bruce, 1994). The subject list was obtained based from the Human Resources Department. There were 14 departments consists of 267 employees. According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970) the minimum sample size for this study is 152. 152 questionnaires have been distributed and all of them were returned and were usable.

The research instrument in this study was conducted through a set of questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 3 sections. The first section contains demographic information. The second section consists of question on self- leadership skills. The respondents were asked to rate 35 items including the three elements of self-leadership questions which are based on behavioral-focused, natural reward and constructive thought pattern strategies, using a 5 likert-scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). This question was adapted from Hougton and Neck (2002). The last section consists of questions on measuring employees innovative work behavior. This section consisted 17 items measured by using likert scale of 5 ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (5). It was adapted from Jong and Hartog (2010).

5. Research findings

Hypothesis testing

H1 There is significant relationship between behavioral focused strategies with employees' innovative work behaviour.
H2 There is significant relationship between natural reward strategies with employees' innovative work behaviour
H3 There is significant relationship between constructive thought patterns with employees' innovative work behavior

Table 1 : Pearson Correlation between Self-Leadership Skills and Innovative Work Behaviour

		1	2	3	4
Behavior_ Focused	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	152			
Natural _Reward	Pearson Correlation	.232**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004			
	N	152	152		
Constructive_ Thought	Pearson Correlation	.300**	.079	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.333		
	N	152	152	152	
IWB	Pearson Correlation	.522**			1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.009	

The result yielded that there was a moderate, positive correlation between behaviour focused strategy and IWB, (r=.522**, p= <.05). Therefore hypothesis 1 was accepted. For natural reward, the findings also shows a moderate positive correlation, (r=.411**, p= <.05) with

IWB, thus hypothesis 2 was also accepted. In testing the third hypothesis the result shows there was a weak, positive correlation between constructive thought and employees innovative work behaviour (r=.210**, p=.009). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was rejected.

6.0 Conclusions and recommendation

The findings of this study have somehow supported the existing literature in which it has shown that self-leadership skills were associated with the innovative work behaviour of employee. It can further be indicated that innovative work behaviour can be fostered through efforts directed toward augmenting behaviour-focus strategy, natural reward and also the constructive strategies in organizational members. Neck and Manz (1996) in their study suggested that people can be trained to adapt and enhanced their self-leadership skill thus improve their creativity in performing their task. In order to improve the overall performance of an organization, investment on effort should be made in terms of developing the self-leaders skill. Such investment should include trainings that can expose the employees in their job-related experience. It has proven to marginally increase the innovative work behaviour of the employees. This study has several limitations. As this study is only steered in one private company in Malaysia, further studies need to be conducted to larger population so that the findings can be generalized to specific sectors. Furthermore, this study is only looking at one outcome that is work innovative behaviour even though they are actually multidimensional such as productivity.

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