Strategic Leadership for Organizational Learning:
A Multi-Level Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational learning and supportive leadership play a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainable development of diverse organizations. The success of an organization depends on the transfer of new knowledge and insights between or among individuals and groups in order to achieve organizations' goals. In particular, the role of leaders in knowledge management, including the transfer of new insights among individuals, groups, and organizational levels, is greatly interested in the workplace practice (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; Swart & Harcup, 2012). The interest is based mainly on the fact that the behavior and management of leaders are critical to encouraging organizational learning through knowledge management. This type of management helps overcome several challenges that organizations confront in their ongoing quest for innovation in the globalized and competitive environments (Nemanich & Vera, 2009). To ensure both individual and organizational performance, leaders need to provide effective strategies to enhance organizational learning by enhancing effective transfer of knowledge between employees and their organizations (Berson, Nemanich, Waldman, Galvin, & Keller, 2006; Ireland & Hitt, 1999). That is why strategic leadership for organizational learning including both transformational and transactional approaches has received much attention in academic fields.

Although many researchers have examined the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational learning, not many studies have delved into the impact of strategic leadership on knowledge transition in organizations. Instead, they focus on a leadership approach as a part of organizational learning and/or do not provide enough knowledge on how strategic leadership can influence the process of knowledge transfer (Berson et al., 2006; Crossan & Berdrow, 2003; Crossan et al., 1999). Moreover, existing studies do not provide an expanded and/or balanced viewpoint of strategic leadership for organizational learning, and they focus too much on the transformational leadership of top management (Bryant, 2003; Huang & Shih, 2011; Jansen, Vera, & Crossan, 2009; Vera & Crossan, 2004).

By reviewing both theoretical and empirical studies, the purpose of this chapter is to examine how strategic leadership contributes to organizational learning focused on the process of knowledge transfer. For this purpose, we adopt the 4I (intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing) organizational learning model (Crossan et al., 1999) as a theoretical framework. The 4I model allows researchers to investigate how strategic leadership can be related to the process of knowledge transition among

individuals, groups, and organizational levels (Berson et al., 2006). Specifically, the chapter investigates an inquiry as follows: How does strategic leadership effectively facilitate organizational learning in the process of both feed-forward and feedback learning?

Method

This chapter is based on researching on a wide range of literature from the diverse electronic journal databases. When researching, the key words were mainly the combination of the strategic leadership and organizational learning. In order to be more specific with detailed information, there were several key words used, such as 4I learning model, transformational and transactional leadership, feed-forward and feedback learning, and top management. There were more than 40 studies discovered, and among them, 17 studies were applied, which are closely relevant to the strategic leadership for organizational learning using a multi-level approach.

In specific, the most relevant theoretical studies were Berson et al. (2006), Bryant (2003), Crossan et al. (1999), Crossan, Vera, and Nanjad (2008), Ireland and Hitt (1999), and Vera and Crossan (2004). In addition, qualitative and quantitative studies strongly connected to the chapter's topic are Crossan and Berdrow (2003), Jansen et al. (2009), and Nafei, Khanfar, and Kaifi (2012).

BACKGROUND

Strategic Leadership

Leaders' roles are significant in the organizational learning. Leaders should lead the members of an organization and provide employees with suitable methods and tools in order to achieve organizational goals (Nafei et al., 2012). Depending on how leaders strategically develop plans, the organizational learning will have a high chance to succeed (Zacharias, Six, Schiereck, & Stock, 2015). While traditional leadership involves leaders at all levels, strategic leadership highlights roles and behaviors of leaders at top management. Behaviors of strategic leadership handle strategic activities, executive roles, and token activities (Hambrick & Pettigrew, 2001).

Strategic leadership should be composed of multiple leadership styles beyond a bottom line. According to Rowe (2001), strategic leadership means "the ability to influence others to voluntarily make day-to-day decisions that enhance the long-term viability of the organization, while at the same time maintaining its short-term financial stability" (p. 83). On the other hand, Ireland and Hitt (2005) refer to strategic leadership as "a person's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate change that will create a viable future for the organization" (p. 63). Meanwhile, Sosik, Jung, Berson, Dionne, and Jaussi (2005) define strategic leadership as "a series of processes that determine the degree to which organizations are effective in making fundamentally sound connections between people, technology, work processes, and business opportunities aimed at adding economic, social, and intellectual capital for shareholders, society, and employees" (p. 48). These definitions show that strategic leadership contains attributes of transformational and transactional leadership for the upper level management (Vera & Crossan, 2004).

In order words, strategic leadership represents both transformational and transactional leadership, and the following are about the various features of both leadership styles. Bass (1985, 1998) distinguished two leadership styles. "Transactional leadership relied on contingent rewards- mutually agreeable com-

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