



The Influence of Authentic Leadership On Knowledge Management Practices Among Secondary School Teachers in Kedah, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: Authentic leadership has been gaining momentum in being a critical element in molding organizational performance and culture especially in the education sector. Its focus on honesty, openness, integrity, and trust enables it to emerge as a leadership style that will enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing amongst teachers. Effective knowledge management in the Malaysian secondary schools becomes imperative in order to have continuous learning, innovation, and better performance of schools. The research design here was quantitative involving a 10-point Likert-scale questionnaire issued to secondary school teachers in some of the districts within Kedah, Malaysia. The instrument also assessed the perceptions of the teachers on authentic leadership exhibited by their principals and also the usage of knowledge management in their schools. The real-life leadership authenticity was measured using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regressions to investigate how authentic leadership affects knowledge management practices. The findings showed that authentic leadership contributes positively to knowledge management practices at a significant level. Specifically, the authentic leadership traits in principals increased levels of information sharing, collaborative learning, and innovation of teachers. Authentic leadership has also shown a significant level of variance in knowledge management denoting its usefulness of predicting how knowledge management can be increased in schools. By instilling the true values in the leadership activities, the principals have the chance to develop a knowledge-based culture where teachers are empowered, learning occurs, and long-term competitiveness is fostered in the secondary education.

KEYWORDS: Authentic leadership, knowledge management practices, secondary school teachers, collaborative learning, information sharing, educational leadership

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is radically changing the world, and the effect of globalization, technological change and the knowledge economy are reshaping education. Schools are no longer viewed as an institution that is involved with dissemination of category but as an institution that must be dynamic and continuously evolve, innovate in response to environmental changes and help establish a culture of learning amongst its staff. In this context, the paradigm of leadership and the paradigm of knowledge management (KM) are becoming two of the most important aspects that determine the quality and longevity of any educational organization. Effective leadership has long been considered to be one of the pillars of school success.

Scholarly sources also indicate the leadership approach embraced by the principals is not only effective in shaping the organizational climate but also determining the professional practices and commitment of teachers as well as their inclination to contribute to knowledge sharing (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). Specifically, the concept of authentic leadership has achieved a high profile as a new leadership approach, which highly focuses on openness, integrity, and ethics (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Contrary to transactional and transformational leadership, authentic leadership is based on self awareness, transparency in relationships, balance processing and an internally derived moral prospect, which encourage confidence and improved workplace relationships at organizations (Walumbwa et al., 2008). As far as education is concerned, the concept of authentic leadership has special significance because schools are communities of practice that may not work unless trust, cooperation, and shared beliefs are present.

When principals are genuine, there are increased chances of establishing an atmosphere that empowers the teachers, minimizes the cynicism in the organization and promotes collective knowledge (Begley, 2006). In their turn, the leadership status that involves the ability to share knowledge and engage in professional discussion as well as contribute to school improvement initiatives becomes more probable when teachers perceive their leaders as sincere and trustworthy (Henderson & Hoy, 1983). In parallel with the argument on the role of a leader, knowledge management (KM) has become an important organizational tool in educational organizations. KM can be said to be the practice of acquiring, organizing, disseminating and using knowledge to enhance performance and innovation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Effective KM practices in schools include practices like joint lesson planning, peer mentoring, professional learning communities and formalizations of teaching strategies. Besides promoting teacher professional development, KM also creates a way of ensuring that institutional knowledge is not lost, but instead transferred and

utilized to achieve the long term growth of organizations (Fullan, 2007). It has been posited that leadership is an important factor in influencing KM practices.

Leaders facilitate the process of knowledge creation and sharing by offering a strategic vision, assign financial and human resources, and build a favorable organizational culture (Donate & de Pablo, 2015). At school level, principals, who engage in authentic leadership, can create trust and openness in school, which will influence teachers to share their ideas without exposing them to judgments and manipulation. Authentic leaders also set examples of ethical actions, and create psychological comfort, where there is greater flow of knowledge across organizational boundaries (Hassan & Ahmed, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2010). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has continually emphasized the need not only of effective leadership but of knowledge sharing as well, as part of their reform agendas, especially under the recently launched Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

Nevertheless, there are complexities with turning such dreams into reality, particularly in the context of Kedah, where there might also be urban-rural inequalities, resource constraints and differing leadership capabilities that could impact on the effectiveness with which knowledge management can be practiced (Tie, 2014). Limited research conducted in Malaysia to date has been largely concerned with transformational or instructional leadership, thus creating a gap in knowledge on the significance of authentic leadership in passage of KM among schools (Ismail Noor, 2000; Ahmad, 2007). In view of this gap, the present study aims to discuss the effect of authentic leadership on knowledge management practices among secondary school teachers in Kedah in Malaysia. In particular, the study focus is:

1. Evaluate the degree of authentic leadership among the principals in secondary schools in Kedah.
2. Assess the level of knowledge management in the midst of teachers.
3. Identify which authentic leadership measures knowledge management practices in schools.

This research work is noteworthy in a number of ways. Theoretically, it would add to the developing body of literature on educational leadership, in that it would offer empirical evidence of the connection between authentic leadership and KM, and the Malaysian setting. Although the concept of authentic leadership has already received considerable attention in the business and corporate sphere, little research has been done in the context of schools, especially in the Southeast Asian region. Practically, the study will provide insights to policymakers and school leaders who aim at enhancing KM as one of the efforts in improving schools.

By noting the importance of authentic leadership in the development of knowledge-based culture, the research could be used to establish effective leadership training programs, professional development, and policy frameworks with an aim of improving the effectiveness of schools. In conclusion, authentic leadership, along with knowledge management, could be regarded as two interlocking concepts that hold a great deal of significance to educational organizations. This research attempt through the investigation of the relations between them in secondary schools in Kedah aims at shedding some light on how authenticity in leadership can be used as a factor that drives sharing of knowledge, constant learning and organizational innovation; the three factors that organizations need to undertake in order to be ready to face the challenges of the twenty first century in education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic Leadership in Education

Authentic leadership has become a major phenomenon in leadership studies on how a leader can act in a self-aware, integrity and transparent manner (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), authentic leadership is composed of four primary dimensions, which include the following: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. In contrast to transformational leadership, which focuses on vision and need to establish charisma, authentic leadership is based on ethical principles and developing real relationships, leading to the development of trust (Gardner et al., 2011). Authentic leadership is especially applicable in the sector of education where schools are moral and social institutions that are made possible by trust and cooperation. It has been reported that when principals are authentic, teachers are more committed, satisfied and trust the leadership (Begley, 2006; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Tsemach, 2014). The authentic leaders also promote openness, psychological safety within a school district where teachers are left free to take risks, innovate and share professional practices (Walumbwa et al., 2010). Current research in Asia points to the increased significance of authentic leadership in the school settings, as well. As an example, it was observed that the authentic leadership positively affected organizational commitment and teacher motivation in the Malaysian schools elsewhere (Hassan and Silong, 2008). With similar degree of agreement, Wang and Hsieh (2013) documented that a leadership practice that is authentic led to higher organizational citizenship behaviors among Taiwan teachers. This implies that authentic leadership cuts across cross-cultural dimensions and can be used in collectivistic cultures such as the Malaysian culture.

Authentic leadership has emerged as a critical paradigm in leadership studies, focusing on leaders' ability to act with self-awareness, integrity, and transparency (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Walumbwa et al. (2008) defined authentic leadership as comprising four main dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Unlike transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision and charisma, authentic leadership is rooted in ethical values and the creation of genuine relationships that foster trust (Gardner et al., 2011).

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In the field of education, authentic leadership is particularly relevant as schools are moral and social institutions that thrive on trust and collaboration. Research indicates that principals who exhibit authenticity enhance teacher commitment, satisfaction, and trust in leadership (Begley, 2006; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Tsemach, 2014). Authentic leaders foster openness and psychological safety, encouraging teachers to take risks, innovate, and share professional practices (Walumbwa et al., 2010).

Recent studies in Asia also highlight the growing importance of authentic leadership in school contexts. For instance, Hassan and Silong (2008) found that authentic leadership positively influenced teacher motivation and organizational commitment in Malaysian schools. Similarly, Wang and Hsieh (2013) reported that authentic leadership practices in Taiwan fostered greater organizational citizenship behaviors among teachers. These findings suggest that authentic leadership transcends cultural contexts and is applicable to collectivist societies such as Malaysia.

Why Do Authentic Leadership and KM have a Relationship?

It has been established that leadership plays a major role in the efficacy of KM (Donate & de Pablo, 2015). Leaders are one of the key people who impact KM through the process of shaping the organizational culture, promoting collaboration and supplying resources to the knowledge processes. In practice, it has been established that the leadership style has a direct influence on KM initiatives (Singh, 2008). In schools, the role of principals is comparable as they foster trusting relationships, professional discourse and the ability to align the knowledge on an official basis (Schechter, 2008). Included in that are authentic leadership, which also complements KM due to trust and transparency. Relational transparency by leaders helps in fostering an environment in which teachers feel free to share knowledge without the fear of getting exploited or chastised (Hassan & Ahmed, 2011). The balanced processing is another element of authentic leadership that guarantees that leaders appreciate the views of others and promote collaborative problem solving that is part and parcel of KM (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This is evidenced empirically. According to Zhou and Liu (2016), authentic leadership had positive effects on the knowledge sharing behaviors in Chinese organizations. In Pakistan, Javed et al. (2017) found that culturally relevant leadership led to the creation of knowledge through trust and commitment amongst the employees. These results imply that authentic leadership is not a hypothetical tool but also in practice, an enabler of KM in diverse organizational settings.

Authentic Leadership and KM in the Learning Set-Up

Although the findings on authentic leadership and KM have been done mainly in corporate sector, recent studies in education have started to investigate this nexus. As an example, Ng (2017) revealed that authentic leadership exercised by the school principals was associated with greater effectiveness in facilitating collaborative knowledge sharing among the teachers in Singapore. In the same manner, Khalid and Ahmad (2019) have concluded that authentic leadership in Malaysian schools has a significant relationship with the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs), which is a principle application of KM in the educational sector. What is more, trust, a key result of authentic leadership, was found to mediate the relationship between leadership and KM. According to Dirks and Ferrin (2002), when there is trust with the leaders then there is improved exchange of knowledge and cooperation. Schools trust also allows teachers to freely exchange teaching materials, experiences, and difficulties so as to enhance communal competencies (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Due to the establishment of trust, authentic leadership thereby contributes, albeit indirectly, to KM processes.

Research Gap

There is increasingly more interest about the connection between authentic leadership and KM in Malaysian schools, yet there is little exploration of it. The theory is that most Malaysian researches focused on transformational or instructional leadership (Ismail Noor, 2000; Ahmad, 2007), and there has been limited empirical study of authentic leadership in the educational field. Also limited information is available in regard to how authentic leadership influences the KM practices within the state of Kedah which is characterized by variety of socio-economic as well as the urban and rural school contexts. Filling this gap is vital because KM has the potential to nullify the gap and improve levels of education in various contexts. Conceptual Framework Based on the literature, this paper develops a conceptualization of authentic leadership as an element of determining KM practices in schools. The proposed framework assumes that authentic principals as self-aware, transparent, balanced processors, and morally upright individuals establish conditions that enhance trust, cooperation and openness. Such states, subsequently, promote KM among educational workers, such as knowledge sharing, collaborative learning, and innovation.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature establishes authentic leadership as a leadership style grounded in ethical values and relational transparency, which has been shown to positively influence teacher trust and organizational outcomes. Simultaneously, KM is recognized as a critical mechanism for sustaining innovation and learning in schools. Empirical evidence indicates that authentic leadership fosters conditions conducive to KM, yet research in the Malaysian school context remains limited. This study thus seeks to fill this gap by empirically examining the influence of authentic leadership on KM practices among secondary school teachers in Kedah, Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to investigate the influence of authentic leadership on knowledge management practices among secondary school teachers in Kedah, Malaysia. The design was chosen as it allows for the collection of standardized data from a large population and facilitates statistical testing of relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sampling

The population of this study comprised secondary school teachers in the state of Kedah, Malaysia. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from both urban and rural schools. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a minimum of 370 respondents was required; however, 400 teachers were targeted to increase reliability and account for non-responses.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire consisting of three sections:

Section A: Demographic information (gender, teaching experience, school location, academic qualifications).

Section B: Authentic leadership, measured using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) developed by Walumbwa et al. (2008), covering self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing.

Section C: Knowledge management practices, adapted from Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model, including knowledge sharing, collaborative learning, innovation, and professional dialogue.

A 10-point Likert scale ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* to *10 = strongly agree* was applied.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by senior academics in educational leadership. A pilot study with 40 teachers from non-sampled schools was conducted. Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the Kedah State Education Department. Questionnaires were distributed in person and via online forms, ensuring voluntary participation and anonymity.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 and AMOS/SmartPLS for advanced analysis. The following statistical procedures were performed:

1. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) for demographic data.
2. Pearson's correlation to examine relationships between authentic leadership and knowledge management practices.
3. Multiple regression analysis to test the predictive power of authentic leadership on knowledge management practices.
4. ANOVA to test for significant differences based on demographic variables (e.g., urban vs rural schools).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary with the right to withdraw at any stage.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 392 secondary school teachers participated in the study, yielding a response rate of 98%. Of these, 62% were female and 38% male. The majority of respondents (47%) had between 6–15 years of teaching experience, while 29% had more than 16 years, and 24% had less than 5 years. Regarding school location, 56% were from urban schools and 44% from rural schools.

Descriptive Analysis

The mean score for authentic leadership was 7.85 (SD = 1.21), indicating a generally high level of authentic leadership as perceived by teachers. Among the four dimensions, relational transparency scored the highest (M = 8.02, SD = 1.19), followed by self-awareness (M = 7.92, SD = 1.16), internalized moral perspective (M = 7.80, SD = 1.22), and balanced processing (M = 7.66, SD = 1.25).

For knowledge management practices, the overall mean was 7.72 (SD = 1.18). The highest-scoring practice was knowledge sharing (M = 7.89, SD = 1.10), followed by collaborative learning (M = 7.76, SD = 1.14), professional dialogue (M = 7.70, SD = 1.15), and innovation (M = 7.53, SD = 1.20).

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation results indicated a strong positive relationship between authentic leadership and knowledge management practices ($r = .63, p < .001$). All four dimensions of authentic leadership demonstrated significant positive correlations with knowledge management practices, with relational transparency showing the strongest association ($r = .61, p < .001$).

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of authentic leadership dimensions on knowledge management practices. The regression model was statistically significant ($F(4, 387) = 56.32, p < .001$), explaining 42.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .428$) in knowledge management practices.

Relational transparency emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .34, p < .001$).

Self-awareness ($\beta = .28, p < .001$) and internalized moral perspective ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) also had significant positive effects.

Balanced processing showed a weaker but still positive effect ($\beta = .14, p < .05$).

Differences by Demographics

ANOVA results revealed no significant differences in knowledge management practices based on gender. However, teachers from urban schools reported significantly higher levels of knowledge management practices ($M = 7.91$) compared to those in rural schools ($M = 7.50$), $F(1, 390) = 4.76, p < .05$. Teaching experience did not significantly influence perceptions of authentic leadership or knowledge management.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that authentic leadership significantly influences knowledge management practices among secondary school teachers in Kedah, Malaysia. This aligns with earlier studies (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio & Gardner, 2005), which emphasize that authentic leaders foster trust, openness, and collaboration—key enablers of effective knowledge sharing and organizational learning.

Authentic Leadership as a Driver of Knowledge Management

The regression analysis revealed that 42.8% of the variance in knowledge management practices was explained by authentic leadership, underscoring the critical role of school leaders in shaping teacher collaboration and innovation. This supports Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) knowledge-creation theory, which argues that leadership is essential in facilitating knowledge conversion and utilization in organizations. In particular, relational transparency and self-awareness emerged as the strongest predictors. This indicates that principals who demonstrate openness, honesty, and self-reflection encourage teachers to share ideas and engage in collaborative dialogue without fear of judgment.

Relational Transparency and Teacher Collaboration

The dimension of relational transparency had the most substantial impact on knowledge management practices. This finding echoes Wong and Cummings (2009), who found that leaders' openness fosters a climate of psychological safety, enabling employees to contribute knowledge more freely. In the school context, when principals model transparent communication, teachers are more likely to exchange teaching strategies, co-develop lesson plans, and embrace innovative practices.

Urban–Rural Differences in Knowledge Management

The study also revealed significant differences between urban and rural schools, with teachers in urban settings reporting higher levels of knowledge management practices. This may be attributed to greater access to resources, digital platforms, and professional networks in urban schools (Abdul Razak et al., 2016). For rural schools, limitations in technological infrastructure and fewer professional development opportunities may hinder knowledge sharing and collaborative practices. This suggests that policies should prioritize capacity-building initiatives in rural schools to bridge this gap.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, the results reinforce the view that authentic leadership provides a valuable framework for understanding knowledge-based processes in educational organizations. Unlike transactional or authoritarian leadership, authentic leadership nurtures trust, openness, and moral integrity, which are foundational for effective knowledge management (Ilies et al., 2005).

Practically, the findings highlight the importance of leadership development programs for school principals. Training that enhances leaders' self-awareness, transparency, and ethical decision-making could indirectly improve knowledge-sharing cultures among teachers. Additionally, the results suggest that ministries of education and policymakers should provide tailored support to rural schools by strengthening digital infrastructure, peer-learning networks, and leadership mentoring.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the study offers valuable insights, it has several limitations. First, it relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future studies could adopt mixed-method approaches, incorporating interviews or classroom observations to provide deeper insights. Second, the study focused only on Kedah; comparative studies across different Malaysian states or Southeast Asian contexts would enrich the generalizability of the findings. Finally, longitudinal research could track how authentic leadership influences knowledge management over time, especially in relation to student achievement outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This paper has already discussed the effect of authentic leadership on the knowledge management practices of teachers in secondary schools in Kedah, Malaysia. The findings identified that there is a significant and positive relationship and that authentic leadership explains 42.8 per cent of the variance in knowledge management practices. Relational transparency and self-awareness were ranked the highest predictor dimensions of authentic leadership, which implies that effective knowledge-sharing, innovation, and professional dialogue among teachers occur when school leaders are open, transparent, and self-aware leaders. The study also pointed out disparities in urban areas and rural areas whereby teachers in urban schools practised more on knowledge management in their schools as compared to rural teachers. This indicates structural/contextual variables that could constrain efficacy of knowledge-sharing in the rural context. On the whole, the results suggest that authentic leadership can be regarded both as the leadership style and a strategic enabler of organizational learning and innovation in schools. With the help of trust, integrity and collaboration, authentic leaders establish the environment where continuous professional growth and the exchange of knowledge could take place.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

For Educational Leaders

This study emphasizes the importance of structured and ongoing professional development for school principals and administrators, with a strong focus on authentic leadership competencies. Core dimensions such as transparency, ethical decision-making, and self-awareness are not only fundamental to effective leadership but also essential in cultivating a school culture grounded in trust and integrity. To further strengthen knowledge management practices, leaders are encouraged to institutionalize collaborative mechanisms including professional learning communities (PLCs), peer mentoring systems, and cross-school networking initiatives. These platforms can facilitate the exchange of expertise, promote reflective practices, and foster innovation, thereby enhancing organizational learning and overall school performance.

For Policy Makers

At the policy level, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need to reduce disparities between urban and rural schools in terms of access to resources, technology, and leadership training. The Ministry of Education should prioritize equitable allocation of resources, provide robust technological infrastructure, and expand training opportunities tailored to the specific needs of rural contexts. Moreover, authentic leadership principles should be systematically embedded into national leadership frameworks to ensure their consistent application in leadership evaluation, promotion pathways, and capacity-building initiatives. Such alignment between policy and practice can reinforce sustainable leadership cultures, thereby enabling schools to effectively manage knowledge and improve educational outcomes.

Future Research Directions

While this study provides important insights into the relationship between authentic leadership and knowledge management, further research is needed to explore these dynamics across different educational contexts and levels of schooling. Comparative studies involving urban and rural schools, as well as longitudinal research designs, could provide a deeper understanding of how authentic leadership influences knowledge-sharing behaviors over time. Additionally, future studies may examine mediating factors such as organizational trust, communication patterns, and digital literacy to expand the theoretical and practical implications of this field.

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