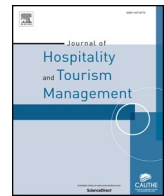


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# The effect of leader competencies on knowledge sharing and job performance: Social capital theory

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## ABSTRACT

Examining leadership from a competency perspective allows scholars to understand different dimensions of leader qualities and capacities. From this perspective, our study, based on social capital theory, proposed and tested a model that embraced the concepts of leader competency, knowledge sharing, employee job performance, and employee loyalty in the context of expatriate general managers. The study shows leader competencies are critical for promoting knowledge sharing and enhancing employee job performance. Both knowledge sharing and employee job performance are found to have a direct effect on employee loyalty.

## 1. Introduction

Well-performing service employees can be an asset and leaders play a critical role in influencing employees' performance and the organization's success. This is no exception to hotel organizations faced with increasing competition in the market place (e.g., [Airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com)). Given the significant impact of leaders, numerous studies examined leader competencies (e.g., [Shum, Gatling, & Shoemaker, 2018](#)). Key research questions such as “what are the required qualities and skills of competent leaders?” and “what are the outcomes of leader competencies?” have surfaced and drawn attention, proliferating research in this field.

Examining leadership from a competency perspective allows scholars to understand different dimensions of leader qualities and capacities. Although many studies (e.g., [Han, Seo, Yeo, & Yoon, 2016](#); [Masa'deh, Obeidat, & Tarhini, 2016](#)) examined leadership style (e.g., transformational leadership), much less attention has been given to leader competencies in the hotel industry. Our study, by examining leader competencies in the hotel industry, will identify a set of required skills for hotel leaders and guide the hotel industry to develop and assess leaders.

Knowledge sharing is recognized as an important social asset for organizations that improve job performance and enhance organizational success ([Masa'deh et al., 2016](#); [Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nielsen, 2016](#)). We view that a leader plays a crucial part in creating and nurturing a knowledge sharing culture in the organization. When

knowledge is shared, inexperienced or newly hired employees will have access to intellectual resources and gain job-related know-hows, which can lead to better job performance. In the hotel industry where services are produced and consumed simultaneously, and thus, there is little room for errors, management of knowledge, especially sharing of knowledge, is essential for preventing service failures. Our study examines whether knowledge sharing positively affects service employees' job performance and loyalty to the organization and whether knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between leader competencies and employee job performance.

The significance of our study is trifold. The first significance is related to the study's examination of leader competencies and their link to knowledge sharing. Many previous studies examined knowledge sharing at a firm level such as an inter-firm relationship ([Hsu, 2012](#)). Less is known about the antecedents of knowledge sharing at an individual level. Recently, [Sveiby \(2007\)](#) and [Rahman, Mannan, Hossain, Zaman, and Hassan \(2018\)](#) called for a need to investigate the role of managers/leaders in creating and shaping a knowledge sharing environment. Our study responds to these calls and attempts to explore the role of leaders in knowledge sharing. The second significance is the study's contribution to the literature by incorporating various areas of study and integrating different elements into one model. Our model is based on the studies of leadership, knowledge management, and services marketing and integrates well-established constructs such as leader competencies, knowledge sharing, service employee's job

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performance and loyalty. The last significance of the study is concerned with its treatment of knowledge sharing as a mediator. Our study views knowledge sharing mediates the effect of leader competencies on employee job performance. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to examine whether knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between leader competencies and employee job performance in the hospitality industry. The finding will cast light on the importance of knowledge sharing and understand the mechanism by which leaders influence employees in terms of job performance.

## 2. Conceptual background

### 2.1. Leader competencies

Based on prior research (Asree, Zain, & Rizal Razalli, 2010; Boyatzis & Ratti, 2009), our study defines leader competency as a leader's knowledge, ability, skills, and behavioral capabilities to perform the job. This approach has emerged as one of the dominant models in the extents of leadership assessment and development (Rankin, 2002). In this regard, competency is viewed as a critical resource for the leader to possess and utilize. This approach is different from leadership style in that it focuses on the leader's performance capabilities as well as skills and abilities instead of the manner in which a leader influences the followers. Therefore, one of the advantages associated with the competency approach is that it allows organizations to identify, develop, and assess a set of appropriate skills, abilities, and performance capabilities (i.e., behavioral measures) required for the leaders to perform the given job.

Literature shows different types of competencies pertinent to leadership (Billings et al., 2019; Boyatzis, 2009; Mau, 2017). Boyatzis and Ratti (2009) suggest that three competencies are required of successful leaders: cognitive, emotional and social intelligence competencies. Cognitive intelligence competency involves a leader's ability to assess the situation, understand the cause-and-effect, and recognize patterns in random events. Emotional intelligence competency refers to a leader's capability of understanding his own emotion, recognizing its impact, and managing the emotion. Social intelligence competency is concerned with a leader's ability to get along with others and understand social dynamics that influence the situation, often known as people skill or relational skill.

Research in management (Sengupta, Venkatesh, & Sinha, 2013) suggests three dimensions of competency be considered for determining a leader's effectiveness: person, job, and role. Person-focused competency refers to a leader's value, motivation, attitude, and other personal traits. Job-related competency is concerned with whether a leader is efficient at fulfilling the tasks associated with the job. Role-focused competency is related with social context in which a job is undertaken. In summary, many competency-related studies indicate that (a) an integrative approach embracing multiple dimensions of competency is beneficial for understanding and capturing their impact, and (b) one of the critical elements of competency is concerned with a leader's social relationship with others as indicated in prior research and referred to as social intelligence competency or social resource (Boyatzis & Ratti, 2009; Lustri, Miura, & Takahashi, 2007).

### 2.2. Social capital and leader competencies

Studies (Chang & Hsu, 2016; Hitt & Duane, 2002; Huang, 2016; Leana & Van Buren, 1999; McElroy, Jorna, & van Engelen, 2006) have used social capital theory to understand and explain various phenomena across disciplines including sociology, political science, education, and management.

Coleman (1990) views capital, regardless of the type, is created when there is a change in the existing structure in the process of value creation and the changes facilitate positive relational outcomes. In the management area, Leana and Van Buren (1999, p. 538) define social

capital as a resource reflecting the character of social relations within the firm. They suggest social capital is realized when organizational members have common goals and build trust. Based on this perspective, we confine our use of the term social capital to internal ties between a leader and the followers (instead of external ties) and ties among the organization's various work units (Hitt & Duane, 2002). The central premise of social capital theory is that the network of relationships becomes a critical resource for the members of the community, benefiting the members for being associated with the community (Chen & Lovvorn, 2011; Hitt & Duane, 2002).

One of the reasons why social capital theory has received a lot of attention across disciplines is that social capital positively affects both an individual's performance and the organization's performance. Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) who examined a linkage between social capital and benefits in career advancement report that employees who have more contacts at higher organizational levels have better access to organizational information and career sponsorship, which in turn leads to such benefits as higher salary and promotion. Our study borrows the concept of social capital (Coleman, 1990; Strömberg, Eriksson, Ahlstrom, Bergman, & Delleve, 2017) and views relational ties between a leader and the followers as critical resources for the leader in leading the organization. Therefore, one of the leader competencies our study examines is concerned with a leader's relationship with the employees (i.e., person-related competency).

Another dimension we examine in our study involves a leader's competency in performing the job (i.e., job-related). Job-related competency is concerned with a leader's capabilities in solving problems, making appropriate decisions, using innovation, setting the vision, and managing changes. This dimension incorporates several elements identified in prior research: cognitive intelligence (Boyatzis & Ratti, 2009), abilities and knowledge (McClelland, 1973), declarative knowledge and procedural skills (Spencer, 1997), and job-related competency (Sengupta et al., 2013). Because there are many different categorizations of leader competencies in prior research, we focus on two broad dimensions for the sake of a parsimonious model: (a) job-related leader competencies and (b) person-related leader competencies. This simplified categorization will allow us to consider all different elements.

### 2.3. Knowledge sharing

Knowledge is viewed as an essential resource and asset for organizations. Sharing of knowledge among employees is crucial for achieving organizational efficiency (e.g., knowledge adoption, innovation). In the organizational context, knowledge is formed and sustained when workers create and share individual knowledge with other workers. Wang and Ahmed (2003) suggest a couple of ideal contexts within which organizational knowledge is shaped and shared. The first context is related with the nature of the relationship or the organizational environment. Knowledge sharing is encouraged when the organization has characteristics of trust, empathy, openness to knowledge sharing, and accessibility to help (Hsu, 2012). The second context involves managerial policies and actions. Policies that support creation and sharing of knowledge will help employees engage in such behavior.

A review of the literature (Hsu, 2008; Lee, Park, & Lee, 2015) suggests that organizations capitalizing on the facilitation of knowledge sharing reap benefits including improved individuals' and the organization's performance, increased amount of collective knowledge at the organizational level, gained competencies, and innovativeness.

### 2.4. Conceptual framework

As competition in the hotel industry becomes global, advanced expatriate GM's capabilities are needed to achieve competitive advantage. Therefore, what are the factors of expatriate GM and how these capabilities are shared within the organization has become an important

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