



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN ORGANISATIONS**

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(Human Resource Development)**

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Please tick (  )

Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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# **THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN ORGANISATIONS**

**NURQHADIYA BINTI ABDUL KADIR**

This project is submitted  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
Bachelor of Science with Honours  
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Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK  
(2020)

The project entitled '**THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN ORGANISATIONS**' was prepared by Nurqhadiya Binti Abdul Kadir and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development).

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to review the existing literature on thought leadership in organisations and to determine the primary subjects researched, the subtopic or themes, methodology used, and the geographical area undertaken, to bridge the gap in comprehending and defines plus characterizes thought leaderships in organizations, to addresses a major void in the literature, and to date there are lack of studies that narrow down the focus to thought leadership specifically in organisational context. Other than, this study was held to answer these questions such as what are the issues connected with organizational thought leadership? What topics related to thought relationship that gain popularity throughout the 10 years and what not? And what can be proposed to future researcher in the context of thought leadership in organizations? This study uses Scopus and Google Scholar to comprehensively review 360 papers released between 2011-2020 with an objective of identifying key themes in the literature. The issues connected with organizational thought leadership would be on thought leadership competencies, thought leadership comprehension and thought leadership practices. On the other hand, topics related to thought leadership in organizations that gain popularity throughout the 10 years are understanding thought leadership at 66% and also identifying thought leadership at 83% within the 12 reviewed papers from 2009-2020. One research title suggestion for future researcher in this field is “Exploring Thought Leaders Competencies in Organization” in the context of Malaysia.

## ABSTRAK

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji literatur yang ada mengenai kepemimpinan pemikiran dalam organisasi dan menentukan subjek utama yang diteliti, subtopik atau tema, metodologi yang digunakan, dan tempat geografi yang dilakukan, untuk merapatkan jurang dalam memahami dan mendefinisikan serta mencirikan kepemimpinan pemikiran dalam organisasi, untuk mengatasi kekosongan besar dalam literatur, dan hingga kini terdapat kekurangan kajian yang mengecilkan fokus kepada kepemimpinan pemikiran khususnya dalam konteks organisasi. Selain daripada itu, kajian ini dijalankan untuk menjawab persoalan-persoalan seperti apakah isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan kepemimpinan pemikiran organisasi? topik apa yang berkaitan dengan hubungan pemikiran yang mendapat populariti sepanjang 10 tahun dan apa yang tidak? Dan apa yang dapat dicadangkan kepada penyelidik masa depan dalam konteks kepemimpinan pemikiran dalam organisasi? Kajian ini menggunakan Scopus dan Google Scholar untuk mengkaji 360 kertas kajian secara menyeluruh yang dikeluarkan antara 2011-2020 dengan objektif untuk mengenal pasti tema utama dalam literatur. Isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan kepemimpinan pemikiran organisasi adalah mengenai kecekapan kepemimpinan pemikiran, pemahaman kepemimpinan pemikiran dan amalan kepemimpinan pemikiran. Selain itu, topik yang berkaitan dengan kepemimpinan pemikiran dalam organisasi yang mendapat populariti sepanjang 10 tahun adalah memahami kepemimpinan pemikiran pada 66% dan juga mengenal pasti kepemimpinan pemikiran pada 83% dalam 12 kertas kajian yang dikaji dari 2009-2020. Salah satu cadangan tajuk kajian untuk penyelidik masa depan dalam bidang ini adalah "Meneroka Kompetensi Pemimpin Pemikiran dalam Organisasi" dalam konteks Malaysia.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

First mention of the term “thought leadership” was in 1994 as a business jargon and use of a word to refer to someone who had brilliant ideas that their industry deemed as valuable. Described as a major departure from traditional leadership, thought leadership is “the championing of new ideas rather than anything to do with managing people or helping a group achieve a goal.”, (McCrimmon, 2005, p. 1064). As for Mignon van Halderen and Kym Kettler-Paddock (2013), they describe thought leadership as “The action of promoting thought-provoking viewpoints that reframe the way customers think about their key issues, helping them toward new insights and solutions.” There is a fine line between thought leadership and traditional leadership. The latter asserts dominance over others and can differ in style including charismatic altruistic, transformative, and order. Regardless of the organizational structure, some type of conventional leadership is indispensable (McCrimmon, 2005).

Studies on thought leadership are limited in number as the studies are still relatively a new field in the context of leadership. Most recent studies regarding thought leadership focuses on understanding what thought leadership is, to become a thought leader and master the ideal definition of a thought leader by developing model and training on how to be a thought leader that shows desired qualities. Moreover, most writings done by authors either concentrate on how to become a thought leader, or thinking habits (Denise Brosseau, 2013; McCrimmon, 2005; Vanden Heuval, 2010; Badings, 2008; Crainer & Dear-love, 1999; Kurtzman, 1997). Even so, many studies on this may differ in their findings as they are affected by demographic differences, perceptions, and culture. One of the studies of thought leadership in Malaysia has been done to

better understand thought leadership in the service industry (Hee & Ying, 2019) and a review of thought leadership in the education industry, focusing on education moving towards the beginning of the fourth Industrial Revolution (Hee & Vimalathithan, 2019).

### **Objectives**

- i. To review the existing literature on thought leadership in organisations and to determine the primary subjects researched, the subtopic or themes, methodology used, and the geographical area undertaken.
- ii. To bridge the gap in comprehending and defines plus characterizes thought leaderships in organizations.
- iii. To addresses a major void in the literature, to date there are lack of studies that narrow down the focus to thought leadership specifically in organisational context.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What are the issues connected with organizational thought leadership?
- ii. What topic related to thought relationship that gain popularity throughout the 10 years and what not?
- iii. What can be proposed to future researcher in the context of thought leadership in organizations?

## LIMITATIONS

Considering systematic review is not a common method in doing research yet especially for undergraduate students, there are few limitations in this study that hinders the process to come up with a proper and systematic Systematic Review. One of the limitations is the lack of knowledge in conducting this study. The author is an undergraduate student and due to the recent outbreak of COVID-19, the author was unable to proceed with data collection for supposedly qualitative study to fulfil the requirement for graduating. Hence, the author decided to pursue Systematic Literature Review instead because data collection is using desktop study.

Other than that, usually, at least two authors are required to select and screen the papers in order to confirm that the same papers are related to the topic. However, the author for this study only did the process on its own. Moreover, the databases used for this study are Google Scholar and Scopus only because those are the available databases to the author. Other database like Web of Science may have more related papers on the topic which are not available in the other two databases.

Next, the author also limits the search to open access only and excluded any papers required subscriptions. Some papers that are related to the topic needed subscription in order to access. Hence, without those papers, this study may not be able to properly represent the whole literature regarding the topics. Due to these limitations, uncertainty by reader can be answered for example the reasons as to why the reviewed paper were only 12 out of overall 360 papers.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The author undertook a comprehensive review of 360 papers released between 2011-2020 with an objective of identifying key themes in the literature. For current research, three broad areas on thought leaderships were Thought Leadership Competencies, Thought Leadership Comprehension, and Thought Leadership Practices. These issues were further broken down into the following subjects:

- Understanding Thought Leadership
- Comparing Thought Leadership
- Identifying Thought Leaders
- How to become a Thought Leader
- Framework/Theories of Thought Leadership

**Understanding Thought Leadership:** Over the year, many researchers have their own definition of what thought leadership is. Thought leadership can be described as a consultant or a specialist in their field of expertise where they are seen as the “go-to-people” because they provide relevant and trusted source of information in their area of expert. Other than that, Thought Leaders are also known as innovator or thought-provoker where they provide innovative ideas or viewpoints which inspires other peoples and provides solution to a problem in an organisation. Van Heuval & Badings (2013), define thought leadership as “the successful promotion of a company’s unique POV, insights, or solution which leads to significant customer engagement”. In an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Rakoditsoe (2016), the researcher has



come up with a summary (Table 1) on the common terms that mainly found in the definition of thought leaderships.

Table 1

*Common terms in defining Thought Leadership.*

Common Terms	Author
<b>Expert on the field, knowledgeable</b>	(Goldsmith, 2008; Beck, 2012; Brosseau, 2014)
<b>Build relationships</b>	(Beck, 2008; McCrimmon, 2015)
<b>Aware of trend, acquire knowledge</b>	(Zuk, 2009; Beck, 2012; Tyler, 2005; McCrimmon, 2015)
<b>Information sharing, Learning</b>	(Tropf, 2015; Zuk, 2009; van Stam, 2013)
<b>Build Alliance, accessibility</b>	(Tropf, 2015; van Stam, 2013; van Halderen Tyler, 2013)
<b>Creative / innovative</b>	(Tropf, 2015; van Stam, 2013; van Halderen Tyler, 2013; Goldsmith, 2008; Brosseau, 2014)
<b>Creates value</b>	(Tropf, 2015; Tyler, 2005)

Source: (Rakoditsoe, 2016)

**Comparing Thought Leadership with Traditional Leadership:** Thought leadership is not like the traditional leadership. In McCrimmon (2005) (as cited in Alhaddi. 2014) work, thought leadership is the opportunity to encourage innovative ideas; an initiative rather than an organisation's position or role. Unlike traditional leadership where leader can be distinguished by their position or role, thought leadership on the other hand can be anyone in the organization as long as they possess ground-breaking ways of thinking and has the ability to champion new ideas has already exhibit thought leadership qualities. Thought leadership is not easily monopolized and non-hierarchical compared to the traditional leader where it requires one for an organization to run however, it begins with the light of a fresh concept and finishes with the preparation to bring the idea into action. Until the implementation process, a thought leader continues to

promote new ideas. Hee & Ying, (2019) in their studies have come up with a table that depicts the differences between traditional leadership and thought leadership as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*The differences between traditional leadership and thought leadership*

<b>Traditional Leadership</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Thought Leadership</b>
A position or role, people management or leading group to accomplish objectives	<b>Key Characteristics</b>	Fostering new ideas, continuous improvement and continuous innovation
Is granted power over others, needs other people to be governed	<b>Degree of authority</b>	Unnecessary
Differ in charismatic, altruistic, transformational and commanding style.	<b>Styles of leadership</b>	Egalitarian, ephemeral, non-hierarchical
Emphasize possession of knowledge	<b>Sharing of Knowledge</b>	An open exchange of information and expertise
Solve problems as they arise, and rely on signs to avoid problems	<b>Problem solving</b>	Try to identify the root causes of problems and find better options from the current main alternative

Source: (Hee & Ying, 2019)

**Identifying Thought Leaders:** As mentioned before, thought leaders and traditional leaders are not the same in sense of the key characteristic defining them, the degree of authority, the styles of leadership, sharing of knowledge and how they solve problems. There are also ways on how to distinguish thought leaders from the traditional leaders. PRSA (2009), to distinguish a thought leader must behave in certain ways (as cited in Rakoditsoe, 2016) and this can be seen through these six elements which are 1. *Knowledgeable*, where thought leaders provide knowledge about their profession or other subjects, they are experts and they are able to share

with others and have them recreate their way of thinking and seeing things; 2. *Aware*, Thought leaders are mindful of the developments in their career and are always dedicated to being conscious of their setting; 3. *Interesting*, Thought leaders are enthusiastic about their area, so every time they talk about it they encourage the next person; 4. *Innovative*, Thought leaders introduce new way of things in the people with whom they interact to create creative thinking to solve issues; 5. *Engaged*, Thought leaders initiate discussions, follow them through and inspire people to take part, hang around to promote the conversation; and 6. *Accessible*, Thought leaders are always ready to give advice and participate. They are featured in numerous forums, so that customers can reach them.

**How to Become a Thought Leader:** Just like traditional leader, thought leadership can be developed. However, to become a thought leader it will not happen overnight as Fallon (2016) stated thought leader “needs experience and credibility overtime” (as cited in Hee & Ying, 2019). Gibbins-Klein, (2011) created her own thought leadership framework and established four main qualities (REAL) that, if accomplished, would provide individuals and companies a higher probability of being recognized as a leader in their industry. Basically, REAL stands for “Reach, Engagement, Authority and Longevity”. “Reach” usually entails recognizing aspiring customers or customers among the society. The aim of this strategy is to gain a success story. In order to do so, thought leaders should engage and go to places where prospect customers may be. Being at these kinds of events increases the probability of being noticed – and customers usually will want to purchase from people they are familiar with. It's not enough to just be known though. Thought leader need to be liked enough to trust, and this is called as "engagement" by creating one-to-one, personalized communications with them, is the best way to achieve it. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, this can be done through social networking with key individuals interacting on Twitter,

LinkedIn, Facebook and other tools with contacts and followers. The third dimension of the REAL framework means that thought leader should become known in the field as a legitimate authority. That is probably the most critical part: Authority is what makes thought leader the most trustworthy brand and helps thought leader to stand out in the industry. Finally, it's important how thought leader push these ideas into the market. Longevity relies on keeping the ideas long after thought leader leave a conference or long after someone has heard any of the content. Longevity means the thought leader, for the right reasons, stay in the minds of people.

**Framework/Theories of Thought Leadership:** Throughout the year, many researchers or authors have developed a framework or theories to as a guideline for future researcher to use to further study about thought leadership. From framework or theory, readers can better understand about the topic from the elements stated in it. Thought leaders are unique in the way that their perspective is different; first they should express their opinions, and then see if their products and services can shape the world better. Van Halderen and Kettler-Paddock have created a planning model called the Thought Leadership Framework<sup>TM</sup> which allows businesses to express Thought Leadership with success. The comprehensive structure is split into four phases: “Diagnosis, Implementation, Thought Leadership Position and Business Result”.

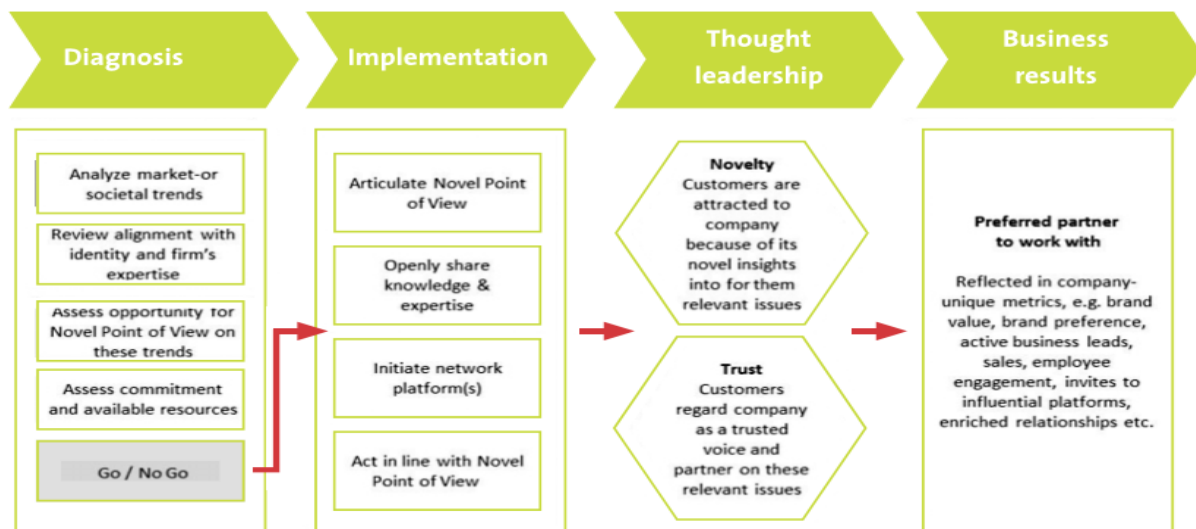


Figure 1. Thought Leadership Framework<sup>TM</sup>.

In the **Diagnosis** process, it discusses the opportunities of an organization to follow a good Thought Leadership. Companies are responsible for addressing four key questions as seen in Figure 1 describing their abilities, expertise, and commitment. This time usually acts as an analysis strategy for deciding whether to make a Go / No Go call. Next, the **Implementation** stage, after an organization completes the assessment test, it is believed that they are able to establish successful Thought Leadership. There are four steps to be observed for deployment. 1. "Articulating the Novel Point of View" comes first; in which the Thought Leadership (aspiring) company simply expresses its point of view to the expected business and society-and approaches to the urgent problems that need to be quickly interpreted. Next comes 2. the exchange of NPOV information to stakeholders. This gives the illusion that the organization has the resources and exact understanding to conduct the NPOV. It is then necessary 3. to implement a digital platform which tackles the NPOV. In this phenomenon, organizations are inviting experts, opinion leaders and key stakeholders to exchange, engage in dialog and continue improving the insights connecting the NPOV where possible. Finally, the corporations have to 4. behave according to their NPOV. Its identity, strategy and daily routines should be embedded and reflect the NPOV.

**Position of Thought Leadership:** Organisations hit certain levels by effectively passing through the fourth stages of Implementation. They are remembered by their NPOV and are trusted when behaving in accordance with it. **Business results:** Van Halderen et al ( 2013) indicated that Thought Leadership investments were: *“creates a new platform of differentiation in the market and raises the bar for competitors; brings closer alignment with the market because it anticipates customers’ needs for refreshing insights into issues important to them; and positions the company as the preferred business partner due to its new insights, plus associated products and services regarding their pressing issues”*(as cited in Young, 2013).

Similarly, the IT Services Marketing Association, commonly referred to as ITSMA, which is a multinational body with membership, has developed a distinct strategy paradigm based on their long history, knowledge and understanding in strategic leadership in the tech industry. The system encourages businesses in the early stages; to find and discuss solutions, to create a point of view and then to check them and then render the knowledge accessible. Young (2013) illustrated that the ITSMA framework and the one established by Van Halderen and Kettler-Paddock are mutually compatible, because ITSMA 's layout obviously varies between the structure's development and communication. In fact, the ITSMA model does not have a process evaluating Thought Leadership outcomes. Nonetheless, all structures are feasible, proven to work and could help the company planning to initiate Thought Leadership (Young, 2013).

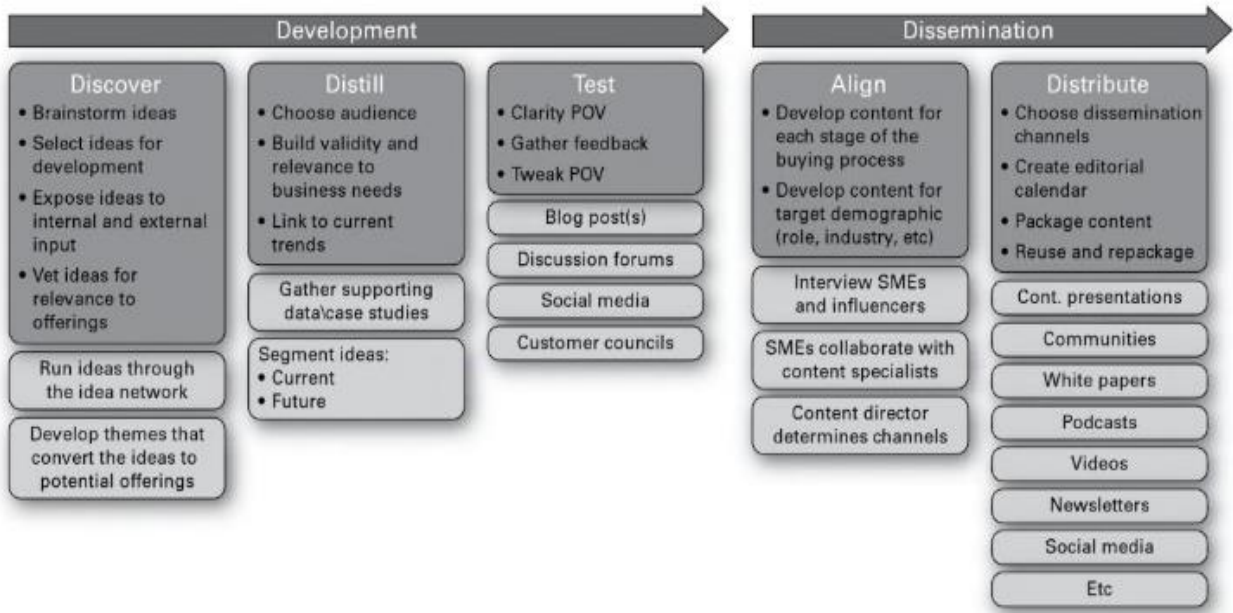


Figure 2. IT SMA's Thought Leadership Model.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This systematic review employed two main databases, namely Scopus and Google Scholar. The reason why the author chose those two databases are because those are available databases to the author during the process of reviewing. Google Scholar (GS), a widely used scholarly search tool on the internet, catalogues ranging from 2 to 100 million scholarly and grey literature papers. Google Scholar gathers information around the Web and is free to download. It has therefore attracted great attention as a method of searching for literature as needed by systematic studies, especially in searches for grey literature (Haddaway, Collins, Coughlin, & Kirk, 2015). Scopus is among peer-reviewed literature's largest abstract and citation databases. Out of 5000 publishers worldwide it gives more than 20,000. Scopus comprises a variety of subject areas, including agriculture, sociology, biology, and education.

In the first stage keywords used for the search method were identified. Similar and thought-leader-related keywords were included in previous work and thesaurus (see table 3).

Table 3

*Keywords used for the search process.*

<b>Database</b>	<b>Keywords Used</b>
<b>Scopus</b>	TITLE("thought-leadership*" OR "thought-leader*") AND ("Organi*ation*" OR "corporate*") =45 docs
<b>Google Scholar</b>	allintitle:"thought leadership" OR "thoughtleader" = 315

Source: Own Study