

Impact of Organizational Leadership Styles and Employee-Organization Relationship on Internal Reputation: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: *This paper proposes a conceptual framework that bridges the concept of internal reputation with organizational leadership and relationship perspectives using the lens of stakeholder theory. A cross-disciplinary literature review is carried out on positive organizational leadership styles, including transformational, authentic, and ethical leaderships, which predict internal reputation among employees, as well as the moderating function of employee-organization relationship in the said relationships. Four propositions are advanced from the review and an integrative conceptual framework is developed. The framework outlines leadership styles which practitioners, especially from the service sector, can consider to adopt in their organizations to enhance internal reputation perceptions on the basis of value creation. The proposed framework also advances the theoretical basis of effectively managing internal reputation from the stakeholder perspective.*

Keywords: Authentic leadership, Employee-organization relationship, Ethical leadership, Internal reputation, Transformational leadership

1. Introduction

Faced with an increasingly competitive and turbulent business environment, reputation management has become one of the top agendas for organizational leaders today to steer their organizations to survive and excel in such an environment. Contrary to conventional approaches which prioritize economic gains, there has been a rise in organizations' interest in addressing the aspirations and needs of stakeholders beyond shareholders and customers (Yohn, 2020). This focal shift has resulted in new challenges for organizational leaders, who must take into consideration the needs of multiple stakeholders when crafting critical decisions (Sanders et al., 2020). This is particularly true for decisions involving employees, whereby such decisions will affect the overall perception that employees have of the organization, that is internal reputation (Men & Stacks, 2013; Slabbert, 2016; Yohn, 2020).

Especially in industries characterized by a high volume of interactions between employees and external stakeholders, it is crucial that organizations possess favorable internal reputation due to the former's ability to influence reputation perceptions of the latter (Andersson, 2019; Carreras et al., 2014). Given the impact on the reputation of such organizations, it is fundamental that leaders address employees' needs in addition to the stakes of shareholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Zhu et al., 2014). Only when expectations are met and satisfied

will employees evaluate the organization positively, ultimately leading to positive interactions with external stakeholders. Nevertheless, despite repeated emphasis on the importance of gauging employees' perceptions (Fombrun, 2014; Freeman, 1984; Verhezen, 2015), the views of employees on organizational reputation remain relatively under-researched (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2014; Özbağ & Çekmecelioglu, 2022; Wæraas & Dahle, 2020).

With internal reputation highlighted as the focal construct of the study, the perspective of employees as internal stakeholders naturally comes to the forefront. Stakeholder theory underlines the need for organizations to be managed by addressing and meeting the needs of not just shareholders, but all stakeholders to achieve organizational goals (Freeman, 1984; Phillips et al., 2003). The relational school of thought of the stakeholder theory acknowledges that employees may have a different set of expectations as compared to other stakeholders of the organization (Chun, 2005). While there has been an abundance of research on organizational reputation from management and communication scholars (Kanto et al., 2016; Pires & Trez, 2018; Sontaite-Petkeviciene, 2019), literature on internal reputation is comparably minimal due to the predominant focus on the perspectives of external stakeholders.

A leader's role in managing organizational reputation is indisputable. Positive forms of leadership approaches began taking the center stage in recent years (Lemoine et al., 2019; Marques et al., 2018). Considering stakeholder theory as being inherently a theory of "organizational management and ethics" (Phillips et al., 2003, p. 480), it offers a solid platform for the investigation of moral and value-based constructs, such as authentic, transformational and ethical leaderships, which emphasize on authenticity, ethics, moral, and transparency. This is in view that the stakeholder theory is grounded in a moral paradigm (Godfrey & Lewis, 2019), whereby moral and values act as principal elements of the stakeholder approach in managing organizations (Phillips et al., 2003). Furthermore, the concept of stakeholder management stresses the need for organizations to manage its relationships with its internal stakeholders (Freeman, 1984), validating the employment of this theory in the examination of employee-organization relationship as a relevant construct. Moreover, embarking on positive forms of leadership and managing relationships with employees resonate with the value creation aspect which the stakeholder theory advocates (Freeman, 1984).

Despite the plausibility of stakeholder theory in uncovering insights concerning the internal reputation concept, a review of past scholarships returned scant results. Sparse scholarly attention has been paid to understand the concept of internal reputation with an exception to a handful of research (Slabbert, 2016; Zhu et al., 2014). This paper responds to scholars' call to investigate other forms of positive leadership and reputation to strengthen theorizing efforts of the field of leadership (Gill et al., 2018) and develop evaluation criteria of reputation from the perspective of employees (Cintamür & Yüksel, 2018). The selection of the stakeholder theory also corresponds with the call by scholars (Marques et al., 2018) to acknowledge the theoretical developments of stakeholder theory when investigating positive forms of leadership.

In an effort to extend current literature on internal reputation, this conceptual paper proposes a framework on internal reputation by incorporating leadership and relationship perspectives. Underpinned by the stakeholder theory, this study aims to provide an account on the organizational leadership style that best predicts employees' internal reputation perceptions, at the same time integrating the moderation role of employee-organization relationship. The paper is outlined into four sections consisting of an introduction, followed by relevant literature review in the second section where propositions are made. The third section discusses and

concludes the review whereas the final section elaborates on limitations and future research directions.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1 The Concept of Internal Reputation

Scholarly discussion on organizational reputation is not new. One of the key areas that generated ample attention among researchers is the multiple definitions and conceptualizations of the term itself (Lange et al., 2011). Among the various definitions put forth by scholars, this study adopted that offered by Fombrun (2014, p. 100) who defined reputation as “a collective assessment of a company’s attractiveness to a specific group of stakeholders relative to a reference group of companies with which the company competes for resources”. Note that this conceptualization of reputation implied the coexistence of multiple reputations, contextualized to specific stakeholder groups with dissimilar and at times contrasting evaluation criteria (Carreras et al., 2014; Fombrun, 2014; Sontaite-Petkeviciene, 2019).

In a similar vein, internal reputation is operationalized as the collective assessment of an organization by its employees as internal stakeholders based on its attributes. Referred to interchangeably as perceived organizational reputation (Men, 2012; Men & Stacks, 2013) or perceived corporate reputation (Ali et al., 2020; Esenyel, 2019), internal reputation is described as “employees’ overall evaluation of the organization based on their direct experiences with the company and all forms of communication” (Men, 2014a, p. 256). While the term internal reputation is also present in other studies, some define it as the perception of employees of how outsiders view their organization (Helm, 2011, 2013; Lee, 2020). This viewpoint contradicts with Fombrun’s (2014) idea of multiple reputations coexisting and deprives employees of their own evaluation criteria when assessing the organization’s reputation. Instead, reputation is conceived as a “socially shared impression” which is dependent on the perception of others (Helm, 2011, p. 659).

Internal reputation was previously examined and linked to a range of antecedents and organizational outcomes. Specific to the internal stakeholder context, corporate social responsibility (Benitez et al., 2020; Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014; Fu et al., 2014; Özcan & Elçi, 2020); organizational culture (Johnston & Everett, 2012; Olmedo-Cifuentes & Martínez-León, 2014); organizational communication (Men, 2014a; Men & Stacks, 2013; Men & Yue, 2019; Slabbert, 2016; Wæraas & Dahle, 2020; Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018); and employee empowerment (Kang & Bartlett, 2013; Men & Stacks, 2013; Özbağ & Çekmecelioğlu, 2022) have been found to be sources of influence towards internal reputation. Apart from the identified predictors, internal reputation management is also outcome oriented, capable of affecting job satisfaction (Babić-Hodović & Arslanagić-Kalajdžić, 2019; Helm, 2011); organizational citizenship behavior (Esenyel & Emeagwali, 2019; Fu et al., 2014; Kang & Bartlett, 2013; Kim & Lim, 2020); and employee engagement (Deepa & Baral, 2019). The association of internal reputation with these large number of organizational variables signifies its prominence which deserves further research attention.

2.2 Stakeholder Approach in Managing Internal Reputation

The stakeholder approach places emphasis for managers of organizations to attend to specific needs and interests of each stakeholder, thus creating value for multiple stakeholder groups rather than just shareholders (Bosse & Sutton, 2019; Freeman et al., 2010). Recent literature in reputation research has seen increased attention devoted to the perspective of employees as important stakeholders of the organization (Ali et al., 2020; Babić-Hodović & Arslanagić-

Kalajdžić, 2019; Esenyel & Emeagwali, 2019; Jamal & Abu Bakar, 2017; Lee & Li, 2020; Turkoglu et al., 2020; Wæraas & Dahle, 2020). Stakeholder theory highlights a comprehensive view on the value network in organizations, in which “each stakeholder must be a means and an end” (Freeman et al., 2020, p. 217). Organizations would strive to create a valuable stake by behaving in ways evaluated positively by particular stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2010). The theory recognizes that different sets of expectations exist among different stakeholders of the organization (Chun, 2005). Satisfying the expectations of employees enhances the possibility of them perceiving the organization positively, enabling the successful implementation of targeted strategies by the organization (Fombrun, 2014).

Donaldson and Preston (1995, p. 71) in their oft-cited article provided three central tenets of the theory which identified descriptive, instrumental, and normative elements, with the normative branch outlining “moral or philosophical guidelines” for organizations. While there exist oppositions concerning the segregation of the theory into different elements (Freeman, 1999; Freeman et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2003), scholars generally agree that stakeholder theory is grounded in a moral paradigm (Godfrey & Lewis, 2019). Stakeholder theory has been identified as “a moral theory that specifies the obligations that companies have to their stakeholders” (Freeman et al., 2010, p. 212). Organizational leaders bear moral obligations to consider the interests of all stakeholders during their interaction with stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2003).

Stakeholder theory has been applied in past examinations of the relationship between organizational leadership and reputation in management and communication studies. For instance, the theory was utilized by Zhu et al. (2014) to investigate the association of ethical leadership with the reputation of tourism firms in China. Slabbert’s (2016) study which proposed a stakeholder-inclusive approach in strengthening the internal perception of reputation by employees was also guided by the said theory. In a bibliometric analysis on scholarship related to another organizational leadership approach, that is responsible leadership, Marques et al. (2018) noted that stakeholder theory provided theoretical basis towards the investigation of positive leadership styles and that future research into these leadership concepts should acknowledge the developments of the theory. The same disposition is applicable to the investigation of transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership which are regarded as positive forms of leadership styles utilizing the stakeholder theory.

Furthermore, the stakeholder management concept underscores the importance for the relationship between organizations and its internal stakeholders to be managed effectively (Freeman, 1984). By recognizing business as “a set of value-creating relationships”, Phillips and colleagues (2019, p. 3) conveyed that organizational leaders are responsible for shaping and directing these relationships. In a study exploring employees’ internal reputation perceptions, Lee (2020) established that employees’ perceived communal relationship with their organization is associated with the organization’s ethical practices in corporate social responsibility. Building on this line of reasoning and the fundamentals of the theory being morally driven, this study seeks to employ stakeholder theory to explain the relevance of employee-organization relationship in the influence between positive forms of leadership styles and internal reputation perceptions.

2.3 Leadership Styles as Predictors of Internal Reputation

From a general perspective, successful implementation of identified organizational attributes is only possible with effective leadership. Leaders are influential endorsers of an organization and are regarded as important sources of information (Fombrun et al., 2015; Men & Stacks,

2014). Scholars have previously discussed the impact of leadership styles on organizational reputation (Men, 2014a; Men & Stacks, 2013; Zhu et al., 2014). Olmedo-Cifuentes et al. (2014) adduced that leadership represents one of the dimensions influencing reputation perceptions by employees. This view is concurred by Wæraas and Dahle (2020) who contended that reputation management entails management of the internal public of an organization.

Notably, three positive leadership styles of interest to this study are transformational, authentic, and ethical leaderships. The selection rationale of these leadership styles falls upon the tenets of the stakeholder theory, given that the theory rests upon “values, norms, and ethics” (Freeman et al., 2020, p. 219). While all three leadership styles appear to converge conceptually, Walumbwa et al. (2008) posited they are related but distinctive concepts. The following subsections discuss the three leadership styles using the theoretical lens of stakeholder theory, as well as how these leadership styles relate to employee-organization relationship and perceptions of internal reputation.

2.3.1 Transformational Leadership.

Transformational leadership has been identified as an important precursor towards employees’ evaluation of organizational reputation. In particular, Men and Stacks’ (2013) study discovered that both transformational and transactional leaderships were capable of influencing employees’ perception of reputation, whereby transformational leadership was the preferred style which encouraged employee empowerment. Although literature on the effects of transformational leadership on a multitude of organizational outcomes have prevailed, scholars argue that transactional leadership may be relevant and required in certain organizational circumstances which are focused on goals accomplishment (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

In transformational leadership, leaders are seen as role models in cultivating employee collaboration towards achieving shared goals, building quality relationships with employees, inspiring new ideas and perspectives, as well as expressing concern for the welfare of employees (Men & Stacks, 2013). Walumbwa et al. (2008) highlighted four main components of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence; (b) inspirational motivation; (c) individualized consideration; and (d) intellectual stimulation. Idealized influence characterizes transformational leaders’ behavior based on principles and values which result in them being role models to be emulated in an organization (Avolio, 1999). Inspirational motivation describes the way leaders enhance team spirit and encourage organizational members to achieve shared goals (Avolio, 1999; Khattak et al., 2020). Next, leaders are seen to possess individualized consideration when they act as coach mentors (Supriyanto et al., 2020) and foster “a supportive climate for individual growth” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 104). Lastly, intellectual stimulation challenges organizational members to be creative and question assumptions and beliefs (Bass, 1985; Walumbwa et al., 2008). These characteristics of transformational leaders rest well with the central admonition of the stakeholder theory which places attention to the “interests and well-being of those who can assist or hinder the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Phillips et al., 2003, p. 481).

Moreover, transformational leaders are able to cultivate good relationship with employees, as evidenced in Men's (2014b) research. This ability may be attributed to the characteristics of transformational leaders who are described as charismatic, relationship-oriented, and participative in nature (Men, 2014b; Podsakoff et al., 1990). An investigation on different management styles by Olmedo-Cifuentes and Martínez-León (2014) discovered that employees tend to have a better perception of reputation when they work under a participative management style. Khattak et al. (2020) claimed that charismatic transformational leaders have

the capability to transform the values and characteristics of their followers. Charismatically-led followers are encouraged to develop their skills to work towards achieving organizational goals (Graham, 1991). Jamal and Bakar (2017) further asserted that leaders with charisma have exemplary interpersonal communication skills capable of swaying internal reputation.

Transformational leadership continues to attract much research attention owing to its relationship-oriented nature and positive association with organizational variables and outcomes such as employee work attitudes and performance; organizational identification; organizational commitment; employee-organization relationship; employee voice behavior; organizational citizenship behavior; and symmetrical communication (Birasnav et al., 2011; Cassar et al., 2017; Khatkhatk et al., 2020; Lee & Chon, 2020; Men, 2014b; Men & Stacks, 2013; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Supriyanto et al., 2020; Tai et al., 2012; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Particularly, Men and Stacks (2013, p. 183) uncovered that transformational leadership positively influence perceived organizational reputation and justified this finding as a result of leaders being a role model in communicating shared vision and “fostering collaboration among employees to achieve collective goals, stimulating new perspectives and ideas, emphasizing the quality of relationships with employees, and showing concern about employees’ individual feelings and welfare”. Following this line of reasoning, the below is proposed.

P1. Transformational leadership has a positive influence on employees’ internal reputation perception.

2.3.2 Authentic Leadership.

Authentic leadership was described by Luthans and Avolio (2003, p. 243) as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development”. Within the construct of authentic leadership lies four main characteristics, namely self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). Self-awareness involves comprehending the manner in which one “derives and makes meaning of the world and how that meaning making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time”; internalized moral perspective concerns internal moral standards and values regulated by oneself; balanced processing describes leaders’ objectivity in seeking feedback in decision-making; and relational transparency refers to presentation of the authentic self to others (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 95). Such reflection towards moral standards in the conduct of oneself reflects the basis of stakeholder theory which has its foundations in a moral paradigm (Godfrey & Lewis, 2019).

The behavior of authentic leaders is grounded upon their personal values in order to foster credibility and trust among employees (Walumbwa et al., 2008). An organizational leaders’ credibility is an essential criterion that forms part of employees’ evaluation criteria of organizational reputation (Men, 2012). Such credibility and trust emanate from the consistency between the words and actions of the leaders. A study by Men (2014a) focusing on employees of medium and large corporations established that authentic leaders are capable of nurturing a transparent internal communication environment, which subsequently influences internal reputation perceptions.

Employees working under authentic leaders find satisfaction in the accountability and transparency of this approach. Such accountability reflects the authenticity of an organization and its leader, whether they stay true to the principles and values proclaimed (Walumbwa et

al., 2008; Yohn, 2020). The concept of authentic leadership differs from transformational leadership in this aspect. The self-awareness component in authentic leadership underscores the sense of self, which is absent in transformational leaders. This “self” element in authentic leadership has a virtue ethics foundation which differs from the deontology basis focusing compliance of normative standards employed by ethical leaders (Lemoine et al., 2019). Therefore, the following proposition is presented.

P2. Authentic leadership has a positive influence on employees’ internal reputation perception.

2.3.3 Ethical Leadership.

Ethical leaders are moral managers and moral persons, referencing the professional and personal ethical facets of the leader (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Brown et al. (2005, p. 120) defined ethical leadership as “normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making”. Whether it concerns the personal qualities or the professional conduct of the leader, ethical leaders portray traits such as openness, trustworthiness; honesty; and fairness (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008). These explicit features of morals and values portray the fundamental attributes advocated by the stakeholder theory in managing organizations (Phillips et al., 2003).

Ethical leadership shares similar attributes with authentic leadership. Nevertheless, Walumbwa et al. (2008) explained that the constructs are conceptually distinctive. It differs from authentic leadership whereby only the internalized moral perspective is present in ethical leadership while the remaining three components are not. Furthermore, the sense of self in authentic leadership stands in contrast with the focus on external expectations on norm compliance present in ethical leadership (Lemoine et al., 2019).

Past leadership studies have examined the impact of ethical leadership on different aspects of organizational reputation (Leelhaphunt & Suntrayuth, 2020; Zhu et al., 2014). Considering its similarity with transformational and authentic leadership which are value-based, we suggest that ethical leadership could be another predictor of positive internal reputation among employees. In line with this argument, the next proposition is developed.

P3. Ethical leadership has a positive influence on employees’ internal reputation perception.

2.4 The Moderating Role of Employee-Organization Relationship

The extent to which an organization and its employees “trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to the other” is referred to as employee-organization relationship (Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 307). While leadership styles are important to effectively generate favorable internal reputation, we argue that employee-organization relationship is a key moderator. This argument is supported by past works examining leadership styles, employee-organization relationship, and reputation (Men & Jiang, 2016; Men & Stacks, 2014; Neves & Story, 2015). Freeman et al. (2010) contended that organizations must endeavor to preserve this relationship to create better work engagement and inspired employees. Central to the concept of employee-organization relationship are four relational outcomes identified by Hon and Grunig (1999), i.e. trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment. By forging trusting relationships with employees, organizations are able to establish competitive advantage (Bosse & Sutton, 2019).

The quality of employee-organization relationship has the capability of influencing internal reputation perceptions (Men & Stacks, 2014; Walden, 2018). Meanwhile, extant scholarship underscored the link between authentic leadership and employee-organization relationship (Men & Jiang, 2016; Men & Stacks, 2014). In particular, a survey among employees of various industries in the United States uncovered that authentic leadership has a positive influence on the relationship quality between employees and the organization (Men & Jiang, 2016). Further to that, in a separate study, the link between transformational leadership and employee-organization relationship was documented (Men, 2014b). Acknowledging that transformational leadership is relationship-oriented, this finding was not surprising.

In addition, Neves and Story (2015) examined the roles of ethical leadership and reputation on affective commitment, which represented the quality of employee-organization relationship, and discovered a relationship. Brown et al. (2005) posited that ethical leaders seek to maintain interpersonal relationships with employees based upon fairness and honesty. Regardless of leadership styles, trust (Bligh, 2017) and moral behavior (Ewest, 2017) have always been the common features in leadership and employee-organization relationship research. Scholars asserted that leaders engender trust and satisfaction among employees by adopting a transparent and open communication system, ultimately fostering better employee relations and perceived reputation (Jiang & Shen, 2020; Men & Stacks, 2014; Walden, 2018). Thus, we suggest the following proposition.

P4. The relationship between (P4a) authentic leadership; (P4b) transformational leadership; (P4c) ethical leadership and internal reputation is moderated by employee-organization relationship.

The proposed conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

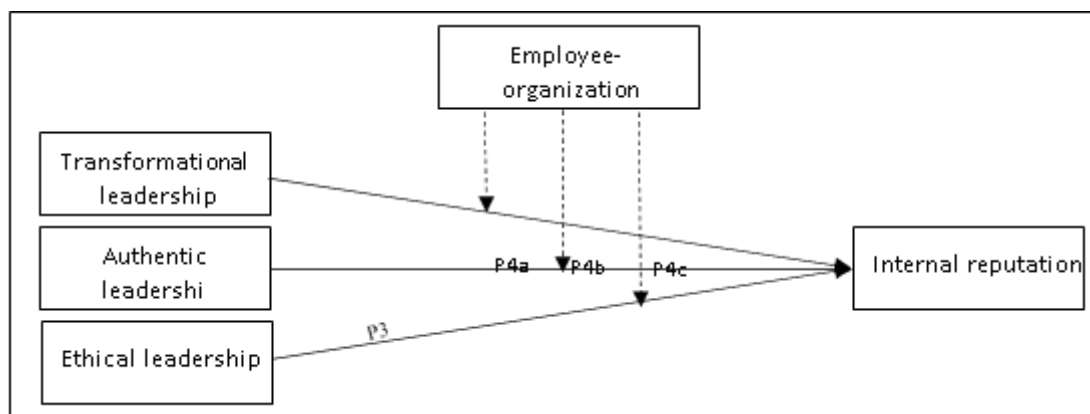


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

3. Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

The main purpose of this paper was to conceptualize the perception of internal reputation based upon the theoretical foundation of stakeholder theory by uncovering relevant organizational leadership and relationship perspectives. In this paper, leadership styles have been envisioned to play an important role in determining the internal reputation perceptions among employees. Guided by the principles of stakeholder theory, essential qualities associated to three leadership styles, namely transformational, authentic, and ethical leaderships, have been outlined and discussed. Employees observe and experience the qualities as portrayed by leaders, evaluate them, and form internal reputation perceptions of the organization. Nonetheless, it is expected

that the relationship that employees foster with the organization determines the strength of influence exerted by these leadership styles on internal reputation.

The stakeholder theory as a theory of ethics provides a framework to examine three related yet distinctive leadership styles, with hypothesized associations with employees' perception of internal reputation. In essence, it can be argued that leadership styles that are based upon values and ethics have the potential to influence internal reputation at varying degrees. The quality of relationship that employees build and share with the organization where they are employed will likely influence how they view the organization. It is expected that especially for employees who experience positive employee-organization relationship, the influence of leadership style on internal reputation will be stronger. This expectation can be justified by the stakeholder perspective, whereby these leadership styles engender leaders' characteristics and relationship quality deemed a valuable stake to employees, ultimately enhancing internal reputation.

That all three leadership styles are portrayed to positively influence internal reputation suggests that mutual exclusivity does not exist. One may affirm that transformational leadership is effective in managing internal reputation in particular circumstances and yet still adopt ethical leadership in other instances. This perspective is in line with the tenets of the stakeholder theory which does not advocate that a particular style is superior than the other (Bosse & Sutton, 2019). Leadership styles may be used interchangeably or complementarily depending on societal context, organizational culture, industry and other contextual factors.

The conceptual framework put forth in this study corresponds with the findings of Men and Stacks' (2013) study which demonstrated the association of different leadership styles on employees' perceived organization reputation. This study builds on the positive link of transformational leadership on internal reputation by including other positive forms of leadership styles. Association of such positive leadership styles like authentic leadership with internal reputation was also documented by Men (2014a). While Men and Stacks (2013) framed their study from a public relations perspective, the conceptual framework proposed in this study attempts to elucidate the relationship between positive forms of leadership by employing the theoretical lens of stakeholder theory. The employment of stakeholder theory addresses Marques and colleagues (2018) call to enhance the stakeholder theory when researching positive leadership styles similar to that of responsible leadership.

Considering the interrelatedness of the variables identified, this paper proposed a conceptual model on the way which organizations may align their leadership styles and relationship management practices with internal reputation management approaches. The proposed conceptual framework may prove helpful to leaders, especially those from the service sector, who intend to develop an effective internal reputation for organizational excellence.

4. Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not one without its limitations. Therefore, future research directions are proposed. One key limitation is that the conceptual model was developed based on a qualitative review of extant reputation, leadership, and relationship scholarship. Other contextual factors ought to be considered to ascertain which, if any, leadership style prevails in certain contexts (e.g. culture, society, industry). In particular, labor-intensive sectors (Olmedo-Cifuentes & Martínez-León, 2014), specific contexts such as corporate culture and ethics of organizations (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Olmedo-Cifuentes et al., 2014), and organizational communication

practices (Men, 2014a) are among factors to be taken into consideration when examining leadership influence on internal reputation.

In addition, apart from employee-organization relationship, it is possible that other organizational variables be included as a moderator to establish the strength of influence between leadership styles and internal reputation. For example, echoing the call by Lee (2020), different relationship types from the organizations' perspective could be further explored.

Thirdly, the proposed conceptual framework serves as a preliminary guide on the way internal reputation could be managed from a leadership and relationship perspective. Future research is required to empirically test the advanced propositions as well as further develop the model. The conceptual model could be empirically tested in reasonably large businesses, which Freeman et al. (2010) affirmed as the most common approach involving examination of stakeholder theory. Both qualitative and quantitative methods would be of value to examine the way in which employees evaluate leadership styles.

Lastly, should the conceptual framework be empirically tested and its validity proven, the study could be enhanced to include the development of a multidimensional evaluation scale for internal reputation from the perspective of employees. This is in response to scholars' call that evaluation from different stakeholders be measured using a comprehensive scale (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Fu et al., 2014).

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