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# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP: BECOMING AN INFLUENCE IN YOUR NICHE

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The decision to write on Thought Leadership is owing to my curiosity and passion for new and challenging topics or subject matters since this study area is yet to be given attention by academics. Although it has no trace in business or marketing textbooks, the intention was not only to gain a better understanding across the subject, but also to develop a framework which can help companies in a successful practice.

I would like to thank God for granting me the strength and ability to complete this dissertation. Furthermore, the following people who gave me their valuable time and helped me with scholarly literature for the success of this thesis: Craig Badings, Mignon Van Halderen (PhD), Jeff Ernst, Mitch McCrimmon, and Forrester Research.

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## TIIVISTELMÄ

|                    |   |
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| Tekijä             | Lukumanu Iddrisu                                      |
| Opinnäytettyö nimi | Mieli Johtaminen: Tehdä vaikutus sinun markkinaraossa |
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Ajassa jolloin asiakas vaatimukset ylittävät tuotteen ja palvelun, yritykset varpaillaan suunnittelevat mekanismejaan olemaan relevantteja asiakkailleen, alalleen sekä yhteisölle. Koska oikeaoppiset markkinointi taktikat joilla yritykset pääsevät johtoasemaan eivät enkään toimi niin kuin ennen. Tästä syystä, Mieli Johtaminen on uusi strategia joita yritykset käyttävät.

Tämä opinnäytettyö tutkii mitä mieli johtaminen on sekä sen merkitystä organisaatioille. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus on ymmärtää miksi yritysten ”tulisi” käyttää Mieli Johtamista ja miten he voivat tehokkaasti sitä käyttää

Jotta näihin tutkimus kysymyksiin löydetään vastaus, kvalitatiivista tutkimusmetodia käytettiin. Strukturoitua haastattelua käytettiin viiden eri yritysten eksperttien kanssa jotka harjoittavat Mieli Johtamista.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että Mieli Johtamista käytetään monesta eri syystä ja ei paremman hyvän sekä haasteiden kanssa jotka sen harjoittaminen tuottaa. Lisäksi, löydökset auttavat kunnianhimoisia pyrkijöitä, kun luovat runkoaan yritykselleen. Lopuksi, koulut suosittelivat lisäämään opetussuunnitelman sekä yritykset halusivat laittaa sen käytäntöön

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Avainsanat: Mieli Johtaminen, ammatinharjoittaja, runko, markkinarako

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## ABSTRACT

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In an era where customer demands go beyond product and service, companies are on their toes to devise mechanisms to be relevant to their customers, industry and community since the orthodox marketing tactics no longer work like they used to - to make a company superior over others. Therefore, Thought Leadership is the new strategy companies are adapting.

This thesis investigates what Thought Leadership is (in detail) and its significance in organizations. The purpose of the research is to find out why companies ‘should’ use Thought Leadership and how they can effectively practice it.

To be able to answer these research questions, a qualitative research method was used. A semi-structured interview was conducted with experts from five different companies that practices Thought Leadership.

The research found that Thought Leadership is practiced for several reasons and not for wholly the greater good. As well, it has challenges that comes with its practice. Furthermore, the findings helped in the creation of a framework that can help aspirants in a successful practice. Finally, schools were recommended to introduce it to their curricula whilst companies were urged to start practicing it.

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Keywords               Thought Leadership, Practitioner, Framework, Niche.

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Background**

Traditionally, companies attract and convince customers with innovative products to differentiate themselves from competitors and create a strong brand that has the potential of generating long-term and loyal customers and sales increase. (Hess, Story & Danes, 2011.). Others have managed to lure customers by using traditional marketing channels like advertising, and public relations to make their brands strong. Today, which is an era of a growing number of educated customers; the standard of demand goes beyond product or service and poses a great challenge to traditional marketing mechanisms (Badings, 2009; Young, 2013.). Additionally, the competitive landscape of businesses has increased (Van Halderen, 2016) since customers/clients seek to be listened to, understood and engaged better (Alexander & Badings, 2012) with issues that matter to them (Van Halderen, Kettler-Paddock & Badings, 2013). Badings (2009) claimed that today's customers do not just accept a product or service a company sells unless it connects with their (customers) values, and aspirations. For this reason, companies (including well grounded) devise strategies to become relevant to their customers, market and the entire community through a novel strategy called Thought Leadership.

Young (2013) opined that the term thought leader is believed to have been invented in marketing about thirty (30) years ago. However, in recent years, the term has widely been used in the business world to sound like corporate jargon - perhaps because the concept is ill-defined, poorly studied or misunderstood. It is evidenced that some companies refer to themselves as Thought Leaders only because they have whitepapers, webinars, and or host seminars to deliver information. However, the real intent of Thought Leadership is beyond that and for a greater good. (Young, 2013: Van Halderen, Kettler-Paddock & Badings, 2013: Taylor, 2016.).

This study determines to explore the meaning of the term, its importance and how

businesses can effectively use it to stand tall in their respective industries.

## **1.2 Objective**

The purpose of this research is to investigate why businesses should consider Thought Leadership and how they can effectively use it to become influencers in their niche. To discuss this phenomenon, other objectives need to be met and they include:

- i) Gaining a better understanding of Thought Leadership.
- ii) Examining Thought Leadership theories and practices from experts and practitioners as a guide for an organization.

## **1.3 Research Problem**

Many companies have the financial capacity as well as innovative products yet are unable to become an authority in their industry because there is an increase in the use of Thought Leadership by B2B and B2C businesses to be “heard above all the ‘noise’ in the marketplace” (Van Halderen et al, 2013). Thus, the need to become on top of the mind demands more than the conventional way of branding.

Regarding this challenge(s), the following research questions were developed to serve as a guide in the study:

- i) What is Thought Leadership?
- ii) Why should Thought Leadership be practiced?
- iii) What propels successful Thought Leadership?

## **1.4 Limitations of the study**

The scope of this research is narrowed to Thought Leadership to set a limit and to focus on the actual topic. Although Thought Leadership is widely discussed within

leading firms in this current millennium, little has been written about it since the subject matter is a developing concept or theory hence limited availability of wide range of information.

Additionally, due to the newness of the topic there are few people who have knowledge of the subject matter. Therefore, it makes it challenging to reach the few experts for information.

### **1.5 Method**

The qualitative method will be employed in this study. The qualitative method provides data analyzed in words.

In this study, interviews will be conducted face to face or on phone by using a semi-structured questionnaire to gather primary data. The sample of this research consists of companies and/or individuals who have successfully practiced Thought Leadership. Moreover, secondary data would be based on books, articles (electronic and prints) and journals.

Due to the nature of the study, a non-probability sampling technique will be used.

### **1.6 Layout of the study**

The thesis is structured into five (5) chapters. Chapter one discusses the background of the study, objectives, research questions and scope of the research to give a guideline of the whole study. The second chapter presents a review of scholarly articles in the related topic. The theoretical framework captures thought leadership, its components, importance, challenges and concepts.

Thereafter the research methodology; its process, and analyses of data are outlined as well as empirical setting. Findings of the empirical study are presented subsequently. The paper ends with conclusions and recommendations.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review analyzes published information about a subject area written by scholars and subject matter experts. This information is summarized and synthesized to evaluate the sources, serve as a guide to the topic and to emphasize the credibility of the writer. This chapter builds an academic foundation on the topic under review using books of researchers and opinions of experts.

Although Thought Leadership has practically been used for many years which has impacted businesses and individuals, very little has been written about it and there seems to be no trace of the topic appearing in business textbooks (Young, 2013). Furthermore, it has not been given attention by academia unlike other business or marketing related topics or undertaken as a subject for academic research - perhaps due to its novelty. Although marketers regard Thought Leadership as a central part of content marketing strategy (Badings, 2017), it is surprising to note that it has not been mentioned in any marketing book or strategy text (Young, 2013).

Nonetheless, Thought Leadership is practically active among businesses and industries (Young, 2013). This chapter seeks to define, explore and examine it on several types of evidences although some are yet to be peer-reviewed or critiqued by academics. Additionally, the chapter will briefly clarify its relationship with content marketing.

### **2.1 Thought Leadership: Introduction and Definitions**

There is a need to discuss the origin of Thought Leadership and what it is from an academic point of view in order to gain a clear understanding of the topic under study.

The term Thought Leadership is believed to have been invented in marketing about thirty (30) years ago (Young, 2013). The term has widely been used in the business world to sound like a corporate jargon - however, its intent is for a greater good;

Thought Leadership creates trustworthy and authority among industry players (Taylor 2016).

Young (2013) described Thought Leadership as a business tool with unique features that deliberately create ideas to make businesses successful. He stressed that Thought Leadership purposely create innovative ideas to gain direct or indirect business advantage.

In his book “Thought Leadership, Prompting Businesses to Think and Learn (2013)”, Laurie Young gathered definitions from experts from various industries. These definitions include;

*“A novel point of view which brings new perspective and is able to change someone’s views on an issue”* - Katy Hartley, Director, Centre for Health and Well-Being, Phillips.

*“Ideas that educate clients and prospects about important business issues and help them solve those issues - without selling”* - The ITSMA

*“The action of introducing and promoting convention-breaking ideas that cause people to change how they think about marketplace or societal issues”*. - Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock (2011)

*“The process of formulating big ideas and insightful point of view on the issues buyers face, capturing those ideas in multiple content vehicles and sharing the ideas with prospects and customers to enlighten them, engage them in a dialogue and position your company as a trusted resource.”* - Forrester Research (2011)

Definitions gathered from other sources include:

M. Brenner (2015) referred to Thought Leadership as a part of content marketing that seeks to answer the deepest questions of a targeted audience; or marketing through contents on a specialized topic to answer the biggest questions of audience

by exploiting the talent and experience in a business or niche.

Tim Prizeman in a guest blog stated that Thought leadership is the term for activity that positions you and your business as a leading expert in a key area. Brosseau & Kawasaki (2013) described Thought Leadership as a person's or company's ability to inspire others to new ideas, and modify the way things are done to transform the industry and the world at large. Brosseau & Guy (2013) further stated that Thought Leaders create a platform and mechanisms for people to follow which includes "*a method, process, guidelines or set of best practices*" to shape their success and not just urge people to a new way of thinking.

Van Halderen et al (2013) cited Crainer & Dearlove (2013) to define Thought Leadership as a strategy that positions a brand as intellectually superior to the competition whilst Celli & Miller (2015) termed it an intellectual engagement.

Heuvel & Badings explained Thought Leadership as the successful elevation of an organization's unique point of view, solution or insight which leads to a vital customer engagement. Similarly, Andrea Learned (2016) asserted that Thought Leadership helps create the bases of public engagement and trust.

Van Halderen et al (2013) defined the concept as a process of promoting thought-provoking viewpoints with new insights and solutions that help in changing the way customers think about their key issues.

Agreeably, it can be inferred on the above definitions that intellect, new ideas, trust, and influence are key elements in defining Thought Leadership.

Based on the above definitions from various authors, Thought Leadership can personally be defined as the introduction and promotion of an influential (new) idea that is heard, implemented and trusted by industry players and the society to solve their pressing concerns (Van Halderen, 2013) with no intention of marketing (ITSMA, 2015) - and in turn makes the company (inventor) a source of reference or trust (Ernst, Cooperstein & Dernoga, 2011). Or: an approach that seeks to help

companies (or individuals) stand tall in their field of specialty by creating insightful contents which will have an influence on audience's decision as well as the industry (Brenner, 2015) with no intention of selling (ITSMA, 2015).

It should be noted that a break-away from the normal societal practices is in a positive direction to solve societal issues and improve the way of doing or seeing things in the industry and the society without (directly) marketing themselves.

Although the various definitions give an idea of what Thought Leadership is, it does not go into details to touch on its features. Therefore, the next phase discusses it to increase the understanding of the term.

## **2.2 Characteristics of Thought Leadership**

The previous part touched on the origin and meanings of Thought Leadership from various authors. However, the various definitions are not enough to give a clear picture regarding features of the mechanism. Therefore, key characteristics associated with Thought Leadership are discussed in this section to increase the understanding of this subject area.

Firstly, Thought Leadership is not like traditional leadership – it has no hierarchy, and no one manages anyone. It is basically the urging of new idea(s) (McCrimmon, 2005) to curb industrial or societal challenge and not by influencing people with (one's) instincts. It can come from any individual in an organization or in the industry be it a manager or non-managerial staff provided the person has the necessary intellect and expertise. For example, McCrimmon (2005) cited that when Christian Barnard demonstrated the feasibility of heart transplant surgery, most doctors adopted to it without being persuaded. In this instance, the doctors trusted the (new) idea based on the facts evidenced by Christian Barnard and not his power to influence.

Secondly, Thought Leadership is neither (traditional) marketing nor selling to prospects. Having said that, it is building a followership to a novelty to create trust

and influence (Brosseau & Kawasaki, 2013). Another feature to note is that Thought Leadership is not the same as content marketing. However, due to its detailed discussion; it is set aside and discussed in the next part.

Furthermore, it is very important to understand that the name Thought Leadership does not necessarily mean a company which is making huge profits, however, it serve as a catalyst for a new thinking to satisfy stakeholders, benefit in the long run as well as transforming the world (Van Halderen et al, 2013).

Finally, Thought Leadership is not identical to innovation (McCrimmon, 2005). There is an enormous difference between the two (Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock, 2011). According to Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock (2011), innovation is translating a new idea into a product/service with the intention of selling to customers. On the other hand, Thought Leadership is about connecting a certain vision to a societal problem and becoming an influence in the market as well as owner of the novel point of view. Similarly, Van Halderen et al (2013) stated that an innovation can be the addition of value to an existing product (e.g. a new flavor of a toothpaste) which does not require a NPOV that goes beyond the product or service. However, Thought Leadership is creating a novelty on a specialty that goes beyond the product and service. Additionally, Van Halderen et al (2013) noted that innovative products are no longer enough since customers are on the look for new insights that will solve society's constant issues with regards to the economy, society and the environment whereas Thought Leadership involves sharing the ideas a company has gathered around their NPOV to stakeholders and industry players to change how customers think and to create a sense of trust unlike innovation (of a product or service) which companies for the sake of business advantage; would not share with competitors.

### **2.3 Content Marketing Vs Thought Leadership**

To understand Thought Leadership better, it is very important to get familiar with

the distinction between the above-mentioned terms. Although there's a good deal of overlap between the two terms (Parke, 2017.), marketers have been struggling with the two and tend to use them inappropriately (Aydin, 2017). Moreover, some companies or marketers that have a content marketing strategy tend to refer themselves as Thought Leaders which is not actually the case. Badings (2013) commented that a company is perceived of a Thought Leadership status when the market sees it as such - however, self-acclaiming is a mere pretense. Therefore, this space will clearly define, distinguish as well as elaborate the relationship between content marketing and Thought Leadership.

To go by definitions: Content Marketing informs, educates and attracts prospects "at different stages of the buying process" yet Thought Leadership content establishes an idea and a company's point of view that has an emotional or cognitive impact upon the market to adopt its positions broadly (Ramos, O'Neill & Trafton 2015,1.). Similarly, Content Marketing Institute (2017) affirmed that content marketing is a type of marketing that focuses on creating and distributing valuable contents to attract audience and to make profit whereas Thought Leadership is a content that holds a company's point of view which seeks to answer biggest questions of industry players and the society with no direct intentions of making profit (ITSMA, 2013; Brenner, 2015).

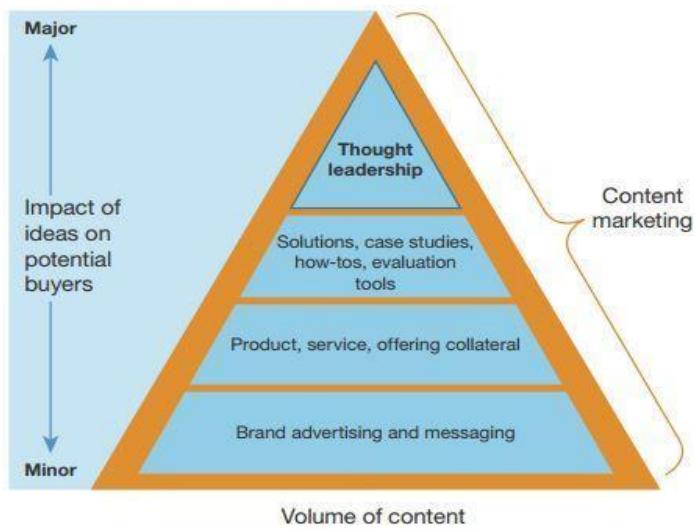
Often times, Thought Leadership is distinguished from Content Marketing because companies do not want their new insight or unique point of view to be perceived as marketing (selling) (Aydin, 2017).

Davis (2017) exemplified that Harman, the industry leader in audiovisual products for 70 years; leverages its position through Thought Leadership contents. The company have knowledge, expertise and experience about how to solve various problems and how the technology works. Thus, Harman writes pieces on those elements to solve industrial and societal challenges which reinforces its place within the industry and gives authority. The authority then promotes the company's

content as being valuable, increasing the traffic to the content itself. Harman experimented in a different way by writing more directly about the company, campaigns/programs and products, and that never performed well as providing Thought Leadership.

Ramos et al (Forrester, 2013.) demonstrated that Thought Leadership “sits at the pinnacle of Content Marketing” (see figure 1). This is because the content of Thought Leadership is rare, hard to advocate and market compared to others. On top of that, Thought Leadership content focuses on an organization’s point of view that must be done well to impact prospects and solve their urgent needs. (Parker, 2016.).

Thought Leadership Sits At The Pinnacle Of Content Marketing



*Source: Forrester Research Inc., 2013*

**Figure 1.** Thought Leadership and Content Marketing

What can be concluded from the scholarly arguments is that: Content Marketing focuses on selling the brand and products/service of a company whilst Thought Leadership pays attention to the introduction and promotion of new insights to solve industrial and societal challenges with no intention of marketing itself. Though content marketing can be Thought Leadership content, most of it – is not. Content

Marketing is typically information a company or brand puts out, hints and tips, opinion pieces, some research related content, interviews, papers, white papers, etc. Typically Thought Leadership requires a novel or new point of view on a topic or issue and in order to do this, content is required to present this point of view (Badings, 2017).

It is virtually impossible to have a Thought Leadership view without content. Therefore, it could be inferred that Thought Leadership is a subset or a part of a Content Marketing strategy.

#### **2.4 Significance of Thought Leadership**

The business populace is ever-changing as more customers are educated and hence affect small or large businesses (Young, 2013). The competitive landscape of businesses has increased (Van Halderen, 2016) since customers/clients seek to be listened to, understood and engaged better (Alexander & Badings, 2012) with issues that matter to them (Van Halderen et al, 2013). Thought Leadership provides the means to tackle all these.

Thought Leadership encourages companies to champion new ideas (McCrimmon, 2005) that has direct relevance to customers (Young, 2013). The new insights that emerge from Thought Leadership breaks conventional thinking of the industry and the society and the way they do things. (Van Halderen et al, 2013).

Although Thought Leadership is originally created to solve industrial and/or societal problems with no direct intention of business or selling, it affects the brand and sales of successful practitioners. (Badings, 2009: ITSMA, 2013). Badings (2009) revealed that Dove's Thought Leadership program (Campaign for Real Beauty) had an impact on the company's brand and sales. In the second business quarter of 2005, Dove experienced a double-digit growth for their brand. Furthermore, an eleven percent (11%) sales increase in the first quarter of 2005 as well as a six percent (6%) total sales increase – this is according to Badings (2009).

Thought Leadership does not only affect organizations externally but internally also. Badings (2013) claimed that employees feel motivated and challenge themselves to discover new ideas when their outfit is recognized as a Thought Leader. In a corresponding comment, Stephanie De Witte (2011) maintained that “*it gives employees self-distinctiveness, resulting in higher levels of rigor, dedication and absorption with respect to their jobs*”. It presents employees with information beyond product and services as well as urge them to be proud of their firm being a trusted voice and in differentiating its position in the industry.

In short, Thought Leadership helps improve situations by introducing novelties that positively break conventional practices or challenges the status quo yet reflect the needs of stakeholders, engaging them and broadly sharing the novelty point of view through developmental process. Therefore, practicing corporations use this business tool together with their vision (in some cases) to attract these customers, address their needs and deliver a return. (Van Halderen et al, 2013)

#### **2.4.1 The Impact of Thought Leadership in making a company an Influence in its niche**

Initially, the significance of Thought leadership was identified. However, this section discusses how Thought Leadership impacts a company to become an influence in its specialty.

Since customer demands goes beyond just product/service, Alexander & Badings (2012) stated that Thought Leadership is an avenue for companies to create a relationship with the customer that goes beyond product and service. By sharing thought provoking ideas for the benefit of the industry and society, Brosseau & Kawasaki (2013) claimed that Thought Leadership “*leads to exposure of ideas*” among industry players and pave way for engagement of stakeholders to make the ideas materialize. This will “*increase strategic visibility*” by engaging with the right people that matter (Brosseau and Kawasaki, 2013) and stand out in the niche. Furthermore, Thought Leadership enables practitioners to become trusted voices or advisors to their customers due to their refreshing viewpoints that curb the issues

and challenges that concerns customers. (Van Halderen et al, 2013). Brosseau & Kawasaki (2013) added that customers trust Thought Leaders in the sense that they believe they know or will find a way to do things better, cheaper, faster and more efficient.

***”Thought Leadership is not about being known; it is about being known for making a difference”***. - Brosseau & Kawasaki (2013)

Additionally, practice of Thought Leadership gives companies the opportunity “*to substantially raise their profiles and remain the cutting edge of developments in their markets and societies*” (Van Halderen et al, 2013)

## **2.5 Sources of Thought Leadership**

The inception of any concept comes from a source or various sources - Thought Leadership is of no exception. This phase examines the sources where businesses have derived or can derive their Thought Leadership from.

There are many ways companies can extract their Thought Leadership from. Van Halderen et al 2013 cited two categories to include:

- i) Industry/market relevance
- ii) Societal relevance

These categories of relevance according to Van Halderen et al 2013, align with Corporate Ability (CA) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) defined by Brown and Dacin’s “16 definitions of corporate ability and corporate social responsibility”. CA deals with company’s capacity to produce and deliver product/service whereas CSR handles character of a company with regards to the society. In building Thought Leadership nowadays, most companies combine the CA and CSR aspect in achieving that.

For instance, International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) is an American

multinational technology company who manufactures and markets computer hardware, middleware and software, and offers hosting and consulting services in areas ranging from mainframe computers to nanotechnology. IBM is regarded a Thought Leader in the technology industry by virtue of using the technology to make the world smarter and better. They are proponent of an idea that helps the streaming, processing and analyzing of all past and present data from inside and outside of a company which reflects their business solution including smarter traffic management, smarter water management, and smarter energy grids. Therefore, Van Halderen et al (2013) opined that IBM “connects CA associations (expertise in technology) and CSR associations (global issues such as energy, water or health care)”

Similarly, a case on General Electric (GE) cited by Van Halderen et al (2013) suggests that the company combined CA and CSR in its initiative to create a Thought Leadership programme. GE, based on a World Health Organization’s (WHO) report; identified that a lot of people in the world had little access to healthcare; and the ones available were either expensive or inadequate. Owing to this, GE set up the “Healthymagination” programme which aims to use five years to tap into their people’s talent in providing a better healthcare for more people at lower cost through powerful and innovative technology hence combining the CA (100-year expertise in healthcare) and CSR (global issues on access and affordability of healthcare) to change the industry and to gain influence.

On the other hand, Young (2013) identified other sources to include;

**Industry Knowledge:** This is one of the basic requirements of Thought Leadership and can also be a source of creating it. Having expertise in a sector makes a company becomes conversant with the processes, strategies and values which can help create original ideas for the sector’s latent need by combining expertise with knowledge of the particular industry. Young (2013) cited Pricewaterhousecoopers as an example, invested a lot of time understanding the legal sector and issued a

report on financial issues in the sector.

**Research:** Many corporations have developed an insight into Thought Leadership through extensive research. For instance, Dove's thought leading 'Real Beauty' campaign was borne-out of a point of view based on a research they commissioned on the perception of beauty in ten (10) countries (Van Halderen et al, 2013). In addition, Young (2013) claimed that Forrester Research is regarded a Thought Leader by their clients because they produce research reports on developing trends in the industry they find themselves.

**Internal Collaboration:** McCrimmon (2005) cited that Karen came out with a Thought Leadership mechanism when a team of product developers met to brainstorm. Initially, none of the team members had any (good) idea. However, before the closure of the meeting a new insight emerged. Karen quickly championed the new idea to create a Thought Leadership – i.e. internal collaboration served as a source to creating Thought Leadership.

**Debate among high-quality specialists:** Phillips involved eleven (11) external subject matter experts to gain insight of key industrial trends to further develop their Thought Leadership campaigns namely Active Aging and Livable cities. (Van Halderen et al, 2013).

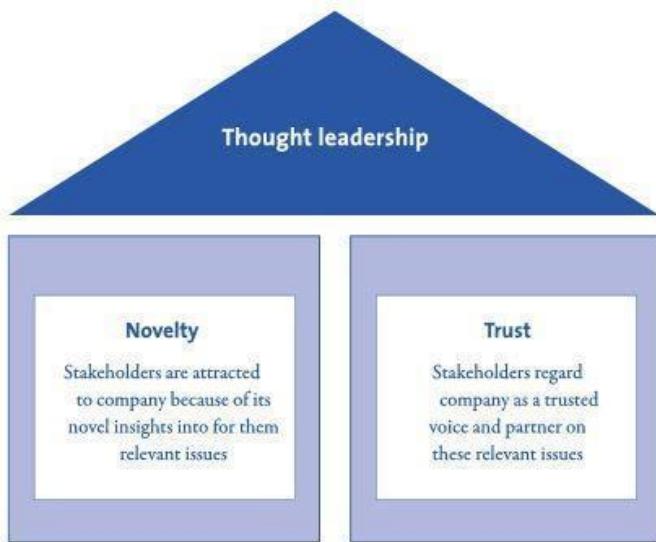
**Futures work:** Deloitte is a typical example of a company that derives Thought Leadership from futures work. The company has positioned itself as an issuer reports regarding the next generation of technological mechanisms, trends and its effects on the populace. Their reports are given maximum consideration by only not those in the industry, but politicians, educators and academics hence termed as Thought Leadership. Example of such futures work is "Building the Luck Country".

## **2.6 Pillars of Thought Leadership**

This section discusses the most important ingredients needed for a successful Thought Leadership. Thought leaders are different in the sense that their view point

of the world is unique; they are willing to share their ideas first and afterwards see how their products and services can help shape the world.

Young (2013) writes that, academics from the Netherlands Mignon Van Halderen and Kim Kettler-Paddock suggest that Thought Leadership are made of two pillars namely; Novelty and Trust.



*Adopted from: Van Halderen, Kettler-Paddock & Badings 2013.*

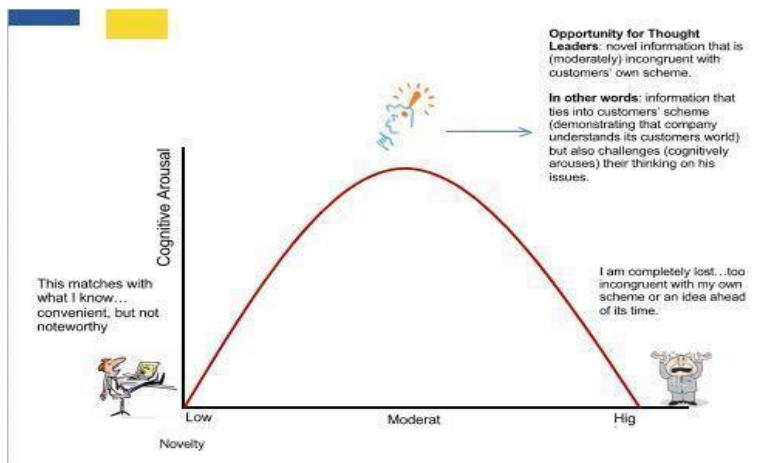
**Figure 2.** Pillars of Thought Leadership

### 2.6.1 Novelty

This is an essential component for a successful thought leadership; without it, there is no Thought Leadership. Novelty are the new ideas that are needed to position an organization as a Thought Leader. The novel point of view (NPOV) by thought leading corporations contain new insights that have relevance to the organization's field of specialty as well as the society which "*attracts the attention of the customer and incentivizes them to spend time considering it*". (Van Halderen et al, 2013.).

The creation of a NPOV does not need to be far beyond the thoughts of stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is adequate to be the first to bring an idea that attracts

attention and involve the society in discussion. Van Halderen et al (2013) used the schema arousal theory to suggest that corporations should consider creating a novel idea that are moderately beyond industry thinking. Moderate in the sense that stakeholders can easily replace their schema to such new information. However, when an idea is far beyond stakeholders' schemas, it creates misunderstanding and mistrust; hence extreme novelty beyond the schemas of stakeholders will be hard to adapt to (see figure 2).



Source: Van Halderen et al, 2013.

**Figure 3.** Schema Arousal Theory

Additionally, when the NPOV is low, it would not be given attention and can dent the company's trust as clearly indicated in the figure above.

NPOV can be possible if organizations have experts that can carve out ideas beyond what is practiced in the industry that can solve industry and societal issues.

In essence, Novelty point of view (NPOV) serves as the drivers for new insights to attract stakeholders, becoming different and influential. It is however important to note that organizations must own their NPOV which is directly linked to their expertise, stakeholders (including society) as well as brand.

## **2.6.2 Trust**

Trust is an important pillar of Thought Leadership that comes after Novelty. Although NPOV attracts stakeholders as earlier discussed, trust is needed for the idea to be accepted, adopted and implemented. Ideally, stakeholders will not endorse the NPOV when there is no Trust.

Van Halderen et al (2013) categorized Trust into two types, based on psychological mechanisms. These are:

i) Cognitive-based trust: This type of trust has the perception that, stakeholders (trustor) can rely on Thought Leader's (trustee) expertise and competence. Van Halderen et al (2013) stressed that expertise is a necessary requirement of Thought Leadership to build cognitive-based trust. Companies do that by issuing factual information (i.e. white papers, case studies, fact-finding reports) to corroborate the validity of their NPOV that challenges industrial status-quo. A typical example is IBM; who shared over 25 case studies for different industries on their Smarter Planet website.

In short, cognitive-based trust seals any doubt stakeholders might have in implementing a novelty that goes beyond the usual industry routine.

ii) Affect-based trust: When stakeholders' (trustor) perceive that the Thought Leader (trustee) have their interest and welfare at heart, it is referred to as affect-based trust. This is mostly created through relationship exchanges to build long term and sustainable relationship.

A practical example of affect-based trust can be inferred on a case study of Phillips captured by Young (2013) and Van Halderen et al (2013). For instance, Phillips set up Thought Leadership programme called “The Centre for Health and Well-Being”. “Active Ageing” and “Liveable Cities” were two themes set for the Centre. Philips involved external experts together with its own to stimulate debate and insight from a combination of analytics and expert dialogue. One of the external experts under

“Active Ageing”, Lauri Orlov (Industry Analyst, Aging in Place Technology Watch) after the campaign - wrote on her blog about feedback to Phillip’s strategy, novelty and what competitors do. This was done not because she was paid or compensated but indicates affect-based trust due to the engagement she has had with Phillips. Furthermore, Laurie Orlov commented on an article in the Wall Street Journal citing her affiliation with the Philips’ “Centre for Health and Well-Being” though not-yet validated (at that time). (Van Halderen et al, 2013).

After discussing the pillars of Thought Leadership, it is necessary to look into the challenges companies face or likely to face when practicing Thought Leadership. The succeeding phase pinpoints and discusses the (likely) challenges.

## **2.7 Challenges of Thought Leadership**

The initial part of the literature review emphasized on the meaning of Thought Leadership, features, significance and pillars. However, this part seeks to discuss the problems companies face when articulating Thought Leadership or what will actually lead to Thought Leadership failures.

As the practice of Thought Leadership is gaining upper hand in industries to position themselves above competitors, it has some difficulties too. Some Thought Leadership shortfalls include:

**Lack of understanding of the term.** The real purpose of Thought Leadership is mostly misunderstood by some companies; thus, such firms end up practicing what is contrary. Some companies instead of creating content (which contains insightful point of views) to tackle societal and industrial concerns, they rather create content to market themselves. Ramos et al (2015) cited that it refers to companies’ (e.g. Booz & Allen and McKinsey) contents as Thought Leadership owing to the message it carries. It carries novelties that addresses the pressing needs of stakeholders. Likewise, Euromoney Institutional Investor in the “Capturing current thinking on content marketing and thought leadership” survey, discovered that more than half of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that misunderstanding the

essence of Thought Leadership was a challenge encountered which led to failure of their campaign. Moreover, as David (2017) referred to Harman in their case of experimenting by writing more about the firm, it is a classic example that prospects are no longer interested in contents about companies but contents that provoke their thoughts to the challenges they face.

**Culture of new ideas.** Thought Leadership is not an ordinary culture every company can easily venture into. It requires deep knowledge or expertise in a particular field or specialty to carve out new ideas to tackle the pressing challenges of audience (in that field). Thought Leadership challenges companies to be on their toes to find solutions to new trends for the industry and society to make life cheaper and better. Without new ideas, there is no Thought Leadership. Some companies having interest in the practice but lack fresh ideas tend to repackaged old ideas; which tend to cause a failure - because audience deem repackaged content as insignificant and would pay less or no attention to it (See figure 2)

**Ideas beyond schemas.** As indicated in figure 3, ideas that are far beyond the mind mapping of the audience are likely not to be accepted. Frequently, it causes misunderstanding and mistrust hence lacks trust (Van Halderen et al, 2013).

**Not acting in line with NPOV.** When companies' actions go contrary to what has been promised (in their NPOV), the Thought Leadership fails. For instance, Van Halderen et al (2013) made a reference on the case of British Petroleum (BP). The firm came out with a campaign on climate change in 1995 by articulating a NPOV to position their brand as ethical and eco-friendly. It supported its claims by discontinuing its membership with Global Climate Coalition (who doubted climate change). BP changed its name from British Petroleum to Beyond Petroleum as well changing the colors of their logo to connote their claims. Furthermore, BP developed emission trading systems, used renewal energy and reduced gas emissions which went in line with their initiative. However, the firm's CEO (Lord Browne) later showed "interest in exploring oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR)" which was against what BP was preaching. To worsen the situation, BP caused environmental problems which included explosion of the

company's refinery in Texas (2005) which killed 15 people and the oil spill in Alaska (2006). Audience lost trust in BP's Thought Leadership (climate change) campaign because they believe BP did not practice what they preached.

**Lack of commitment.** Thought Leadership needs time, money and other resources to materialize - yet some companies fail to do so. Van Halderen et al (2013) asserted that organizations that pursue Thought Leadership with less commitment are treading on a fruitless journey. Thought Leadership results do not come immediate - it takes a lot of time and firms engaged in it require patience. It requires long-term strategic investment i.e. time, money, education and the passion to drive.

**Unfamiliar with audience needs (interest).** One of the basic principles of a successful Thought Leadership is to exploit the needs, desires and wants of (target) audience and then create content beyond service or product to add value to their lives. (Badings, 2009). In spite of that, insights that does not conform to their (audience) needs and desires would not be accepted leading to failure.

**Unengaging content.** As earlier discussed, expertise is a prerequisite to a successful Thought Leadership yet writing skills and content creation matters. Companies whose expert lack the skills to produce content that will engage audience are likely to fail in their Thought Leadership. Euromoney Institutional Investor's survey captured respondents who agreed that their campaign failed because their contents were not interesting to prospects.

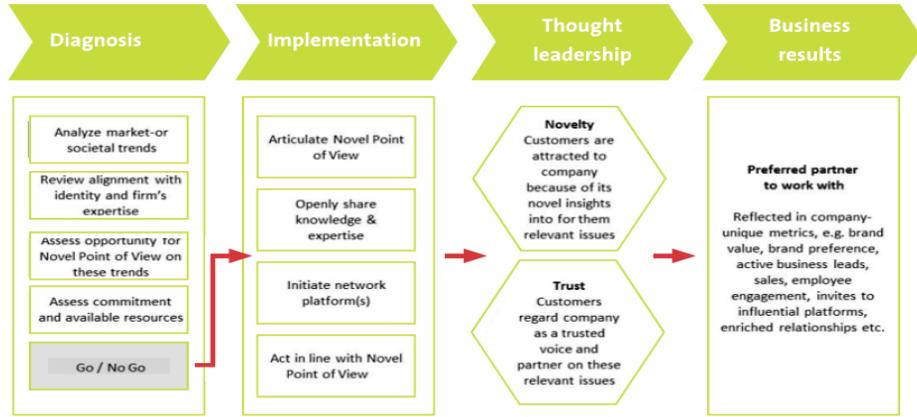
**Channel of delivery.** Some companies fail with their Thought Leadership due to the mode and medium of distribution although they have the best of content (new ideas). In such instance, the content will not reach the right people for it to be heard and this could lead to failure.

## 2.8 Thought Leadership Frameworks

This part of the literature work aims at reviewing, discussing and comparing the various Thought Leadership models or frameworks available.

Van Halderen and Kettler-Paddock developed a planning model called the *Thought*

*Leadership FrameworkTM* which aids companies to successfully articulate Thought Leadership. The detailed framework is divided into four phases namely: Diagnosis, Implementation, Thought Leadership position, and Business results.



Adapted from: Van Halderen et all, 2013

**Figure 4.** Thought Leadership FrameworkTM by Van Halderen and Kettler-Paddock, 2013.

i) **Diagnosis:** This phase examines a company's prospects to pursuing a successful Thought Leadership. Firms are tasked to answer four key questions as shown in figure 4 which explores their abilities, competence and commitment. Ideally, this period serves as a review strategy to decide whether to make a Go/No Go decision. Van Halderen et al (2013) argued that GE passed the diagnosis stage citing that GE “analyzed market- or societal trends” by identifying growing importance of climate change, energy reduction and less harmful activities of companies (eco-friendly). Secondly, GE connected its expertise to these societal challenges by launching the “Ecomagination campaign” as well as cement its commitment.

ii) **Implementation:** When a company passes the Diagnosis test, it is assumed that it is ready to create effective Thought Leadership. Four implementation processes are to be followed. “Articulating the Novel Point of View” comes first; where the

Thought Leadership (aspiring) firm clearly communicates its point of view to the intended industry and society - and solutions to the pressing issues raised which must be easily understood.

Sharing information about the NPOV to stakeholders comes next. This creates the impression that the company has the know-how and capacity to deliver its NPOV. Moreover, information sharing also creates trust between the stakeholders and the owner of the NPOV for the success of Thought Leadership as discussed in “Pillars of Thought Leadership: Trust”.

Subsequently, initiating a network platform that addresses the NPOV is important. In this phenomenon, organizations invite experts, opinion leaders and key stakeholders to share, dialogue and if possible improve the insights connecting the NPOV. Young (2013) cited that establishing network platforms promote the NPOV among influential people, improves knowledge and expertise of the company as well as build strong ties with experts and stakeholders which then leads to trust and authority.

Finally, companies must act in line with its NPOV. It should be integrated in its identity, strategy and daily routines. This is very important if the Thought Leadership is to succeed - else it will lose trust and credibility. As discussed earlier, BP’s case is evident.

iii) **Thought Leadership position:** Organizations reach these heights after successfully going through the Implementation (four) processes. Through their NPOV, they are recognized - and trusted by acting in line with it.

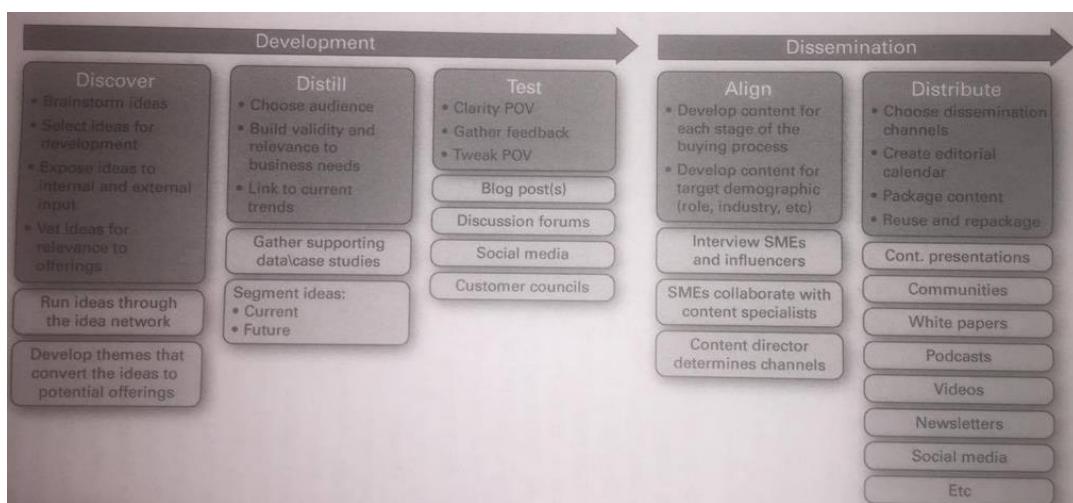
iv) **Business results:** Young (2013) cited that Van Halderen et al (2013) indicated that investing in Thought Leadership: “*creates a new platform of differentiation in the market and raises the bar for competitors; brings closer alignment with the market because it anticipates customers’ needs for 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.”*

This framework was used by Phillips for their Thought Leadership campaign.

Likewise, IT Services Marketing Association popularly called ITSMA which is an international membership association - created a different planning model borne-out of their long history, experience and perspective of Thought Leadership in the technology industry. The framework urges firms at the initial stages; to discover and explore ideas, create a point of view from it and then test it - afterwards, the information (Thought Leadership content) is disseminated.

Young (2013) summarized that the ITSMA framework and the one developed by Van Halderen and Kettler-Paddock correspond to each other although there is clear distinction between creation and communicating the mechanism in ITSMA's structure. Moreover, the ITSMA model does not have a phase that measure the results of Thought Leadership. Despite that, both frameworks are practical, tried and tested and could help companies having the intention to start Thought Leadership (Young, 2013.).



Source: Young, 2013

**Figure 5.** ITSMA's Thought Leadership Model

Craig Badings also proposed a START IP blueprint now called the Leading Thought Model. The structure is a five-step logical process which involves understanding the challenge at the initial challenge; developing the strategy; producing the Thought Leadership content; communicating the NPOV; and measuring results.

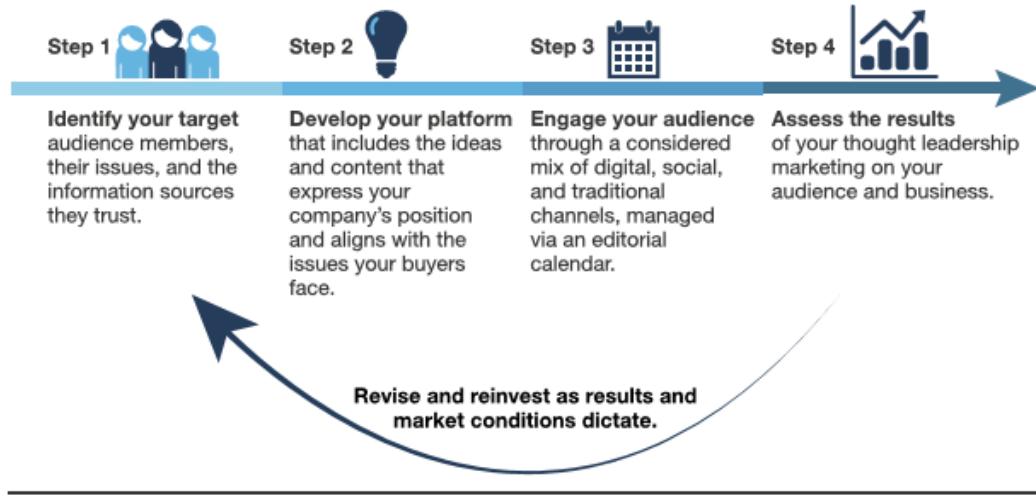


Adapted from: *Leading Thoughts*, 2014

**Figure 6.** Leading Thought's Framework: Thought Leadership

A critical observation of this model correlates with Van Halderen and Kettler-Paddock's framework in terms of measuring results. Additionally, there is a similarity with ITSMA's model when it comes to disseminating the NPOV. Badings who have had over twenty years of experience in advising corporations on successful Thought Leadership commented that this framework is a proven strategic methodology that "...will help you find your point of view and take it to market. It ensures you create the biggest possible impact with the stakeholders who matter most, by identifying content and insights that matter most to them."

Last (but not the least) to be discussed is Forrester's four-step Thought Leadership framework acronymically called IDEA. Forrester Research suggested the following steps:



Source: Ramos, L., O'Neill, P., & Trafton, R. 2015.

**Figure 7.** Forrester's Thought Leadership Framework

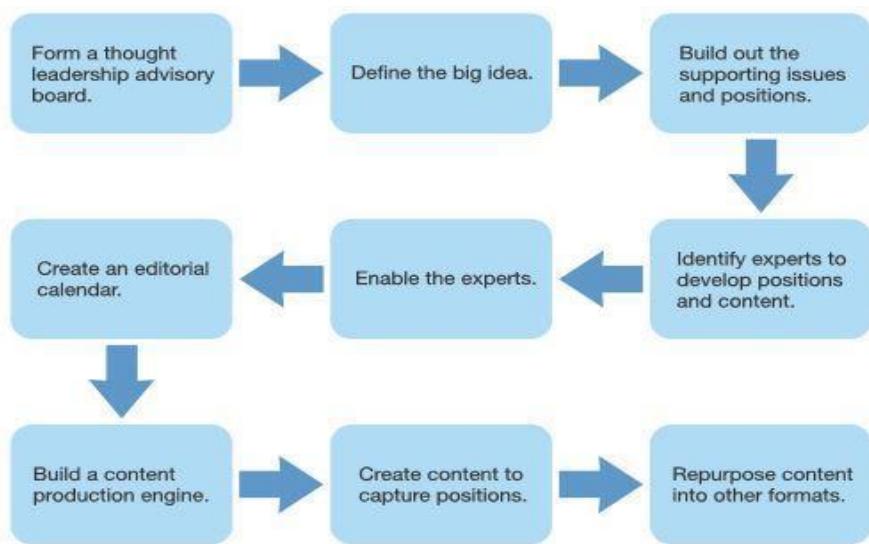
### Step 1: Identify Your Target Audience

Since most Thought Leadership ideas respond to current trends than customer needs, it is necessary to outline the kind of audience a firm wants to attract as well as the impression the audience will have of the firm. To achieve this, Forrester proposed that firms have to target a particular group of potential audience who are likely to buy the idea which can in turn influence others - e.g. some practitioners target C-suite managers so their point of view will attract influencers and then descend to subordinates.

In addition, Thought Leadership firms should find out their targets' pressing concerns and conduct research extensively in the industry to elucidate their issues. On top of that, find out where target audience go for information in solving their problem.

## Step 2: Develop Your Thought Leadership Platform

In creating a Thought Leadership programme, Forrester Research advised a sequential plan which includes: devising an insight that aligns with the firm's brand to create a point of view of a critical issue and can be served as a theme. Subject matter experts deliberating on the idea to take a position and to create content for it. Finally, the contents must be strategized considering the steps of execution, and delivery (see figure 8 below).



Source: Forrester Research Inc.

**Figure 8.** Steps to Develop Thought Leadership Platform

## Step 3: Engage Your Audience

Today, in the digital age there is an overwhelming majority of audience available on the internet. Ernst, Cooperstein & Dernoga (2011) urged firms to engage their Thought Leadership audience through digital, mobile and social channels by: publishing through the firm's own website or blog and distributing it to the firm's social media by posting the links; contacting influential bloggers to review the NPOV on their blogs, promote contents through sponsored ads and engage audience in seminars as well; and informing employees of the Thought Leadership

campaign and making it easily accessible to them.

#### Step 4: Assess the Impact on Your Business

Thought Leadership does not only have an impact on a company's brand, however it does play a role in sales and revenue. Ernst et al (2011) of Forrester Research claimed that Thought Leadership results must be measured across three (3) areas. That is "*how people consumed your idea*", "*how people spread and talk about your platform*" and "*how ideas lead to revenue*" (See figure 10).

| Size of audience  | Share of influence   | Pipeline and revenue  |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Size and growth rate of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thought leadership page views and report downloads</li><li>• Blog readers and comments</li><li>• Webinar and speech attendees</li><li>• Members of groups on social networks</li><li>• Email and direct mail subscriber lists</li></ul> | <p>Quantity, growth rate, and tone of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Readers who share content with friends and colleagues</li><li>• External blog posts, comments and tweets about your content, and links to content</li><li>• Mentions of your firm relative to competitors around an issue</li><li>• Mentions in traditional media outlets</li></ul> | <p>Quantity and conversion rates of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leads captured as a result of thought leadership content</li><li>• Meetings scheduled</li><li>• Converted sales opportunities</li><li>• Closed deals and revenue</li></ul> |

Source: Forrester Research Inc.

**Figure 9.** Thought Leadership's Impact along Three Dimension

In evaluating an effective outcome, firms need to know the number of people their Thought Leadership ideas affect across all shared channels. This includes the number of readers or page views, report downloads, comments. Where and how frequent people talk about the campaign is very essential to measure. When readers get enthused with the content and decide to share with colleagues, mention the firm to competitors around an issue or in the traditional media, it indicates some level of influence hence a good result. Influential ideas lead to business opportunities like converted sales opportunities, closed deals and revenues, for example, Dove increasing in double digit percentage in sales after their Real Beauty campaign.

## **2.9 Summary of Theoretical Framework**

This part of the entire chapter seeks to summarize the relevant studies on Thought Leadership captured in the literature review. A recapitulation of the relevant knowledge gathered in this chapter will aid in the understanding of the situation of Thought Leadership as well support the construction of appropriate questions to be used in the empirical study.

Firstly, the definition and features of Thought Leadership were discussed into details to give a better understanding of the subject matter. As discussed above, Thought Leadership is inventing a novel idea that will help better the industry and society without any intention of selling (Van Halderen et al, 2013: ITSMA, 2013). Furthermore, Thought Leadership must not be confused with sales, marketing or content marketing as well as innovation. (Brosseau & Kawasaki, 2013: Van Halderen et al, 2013: Ramos, L., O'Neill, P., & Trafton, R. 2015.)

The chapter also discussed the importance of Thought Leadership to include that, companies who articulate Thought Leadership have the tendency of introducing new insights that will better audience needs and give them the *strategic visibility* to become an authority in their specialty. In addition, it was stated that Thought Leadership affects companies' employees and increases sales (although it is not the prime intention). (Badings, 2009: Brosseau & Kawasaki, 2013: Van Halderen et al, 2013)

In section 2.5 & 2.6, the sources and pillars of Thought Leadership were discussed. The sources revealed where Thought Leadership can be derived. According to Van Halderen et al (2013) it can be derived from a combination of a company's ability (competence) and its character to the society and industry. Young (2013) on the other hand suggested various sources to include research (extensive), internal collaboration, a company's knowledge in the industry, debate amongst experts and futures work. Regarding pillars of Thought Leadership, Van Halderen et al (2013) claimed that there are two essential ingredients that makes Thought Leadership and without them, there is no Thought Leadership. Novelty

(expertise and point of view) and Trust (acceptance of the message) were mentioned as the two pillars of Thought Leadership.

The succeeding section explored what leads to Thought Leadership pitfalls. Several factors were mentioned including lack of understanding of the term, non-alignment with company practice, lack of commitment, the idea, contents and audience needs. All were cited as some of the reasons leading to Thought Leadership failures.

Finally, the frameworks of Thought Leadership were discussed and compared. The featured frameworks comprised of Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock, ITSMA, Alexander & Badings and Forrester Research Thought Leadership Models. The various framework revealed the processes involved in Thought Leadership from start to measuring the outcome.

All these theoretical frameworks will be used as a foundation for the empirical research, however, the focus will be on Van Halderen et al (2013) theory. This model will be used to identify why companies practice Thought Leadership and the process involved in articulating a successful Thought Leadership. Challenges companies face will also be examined. As well, the pillars of Thought leadership will be evaluated.

Next is the research methodology chapter.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In the preceding chapter, relevant scholarly writings were reviewed to give an understanding of the topic under study and helped in forming the necessary questions to be used in this chapter. This chapter presents the research methods employed in the study. It explains the method, approach, data collection, sampling plan, validity and reliability, limitations, and empirical setting.

By definition, research is increasing or revising a knowledge or discovering a new fact to solve problems through a systematic investigative process (i.e. the methodology) which involves identifying, gathering, analyzing and disseminating information (Kumar, 2000; Wilson, 2014).

#### **3.1 Research Method**

Basically, research methods are made up of two types namely: Quantitative and Qualitative research methods.

The quantitative method involves the use of systematic mathematical or statistical technique in gathering data from large sample of respondents (in most cases) and further analyzed in numbers whereas the qualitative uses an interpretive technique to describe, decode, translate or come to terms with the meaning of an occurring phenomena in the social world (Cooper & Schindler, 2006).

Moreover, the qualitative method provides rich and detailed results which in turn offer ideas and concepts to inform the researcher (Ospina, 2004). The figure below compares quantitative and qualitative research methods.

| Type of method              | Quantitative   | Qualitative   |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Aim</b>                  | The aim is to count things in an attempt to explain what is observed                                   | The aim is a complete, detailed description of what is observed.                              |
| <b>Purpose</b>              | Generalizability, prediction, causal explanations  | Contextualization, interpretation, understanding perspectives                                 |
| <b>Tools</b>                | Researcher uses tools, such as surveys, to collect numerical data                                      | Researcher is the data gathering instrument.  |
| <b>Data Collection</b>      | Structured   | Unstructured  |
| <b>Output</b>               | Data is in the form of numbers and statistics  | Data is in the form of words, picture or objects.   |
| <b>Sample</b>               | Usually a large number of cases representing the population of interest. Randomly selected respondents | Usually a small number of non-representative cases. Respondents selected on their experience. |
| <b>Objective/Subjective</b> | Objective - seeks precise measurement & analysis   | Subjective - individuals' interpretation of events is important                               |
| <b>Researcher role</b>      | Researcher tends to remain objectively separated from the subject matter.                              | Researcher tends to become subjectively immersed in the subject matter                        |
| <b>Analysis</b>             | Statistical  | Interpretive  |

Adapted from: McDonald & Headlam, n.d;

**Figure 10.** Comparisons between Quantitative and Qualitative research methods

Therefore, before conducting a research, it is essential for a researcher to know and choose the appropriate method which will correspond with the research problem. Based on the nature of the topic under study - which is obviously new, the research method appropriate and suitable in this dissertation is the qualitative research method. This method explores a problem through an unstructured or semi-structured technique based on small samples to provide better insight by finding answers to the questions of why and how and further analyze data in words.

In achieving that, in-depth interviews will be conducted in this dissertation with the Thought Leadership experts from five different companies. The questions to the interviews are open ended for respondents to feel free in expressing their opinions to the researcher.

### **3.2 Sampling Plan**

Sampling explains the category, selection of respondents, and the size of respondents. Holme & Solvang (1991) stated that, it is important to select a sample that has a purpose to the study and has a know-how of the subject matter when conducting a research.

Accordingly, the non-probability sampling technique was used based on the study complexity. Specifically, the snowball sampling method which is designed to find informants with rich information and recommending other informants to the researcher who could be of interest to the research question (Janesick, 2000; Patron, 1987) was considered.

The informants were chosen based on the following criteria: Firstly, the company they work for, have knowledge of or practices Thought Leadership. Secondly, informants have knowledge of the subject matter and are involved in the Thought Leadership process. Lastly, their firm can offer evidence of successful Thought Leadership knowledge or practice.

In the empirical part, there is a brief background of the various case companies to throw more light to the reason behind their selection.

| <b>Company</b>                | <b>Country</b> | <b>Informant's position</b>                  | <b>Industry</b>    |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--|--------------------|
| <b>Thought Leadership Lab</b> | <b>USA</b>     | <b>Chief Executive Officer</b>               | <b>Consultancy</b> |
| <b>Jabil Incorporated</b>     | <b>USA</b>     | <b>Corporate Content &amp; Media Manager</b> | <b>Technology</b>  |

|  |                |   |                   |
|--|----------------|---|-------------------|
| <b>ConnectWise</b>                         | <b>USA</b>     | <b>Snr, Corporate Marketing Manager</b> | <b>Technology</b> |
| <b>MCB Group</b>                           | <b>Holland</b> | <b>Marketing Manager</b>                | <b>Metal</b>      |
| <b>Font University of Applied Sciences</b> | <b>Holland</b> | <b>Applied Researcher</b>               | <b>Education</b>  |

**Figure 11.** Profile of Informants

### **3.3 Data Collection & Analysis**

The main objective of this dissertation is to investigate why a business 'should' practice Thought Leadership and how they can effectively use it as a business tool to succeed. Therefore, primary and secondary data were gathered.

The primary data consists of interviews with informants to get firsthand information. This was done by a semi-structured interview conducted via Skype with the various selected experts from different practicing organizations.

Secondary data was gathered from company blogs, published reports and brochures to serve as supportive documents to enhance better understanding of the subject matter and its practice.

Five interviews were carried out in total. Those interviewed were a CEO (1 interview), Corporate Content & Media Manager (1 interview), Corporate Marketing Senior Manager (1 interview), Marketing Manager (1 interview) and an Applied Researcher (1 interview). All the interviews were conducted on telephone (Skype to be specific) in English due to geographical distances. The average length of the interview was 40 minutes and the length varied between 24-85 minutes. The interviews were focused on the informant's knowledge of Thought Leadership and how their company have successfully practiced it.

Finally, the recorded interviews were transcribed, edited (corrected) and commented for the purposes of analysis.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

Reliability and Validity are two credibility theories that measures the authenticity of research data. Research precision and repeatability is obtained through the reliability theory, meaning the research when repeated will give the same results. (Kjellberg & Sörqvist, 2011, 86-92)

On the other hand, Validity measures the trueness of the research data and the accuracy of structured questions, data collections and analysis of the data (Denscombe, 2009). Since this dissertation employs the qualitative method, validity of research is more critical than reliability. Simply put, validity determines whether the purpose of the research is met as well measuring the things needed. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 1997, 226).

The five selected informants were experts of the subject area. All interviews were conducted through Skype. Furthermore, informants easily understood the interview questions and answered accordingly without problems to meet the purpose of the research.

### **3.5 Limitations**

Due to the newness of the study area, there were few people who have knowledge of the subject matter. Therefore, it made it challenging to reach these few to respond to the research questions for analysis. Furthermore, the time frame was a limitation to this thesis. Due to time limits, some interviews could not be made carried out. However, the in-depth interview conducted gives enough material for analyzing, evaluating and summing up the results.

### **3.6 Empirical Setting**

The final part of this chapter describes the empirical setting by briefly introducing the various case companies to explain the reason behind their selections.

### **3.6.1 Jabil Incorporated**

Jabil Incorporated is a global manufacturing & design services based in the United States. The company works with 250 of the biggest brands in the world. Jabil Inc. practices Thought Leadership by introducing new ideas and sharing it to the industry they find themselves.

### **3.6.2 Thought Leadership Lab**

Thought Leadership Lab is a consultancy firm that helps companies create a Thought Leadership culture. The firm has worked with Fortune 1000 companies including Google and Microsoft. The company has created a Thought Leadership blueprint for companies to use as a guide to move from leaders to thought leaders.

### **3.6.3 Fonts University of Applied Sciences**

Fonts UAS is known to be the first school (in Europe) to teach Thought Leadership as a course as part of a university programme. They have dedicated lecturers who aim at helping students develop new ideas to change the world's setting. The informant conducts research for Fonts UAS in Thought Leadership to get a better understanding of what is it as well as the big spectrum of the practice.

### **3.6.4 MCB International BV**

MCB Group is a manufacturing company in the metal industry. As well, the company supplies semi-manufactured plastic and technical products. MCB shares new insights about metals in their industry.

### **3.6.5 ConnectWise Incorporated**

ConnectWise is a B2B company located in the USA. It sells software that is meant to help businesses to create better efficiencies. It is known as a Thought Leader in cyber security.

## **4 FINDINGS**

As earlier mentioned, the interviews were conducted via Skype with experts from different companies that practices Thought Leadership by means of collecting their answers on the set questions as discussed in the previous chapter. Since the thesis aims at investigating why firms (should) practice Thought Leadership and how they can effectively practice it, answers to the questions are analyzed and presented in this chapter.

Six themes can be used to describe the findings from the study. These themes are Entry mode, Process, Levels, Controls, Challenges and Pillars.

### **4.1 Findings from Interviews**

The results of the interview are revealed in this chapter. There were thirteen (13) open-ended questions answered by five informants. The results are transcribed, edited and commented. This will serve as finding to help in drawing conclusions.

#### **4.1.1 Entry Mode**

The following questions were composed to collect more specific and detailed descriptions from respondents to examine the importance of the concept and what to consider when entering Thought Leadership:

- i) Why does your company practice Thought Leadership?
- ii) What did your company consider before venturing into Thought Leadership?
- iii) How crucial is financing?

Informants were of the view that since customers are tired of companies using sales marketing to inform them purposely to sell their products and brands, companies have now devised this mechanism to establish their voices without marketing - by informing, educating with fresh viewpoints to solve industry and society's major concerns purposely to connect with audience, differentiate themselves from competitors, position themselves as the "go-to" in their specialty and in turn earn

their trust hence becoming influential

*...It is matter of positioning yourself as an expert in your field and industry. Thus, by education and informing your customers (with new ideas rather than using sales marketing to sell yourself) to create an (initial) trust with customers and potential customers... (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.)*

*... (Companies) want to be seen as adding value to the community. (Therefore) Thought Leadership is a way that is not marketing and sales but a way of establishing a voice and a point of view and a way of creating a value in an industrial setting where people look up to you..... At first, I thought it was about influencing but it also about trust. Thought Leadership gives the best clue to help companies to reestablish trust in their industry and the world... (Ceo, Thought Leadership Lab)*

*...Due to the knowledge economy, companies use Thought Leadership to differentiate themselves from competitors by not only having knowledge (expertise or intellect) but by sharing knowledge (fresh viewpoints) ..... (Marketing Manager, MCB).*

*... The purpose of Thought Leadership and why people (companies) do it is to create a soft and relatable way to connect with audience and doing it in a way that is helpful. (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing, ConnectWise)*

Furthermore, one respondent opined that companies use it to be seen as having the real or sincere intention of changing the world.

*..... Companies do that in a transformative way to be seen as having the intrinsic motivation to help the world. (Researcher, Fonts UAS)*

Therefore, it can be concluded that companies and individuals practice Thought Leadership not for practicing sake or wholly for the greater good, but the reason is; to connect with audiences, differentiating themselves from competitors, position

themselves as having the intellect, getting their voices heard, creating long term relationships and to earn trust without actually marketing themselves.

Additionally, according to the information gathered from the interviewees, factors such as company's mission, topic or subject area in the industry the company is good at and the new point of view should be considered when venturing into Thought leadership. Furthermore, knowing your target audience and industry trends is also another factor worth considering.

Regarding financing, the respondents agreed that financing Thought Leadership is critical but relative in the success of every Thought Leadership process. The five informants affirmed that starting from the research process to get a new idea, framing the idea into various contents and finally disseminating it, all comes with some sort of financial commitment but the most important is investing the time in hunting for fresh ideas to carve fresh viewpoints. Therefore, it is appropriate for aspiring Thought Leading companies to get a special budget for their Thought Leadership projects notwithstanding dedicating special time for Thought Leadership.

#### **4.1.2 Process**

When asked from where Thought Leadership is derived, the five informants mentioned various sources including internal expertise or practices, research (external and internal), trend watching and collaboration.

*.... One of the sources is our internal subject matter experts. We utilize secondary research from other companies (in the industry) to enforce our perspectives or thoughts. Finally, we conduct original research through third party survey companies for each campaign we are doing. (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.)*

*... You can derive it through external research. You can also look internally for your best practices that are unique and fresh and will not cost you a competitive*

*threat to share. (Ceo, Thought Leadership).*

*.... We research on one subject that we can become an expert on... (Marketing Manager, MCG Group)*

*...mainly researching and looking for big global issues (trends). Again, you research internally..... Another source is collaborating with organizations that are familiar with the theme you want to address. (Applied Researcher, Fonts UAS)*

*... A lot of it comes from our internal experts, and also, we research to understand customer's urgent needs and industrial publications that goes in line with our subject matter. (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing, ConnectWise)*

Furthermore, respondents claimed that they create a theme after extracting a novel idea which conforms to the nature of the campaign, what they do and the industry they find themselves.

In addition, information gathered from the five representatives indicates that white papers, and blog articles (and sharing it on the company's social media page), infographics, and PowerPoint presentation are some of the formats through which their Thought Leadership contents are crafted.

*.... Digital (like a new website to spread your npov in a form of a blog or vlog), speaking events (like industrial gathering or TEDEx), whitepapers, but the criteria of the content have to be logically connected with your identity of your organization.... (Applied Researcher, Fonts UAS)*

*.... Blogs are an excellent form of Thought Leadership because they tie back to your website. When we get feedback from our blogs, we then move it to the next level and support it with videos and infographics and then to PowerPoints presentation for our Thought Leaders to present at events. And when we get some interest level, we try to build it into whitepapers. (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing, ConnectWise)*

Despite that, one respondent said that they frame their viewpoints into books.

*.... we frame our point of view into books, and publications on our blogs and share it on our social media (Marketing Manager, MCB)*

Another also stated that, the company engages in the organization of meetings, symposiums where all industry stakeholders emerge where they can translate their NPOV to them. Again, they can also lobby with decision makers in order to get their NPOV across.

*.... The most powerful way is to convene your own community.... by bringing experts together, having conversation at industry gathering (with your NPOV) and by getting yourself involved in committees and commissions or boards at the national level to be able to influence national policy (with your NPOV) depending on your industry... (Ceo, Thought Leadership Lab)*

Regarding the best social media platform in delivering Thought Leadership content, there were differences of opinions amongst the respondents. Three out of the five respondents were very specific by stating that LinkedIn is the most effective and one suggested YouTube

Notwithstanding, two respondents out of the five asserted to the fact that the platform to use is solely dependent on the theme of the Thought Leadership project as well as the audience's characteristics like location, age and consumption patterns or attitudes.

*...It actually depends on the theme of the Thought Leadership. If the theme connects to older and professional audience, LinkedIn comes to mind. However, with younger audience LinkedIn will not be appropriate. (Applied Researcher, Fonts UAS)*

*.It depends.... The most important is digging into audience's demographic and psychographic. If your business is to market to businesses perhaps LinkedIn is okay.*

*However, if your business is marketed to consumers, Twitter or Facebook will be appropriate. (CEO, Thought Leadership Lab)*

#### **4.1.3 Levels**

Informants opined that targeting executive levels that has the power to make decisions is best.

*... We target directors and c-suites levels or anyone who has a decision-making power... (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.)*

However, four of the interviewees further stated that it is appropriate to target all levels since every level has something to tap in the Thought Leadership process.

*.... Targeting the people in the decision-making unit like the CEO level depending on the industry is very important... However, anybody in the industry can be targeted since they will also be reading your knowledge (Thought Leadership contents) ... (Marketing Manager, MCB Group)*

*...Is about targeting people everywhere since anyone in the industry has something to be tapped. Although there is a great synergy in targeting top level executives... (CEO, Thought Leadership).*

*.... The top level is important. But synchronizing every level is very important. (Applied Researcher, Fonts UAS)*

*.... We aim at decision makers but also people who support the decision makers. Because today, decisions are not only made by a single person.... Another is to target industry leaders who have an influential voice. And influential editors who can also amplify our message (point of view)... (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing, ConnectWise)*

Moreover, interviewees responded that they do not involve external experts but acknowledged their importance in the Thought Leadership process at a certain

stage.

*.... Only internal (experts) because that is the best way to show that your company is a Thought Leader (and to prove that your company has the men) and own a (novel) viewpoint. In spite of that, external experts can be involved in discussion at a later stage for the purposes of dialoguing. (Marketing Manager, MCB)*

*... There is a certain stage a company (especially the sophisticated ones) go through before involving external experts to have a dialogue to strengthen ideas and create the best of content to go out the world... (Ceo, Thought Leadership Lab)*

*.... Not at the moment. But we look forward to involving them at a certain stage... (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.)*

*...It (external experts) is very important in a strategical way but should be included at a certain stage (Applied Researcher, Fonts UAS).*

*... Yes we involve external experts.... but not until we have established some level in the Thought Leadership process... (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing, ConnectWise)*

#### **4.1.4 Controls**

In measuring the outcome of Thought Leadership, two informants assumed that it will take Thought Leadership from nine months to three years to materialize.

*... It needs some dedication at least in the first 3 months to see some results in 9 months. (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing ConnectWise)*

*.... We believe effective thought leadership takes like 2-3 years to materialize. (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.).*

Two (2) respondents stated Thought Leadership cannot be easily measured within a time frame

*.... It is an evolution .... Therefore, it is a gradual and/or continuing process.*  
*(Marketing Manager, MCG Group)*

*.... It depends on the situation, type of theme and the organization you are. So, it will be hard to measure it within a specific amount of time. It differs from case to case.... (Applied researcher, Fonts UAS).*

Another further asserted that the time frame between an established firm and a less established firms differs considerably.

*.... What is interesting is ... it can happen within a short time for a big and respected company, but as a starting (small) company; it will take a while. (CEO, Thought Leadership Lab)*

Considering the above responses, it is imperative to note that companies should not necessarily expect to reap results within the short-term period. However, medium to long term can be a period where results start to show up.

Aside from the above information, it was also found out that there are an array means of measuring Thought Leadership ranging from the mentioning of NPOV and/or implementation by competitors, views and comments on Thought Leadership contents. Additionally, conducting market research on focus groups is another way of measuring your Thought Leadership outcome.

Another measuring tool is Reptrack which is a monitor (KPI) that helps firm assess the level their thought leadership or NPOV has reached or how audiences view their Thought Leadership campaigns.

#### **4.1.5 Challenges**

The respondents gave different answers based on the difficulties they have encountered in their Thought Leadership process.

The first respondent uttered that their main problem they face is “conflict of

interest" with their marketing department. Whenever they introduce a new idea, the marketing department want to use that idea to gain sales.

*The main problem is our marketing department. (Because) when we discover a fresh viewpoint, they want to quickly capitalize on that for a business advantage. And this will ruin our thought leadership essence. So, whenever we discover a novel insight, there is a conflict of interest (with the marketing department) (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.)*

Two respondents mentioned lack of self-belief (from experts), unwillingness to share a new idea, lack of trust (in terms of sincerity in the practice) and consistency in practicing Thought Leadership as well aligning it to your company's practice, in essence conservativeness.

*.... Our biggest huddle was that, experts in our company were afraid to share their knowledge because they do not see themselves as one (because of their courtesy and humility). Another problem was transparency; because (top) managers were afraid to share new findings (they have discovered) to the industry for competitors to capitalize. (Marketing Manager, MCB)*

*.... Some challenges (commercial organizations) might face are; audience might question whether the practicing firm is doing it wholeheartedly or just using it as a marketing way to get customers. This means getting trust from the public is a challenge. So, if you are commercial company, it very difficult to gain trust (at times). Another difficulty is being consistent and also aligning your Thought Leadership (novel point of view) to everything you do internally. Because when you start to practice, thought leadership becomes your main strategy. And when you do something otherwise, it becomes hazardous to your company and brand. (Applied Researcher, Fonts UAS)*

Another informant disclosed that the ability to obtain a new idea and a NPOV, lack of concentration on one topic at a time (inconsistency), and the depth of (Thought

Leadership) content are difficulties companies encounter when practicing Thought Leadership.

*.... The ability to source Thought Leadership and the other challenge is you can start a topic (without completing it) and then something comes up and someone brings another topic and you have to divert and not give one topic enough time to develop... So, dropping one topic and building another one from scratch is a major challenge sometimes. Another challenge is the depth of the (Thought Leadership) content. (Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing, ConnectWise)*

*... Laziness (in getting fresh ideas) and the lack of point of view will not let people consider you. (CEO, Thought Leadership Lab)*

#### **4.1.6 Pillars**

The respondents mentioned intellect (company's expertise) and the message (point of view) as being the most important ingredients.

*... The company expertise and the viewpoint are most important... (Corporate Content & Media Manager, Jabil Inc.)*

*.... You must have an understanding of where you are going... that is what I call the 'what if future?' ... And secondly what's your role towards that.... and lastly what is the message you are going to use. (CEO, Thought Leadership)*

*.... The most important is the company's expertise and an authenticity of the message (novel point of view) that is attached to people. But trust only comes as a result when your message is accepted. (Marketing Manager, MCB)*

*.... Understanding what you want to do and having the potential to inspire and transform their way of thinking... That is having the expertise and the novel point of view. Again, having the ability to mobilize people. (Applied researcher, Fonts UAS)*

*... The most important is honesty (message) and relatability to the target audience.*  
*(Senior Manager: Corporate Marketing ConnectWise)*

## **4.2 Discussion**

With regards to *why companies (should) practice Thought Leadership*, the findings of this study show that connecting with audience, differentiation from competitors, positioning as an expert in a specialty and (re)establishing trust are some of the reasons why companies practice Thought Leadership. This finding correlate with what was mentioned by scholars in the literature review (e.g., Van Halderen et al, 2013; Alexander & Badings 2012).

As far as the sources of Thought Leadership is concerned, the findings revealed that Thought Leadership can be derived from internal practices, research (both internal and external), and collaboration. This goes in line with Young's (2013) sources of Thought Leadership. Furthermore, the findings disclosed that; company's mission, subject matter expertise, novel point of view, target audience and industry trends must be considered before venturing into Thought Leadership. This matches the 'Diagnosis' part of Van Halderen & Kettler Paddock's Thought Leadership Framework. However, this finding added a new perspective regarding financing Thought Leadership. Interestingly, the study indicates that financing is relative, but it is however appropriate to draw a special budget for it. Moreover, it is discovered in this study that a Thought Leadership theme must go align with the campaign and company practice.

The study adds a new insight that, there is a great synergy in influencing the decision-making unit with Thought Leadership. In spite of that, targeting all levels are important since the various levels have something to be tapped in the Thought Leadership process. It was also realized that most B2B companies consider LinkedIn as the most effective social media platform in delivering their content since they believe it is where people go for business contents.

In this dissertation, it was discovered that involving external experts in the Thought Leadership process is important but only at a certain stage. This supports Van Halderen et al's (2013) theory.

The findings of the challenges of Thought Leadership provides support to the reviewed scholarly literature. However, *conflict of interest* was a new finding revealed in this thesis.

The findings uncovered that there is no particular time frame regarding the success of Thought Leadership. However, medium to long term can be a period where results start to show up.

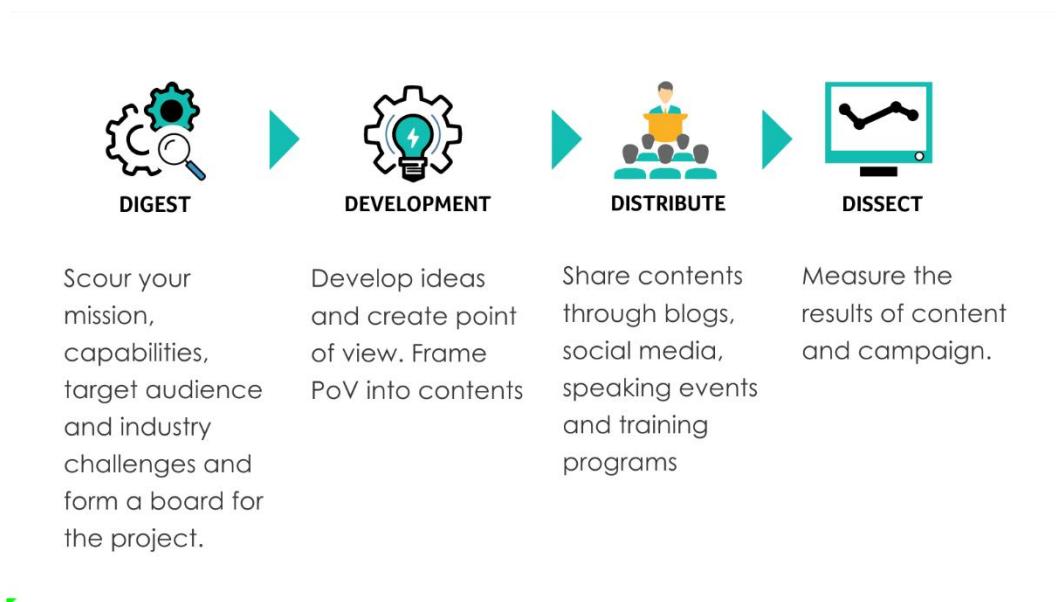
The findings regarding ways of measuring Thought Leadership outcomes correspond with Badings' framework and that of Forrester Research's framework.

In relation to *the most important ingredients of Thought Leadership*, the findings of this thesis add to prior study. While Van Halderen et al (2013) stated Novelty and Trust as the pillars of Thought Leadership, the finding supports the view of Novelty (i.e. having expertise and a novel point of view) yet deem Trust as an outcome and not a pillar.

#### **4.3 Formulation of Thought Leadership Framework**

After gathering answers from informants and considering scholarly writings, the researcher got an idea to develop a framework for potential Thought Leadership practitioners. This framework is referred to as the 4D Thought Leadership Model.

As the name suggests, it comprises of four stages to include: Digest, develop, distribute and dissect respectively. The figure below presents the 4D Thought Leadership model developed by the researcher.



**Figure 12.** 4D Thought Leadership Model by Lukumanu Iddrisu (2017)

Digest is the first stage that urges companies to review what they stand for, analyze their expertise and the subject matter they can best deal with. Furthermore, the challenges of the target audience and that of the industry must be analyzed. When all these are evaluated, the firm can proceed to form a board committed to pursuing Thought Leadership. The board should comprise of subject matter experts and content creators.

The succeeding stage after the review, is the development stage. This is where the viewpoint and contents are created. The first step in this stage is to create an (understanding) idea through research (extensive) or unique internal practice that addresses audience and industry challenge. The idea is subsequently tested, and a novel point of view is carved out. The point of view is then integrated with the company's practice and a theme created. The point of view is then crafted into contents formats like articles, infographics, books/eBooks, videos, slides, white papers, etc. The need to be in dialogue with external experts is crucial at this stage to increase the trust of your message (NPOV). Finally, it is necessary to produce an editorial calendar for the dissemination process.

The next stage is where the Thought Leadership is distributed to the audience and the industry. Practitioners can use blog posts to reach the audience and the same time share the blog posts through their various social media channels. However, the best social media platform must be considered. Additionally, speaking about the NPOV at industry gatherings, conferences, committees, and boards are an effective way to get your NPOV to influencers. Lastly, creating a training platform to freely induce people about your NPOV and the solutions it brings to the audience and the industry is also another way of dissemination.

The last stage is where the results of the campaign is measured. Firms can monitor views and comments of their content to see if the message is really breaking thoughts. Furthermore, mentions and/implementation of the NPOV by competitors is another way of assessing the outcome of Thought Leadership campaign. A market survey on the focus group is also another form of getting to know how you have impacted people with your NPOV.

| DIGEST   | DEVELOPMENT  | DISTRIBUTE & EDUCATE   | DISSECT RESULTS   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Revisit mission of the company.</p> <p>Evaluate expertise and subject matter</p> <p>Analyze audience and industry challenge</p> <p>Form a board for the project</p> | <p>Create a new idea (an understanding)</p> <p>Test ideas and create a point of view.</p> <p>Integrate NPOV with company's practices.</p> <p>Create a theme (that matches your practice)</p> <p>Frame ideas into contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Articles</li> <li>● Infographics</li> <li>● Books/eBooks</li> <li>● Videos</li> <li>● Slides</li> <li>● Whitepapers</li> </ul> <p>Dialogue with external experts.</p> <p>Produce calendar for content dissemination</p> | <p>Blogs</p> <p>Social Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● LinkedIn (for B2B)</li> </ul> <p>Speaking Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conferences</li> <li>● Committees</li> <li>● Boards</li> </ul> <p>Training</p> | <p>Check views and comments on contents.</p> <p>Mentions of NPOV by competitors.</p> <p>Implementation of NPOV by others.</p> <p>Through market survey.</p> |

**Figure 13.** Summary of 4D Framework

#### **4.4 Discussion on Framework**

The first stage of the ‘4D Framework’ (Digest) has some similarities with the first stages of the frameworks captured in the scholarly literature. It corresponds to Forrester’s model in-terms of identifying target audience; Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock model in respect of assessing market and societal trends as well as reviewing expertise. Still in the ‘Digest’ section, the last point (i.e. form a board) has some connection with Forrester’s framework step 2.

In the Development phase (second stage), there is a correlation between ITSMA’s framework when it comes to creating a new idea and developing a theme although ITSMA’s are captured in their first stage. In addition, the second stage matches the second stage (also known as the Implementation stage) of Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock model when it comes to articulating the NPOV and dialoguing with external experts. And same when it comes to ITSMA’s model in spite of the fact that it is captured in ITSMA’s third step. Furthermore, there is a similarity with Alexander & Badings’ (Leading Thought) model regarding framing ideas into contents. However, the 4D model was specific to mention content formats like articles, infographics, books/eBooks, videos, and slides.

On the part of ‘Distribute’ (3<sup>rd</sup> stage), there is a connection with Alexander & Badings’, ITSMA’s and Forrester’s models as all suggested practitioners to communicate contents on blogs, social media and speaking event. However, this framework added “Training” as another platform to share one’s NPOV.

On the final stage of the 4D model (dissect results), there is a link between Alexander & Badings’, Van Halderen & Kettler-Paddock and Forrester’s models. Having said that, the 4D added a new insight by stating market research.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This research has presented the meaning of Thought Leadership and why companies (must) practice it. It has also revealed the steps companies can take to build an effective Thought Leadership culture. Five companies participated in this study and they provided in-depth and valuable information to the question asked in the interview. All the information given by informants describes the practicalities found on the theoretical level.

It can be concluded that this dissertation has managed to find the answers to the research questions stated in the introduction:

- i) What is Thought Leadership?
- ii) Why should companies practice Thought Leadership?
- iii) What propels successful Thought Leadership?

Since Thought Leadership is practiced among industries and continue to have huge impact, it is high time academics have given it the needed attention to help introduce it to business textbooks as a guide to curb the ill-information and poor study. Additionally, universities and polytechnics could consider introducing it in their curricula as a course (especially those in the field of business) for students to study a novelty that will help transform the world. Furthermore, there is only one school in Europe who teaches Thought Leadership as a course. Therefore, universities and polytechnics could collaborate with a school like Fonts University of Applied Sciences for students to do an exchange program and benefit from this novel mechanism.

In addition, companies can include this Thought Leadership culture in their corporate vision to help change them internally, their industry and the society as whole. Specifically, Vaasa University Applied Sciences can start pursuing Thought Leadership with the ***4D Thought Leadership Model*** developed by the researcher

as a guide. Aside from the earlier recommendation to introduce it as a course in a curriculum.

Finally, as there are few Thought Leadership theories, this dissertation focused on the (large) organizational level of Thought Leadership. Therefore, it is highly recommended that future work can explore Thought Leadership on the individual level or employee level. Furthermore, this study did not touch on the different types of Thought Leadership, hence it would be relevant to explore that area and how businesses could use these types to achieve results.

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Branden, Martens. Researcher at Fontys University of Applied Sciences. Holland. Telephone Interview. 01.11.2017 at 14:03-15:25.

Rose, Julianne. Senior Corporate Marketing Manager at ConnectWise Inc. USA. Telephone Interview. 02.11.2017 at 14:04-14:35.

## **APPENDIX**

### **STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Q1. Why does your company practice Thought Leadership?

Q2. Where does your firm or where can organizations derive Thought Leadership from?

Q3. What did your company consider before venturing into Thought Leadership?

Q4. How crucial is financing in Thought Leadership?

Q5. What executive level do you target to influence with Thought Leadership?

Q6. Does your company involve external experts in the Thought Leadership process?

Q7. Do you have a theme and how do you frame your theme?

Q8. How do you frame Thought Leadership contents (NPOV) to get your voice heard?

Q9. Which social media platform is effective in delivering Thought Leadership content?

Q10. What are some of the challenges faced?

Q11. How long does it for a Thought Leadership campaign to materialize?

Q12. How do you measure the outcome of Thought Leadership?

Q13. What is the most important ingredients of true Thought Leadership?