

PROACTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR AT WORKPLACE IN THE ARAB WORLD

Dr.Mohammed Al Hazaizi,

Associate Professor, Faculty of Management Studies, Arab Open University, Sultanate of Oman

Dr.Subrahmanian Muthuraman,

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Studies, Arab Open University, Sultanate of Oman

ABSTRACT: *Knowledge is considered an important source of establishing and maintaining competitive advantages. In the knowledge-based economy, knowledge sharing is increasingly viewed as critical to organizational effectiveness. Knowledge sharing has gained importance in organizations seeking to gain a competitive edge. Specifically, knowledge sharing, and the resulting knowledge creation are crucial for organizations to gain and sustain competitiveness. However, knowledge sharing is challenging in organizations for two reasons: First, individuals' tacit knowledge, by its very nature, is difficult to transfer. Second, knowledge sharing is typically voluntary. Indeed, effective knowledge sharing is challenging because individuals cannot be compelled to do it. Organizations can manage knowledge resources more effectively only if individuals are willing to share their knowledge with colleagues. To facilitate knowledge sharing among individuals and across organizations, it is essential to understand the factors influencing individuals' proactive attitude to sharing knowledge. Accordingly, there is a significant amount of research on factors such as shared goals, trust, willingness, motivation and intention, that may influence knowledge sharing behavior in organizations. The aim of this paper is to develop an understanding of the factors supporting or inhibiting individuals' knowledge sharing behavior. As Oman, like any other countries in the Arab world, faces a somewhat high unemployment, especially among its graduates, providing a secure job may motivate them to engage in knowledge sharing behavior. More studies in knowledge sharing are expected to help decision and policy makers in organization in the Arab world with a reason to support implementing knowledge sharing strategies. Knowledge sharing research will continue to grow, reflecting the significance of knowledge as an important resource to the organization in developing its competitive advantages.*

KEYWORDS: knowledge sharing behavior, intention, proactive attitude, motivation, shared goals, trust, willingness

INTRODUCTION

In today's knowledge-based economy, an organization's ability to strategically leverage knowledge has become a crucial factor for global competitiveness. Knowledge is considered an important source of establishing and maintaining competitive advantages. Knowledge is commonly acknowledged as a critical economic resource in the present global economy and it is

progressively becoming evident that organizations should possess the right kind of knowledge in the desired form and context to be successful [21].

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Knowledge management is a process for the integration of knowledge as a strategic asset which will continuously push an organization to make gains [30]. Knowledge management is a structured activity of an organization to improve its organizational capacities [33]. In the knowledge-based economy, knowledge sharing is increasingly viewed as critical to organizational effectiveness [35]. Knowledge sharing is a competitive advantage for the organization which has become important in recent years [20]. Knowledge sharing is critical to a firm's success [11] as it leads to faster knowledge deployment to portions of the organization that can greatly benefit from it [46]. Knowledge sharing is the behavior of distributing one's acquired knowledge with other members in the organization. Knowledge sharing among people is conducted through shared goals, trust building, willingness and motivation. Most researchers consider this as a crucial issue which indicates the undeniable role of proactive attitudes towards knowledge sharing among individual's behavior who want to continue their existence in the current turbulent environment. The needs to share knowledge in all levels of an organization will be the most important factor since it will create organizational value, acquisition of new techniques, and solving problems that will ultimately create core competence [17] [22].

Purpose

Knowledge is a powerful intangible resource that enables individuals, organizations, and countries to improve learning and decision-making processes and consequently achieve a competitive advantage in the knowledge-based economy. Unlike the western world, knowledge sharing in the Arab world is a rather fascinating phenomenon. While there has been an increasing interest in this area of research in the Arab World [48], persuading individuals to contribute their knowledge to organization is even more challenging in an Arabian Culture such as Oman. In the Arab culture, knowledge is generally perceived as power and of a private nature. Thus, they will most likely feel reluctant to share their knowledge (power) with others, because they might lose their values and competitive advantage [3]. Nevertheless, the deployment of knowledge management is very essential for developing countries to efficiently manage their knowledge and build their human resources [47]. Thus, developing a knowledge-culture is very crucial to promoting individuals' knowledge sharing behavior and consequently a successful knowledge management deployment in these countries [3].

It is argued that knowledge sharing among employees significantly impacts the performance of both the public and private sectors' organizations [41]. As a result, knowledge sharing has gained importance in organizations seeking to gain a competitive edge [13]. However, knowledge sharing is challenging in organizations for two reasons. First, individuals' tacit knowledge, by its very nature, is difficult to transfer. Second, knowledge sharing is typically voluntary [26]. Indeed, organizations can manage knowledge resources more effectively only if individuals are willing to share their knowledge with their colleagues. To facilitate knowledge sharing among public employees and across agencies, it is essential to understand the factors influencing individuals' willingness to share knowledge [5]. Accordingly, there is a significant amount of

research on factors that may influence knowledge sharing in organizations. The major objective of this paper is to seek to understand the impact of proactive attitudes towards knowledge sharing on individual's behavior. The aim is to develop an understanding of the factors supporting or inhibiting individuals' knowledge sharing behavior.

Conceptual Model

Effective knowledge sharing is challenging because individuals cannot be compelled to do it. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that affect individuals' knowledge sharing behavior. Several models presenting factors that affect knowledge sharing behavior have been tested in a variety of organizational settings. The author proposes that the following factors affect individuals' knowledge sharing behavior.



A. *Knowledge Sharing*

Knowledge sharing is the process intended at exploiting existing and accessible knowledge, in order to transfer and apply this knowledge to solve specific tasks in a better, faster and cheaper way than they would otherwise have been solved. Usually sharing knowledge can be defined as the dissemination of information and knowledge throughout the whole departments and/or organization [21]. When the new knowledge is acquired, it should be transferred to other sectors of the organization which need the new knowledge, or where it could be helpful there. Without this step, knowledge will have a very low impact on the organization. As a result, knowledge transfer at a suitable time and place is the most important section of knowledge storage in the organization [20]. Knowledge sharing is a set of behaviors including information and knowledge exchange and helping others in this regard. McDermott describes the process of "knowledge sharing" as enabling sharers to disseminate knowledge through sharers' thinking and/or using their insights to assist sharers to examine their own situations. Those who share knowledge can refine their shared knowledge by the interactive dialogue process; those who shared knowledge can obtain knowledge from sharers. Knowledge sharing occurs when an individual is willing to assist as well as to learn from others in the development of new competencies [29].

B. *Influence of Proactive Attitudes*

Li et al. stated in their research finding that proactive attitude has a positive and significant relationship on the creation of knowledge which covers organizational transfer of knowledge. Li et al. also proved that proactive attitudes displayed by the owner of an organization will positively influence the desire to manage and transfer the knowledge, therefore, it will finally influence innovation and organizational effectiveness. Previous studies supported the ability of proactive attitudes on organizational learning, and it had been analyzed by some scholars [23]. Many researchers have argued that a manager who tends to search any business opportunities will positively influence organizational learning

C. *Shared Goals*

Shared goals consist of common goals and ambitions of the members of a team. More and stronger shared goals are social interactions that should increase knowledge sharing. In an organization, the presence of the same shared goals between individuals promotes exchange of ideas and mutual understanding [9]. This, indeed, could encourage knowledge sharing among individuals. Shared goals could also be considered as the strength to hold people together and let them share with each other to achieve specific goals [44]. In the effort to achieve the shared goals, holding discussions and brainstorming sessions could help in the exchange of ideas and cultivate a knowledge sharing environment. It can be achieved through cooperation and knowledge sharing initiatives.

D. *Trust*

Another factor that enables knowledge sharing is trust. For tacit knowledge to be transferred successfully, there must be trust and mutual understanding [7] [6]. In their study of factors that influence knowledge sharing, Ardichvili et al; [6] found that participants will be more inclined to use the knowledge made available if they trust it to be a reliable and objective source of information. Thus, trust leads to greater openness between individuals [14], encourages sharing of knowledge and willingness to collaborate with others [24] [40]. When trust exists, an atmosphere of knowledge sharing is formed which increases the willingness of the members to engage in cooperative knowledge sharing interaction and knowledge contribution [32] [8]. Social trust is important in creating an atmosphere for knowledge sharing. Many authors believe that when there are trust-relationships, people are more willing to provide useful knowledge. Trust is being one of the most frequently mentioned factors as a facilitator of knowledge sharing. Social trust will make the organization members interact with each other with more trust and sharing of their knowledge [44].

E. *Motivation to share knowledge*

Motivation is a necessary prerequisite for knowledge sharing [7] [50]. Because knowledge resides within individuals, knowledge cannot be shared effectively if individuals are not motivated to share it. Therefore, it is important to gain a better understanding of the factors that motivate knowledge sharing. Individuals may be motivated to share knowledge with others because they expect knowledge sharing to be advantageous to them [16]. Personal benefits from knowledge sharing identified in the literature include status and career advancement; a better professional reputation; emotional benefits, and intellectual benefits [5].

F. *Willingness to share knowledge*

Willingness is a positive attitude to the employees in an organization. Therefore, willingness to share is somewhat a conditional way of knowledge sharing. People may not be willing to share

their knowledge unless they think it is worthwhile and important [38]. Individuals are willing to provide access to their personal knowledge. In the meantime, they expect other individuals to behave similarly and share their personal knowledge. For people who are willing to share their knowledge, the norm of reciprocity is important – they expect others to contribute as well [1] [32]. According to Marshall and Sapsed, [28] most organizations that aim to launch knowledge management initiatives should motivate individuals to increase their willingness to share their knowledge for organizational use.

G. Intention to share knowledge

Chow and Chan [9] have claimed that personal attitudes towards behavior are a significant predictor of intention to engage in that behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) can be used as a theoretical guide to explain the intention to share knowledge. TPB asserts that behavior is determined by behavioral intention and this intention is determined by an attitude toward behavior and subjective norm [10]. Their behavioral intention to share the knowledge is actually determined by an individual's attitude towards that behavior. Individuals need to believe that they could improve their relationship by offering knowledge and skills and that will bring intention to share knowledge. Intention to behave is an individual's intention to share knowledge, to perform or not perform a specific behavior [44].

H. Knowledge sharing behavior

Connelly and Kelloway [10] define knowledge sharing as “a set of behaviors that involve the exchange of information or assistance to others. Knowledge sharing behavior is viewed as the degree to which individuals actually share their knowledge with their colleagues for organizational tasks and goals. Attitudes of knowledge sharing such as social trust, shared goals, eagerness and willingness could positively improve the intention of knowledge sharing to a degree which an individual actually shares knowledge with other organizational members [44]. Furthermore, knowledge sharing behaviors are generally unnatural because individuals perceive their knowledge as valuable assets, and open sharing of knowledge with others is limited by their natural tendency to keep information to themselves [11] [18]. Therefore, the unwillingness of individuals to share knowledge with other colleagues has created problems for organizational survival [25].

DISCUSSION

Most studies on knowledge sharing have been carried out mainly in the West. Studies in the Arab world, in particular, are scarce. Given the vibrant and dynamic environment of this region, particularly the Arab Countries of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Oman, and the increasing role it plays at the world stage economically and socially, it is unfortunate that studies of this sort are scarce [39]. Examining knowledge sharing behavior is more critical in this part of the region. In the Arab countries a substantial number of expat workers work on a contractual basis. Among them, retaining skilled and professional individuals is one of the biggest challenges facing many organizations [19] [15]. Also, due to localization policies, local nationals tend to job hop, looking for better career opportunities [27]. In this situation, organizations are at risk of losing the knowledge, especially the implicit knowledge the individuals have when they decide to leave or are forced to leave. In this employment context, we are interested in understanding how knowledge sharing is affected.

With the advent of technology and availability of different knowledge repositories of books, websites, and multimedia resources, one would assume that knowledge is being hugely created, easily accessed, and widely shared. Realizing the importance of knowledge as a significant element in organizations makes creating a competitive climate and enhancing individual and organizational assets allowable. Organizations are seeking different strategies to capture the knowledge and expertise of their human capital by offering incentives to encourage individuals to share their possessed knowledge [42].

As organizations in the Arab world embark on internationalization plans, the need to develop knowledge sharing practices cannot be underemphasized [49]. Mohamed et al. [31] found that there are shortfalls in knowledge sharing practices in the region due to economic, political, and cultural factors. Ideas could be 'stolen' for personal use or information could be manipulated to serve political acts undermining the intrinsic value of knowledge sharing. They further found that interpretations of knowledge are equally important for subsequent applications and uses. Knowledge sharing could either help individuals to make sense of ambiguous contexts or create new areas of interest that may or may not add value to individuals or their organization [36]. Technology could also help facilitate knowledge sharing. More than a decade ago, researchers found that organizations in the Arab world mainly focused on exploiting technology to ensure knowledge transfer [4]. Given the high-context culture of the Arab world, the relationship between knowledge attitudes and behavior may not be necessarily straightforward [49].

Practicing knowledge sharing results in improved organizational effectiveness [43] such as creating new knowledge, innovating, improving performance [43], achieving long term sustainability and success [34], and accelerating individuals' learning [37]. Regardless of the business an organization is engaged in, the type of services or products it is providing, effective knowledge sharing practices are the key to all successful organizations aiming to achieve their objectives [42]. More studies in knowledge sharing are expected to help decision and policy makers in organization in Arab world with a reason to support implementing knowledge sharing strategies. This would promote collaboration and exploit existing knowledge to enhance performance and sustain competitiveness. In addition, many researchers themselves would feel encouraged to create and share knowledge by conducting more researches and scientific studies and by publishing scholarly works as well as by exchanging their knowledge and expertise which will help the Arab world to be more sustainable in the future.

To encourage individuals to learn from their peers and other individuals, managers need to examine their current career-related practices [19]. As Oman, like many other countries in the Arab world, faces a somewhat high unemployment rate especially among its graduates [12], providing a secure job may motivate them to engage in a knowledge sharing behavior. However, to do this, knowledge management activities that relate to learning, sharing, and application of knowledge can be integrated with policies on job security. The organization can stipulate that the individuals share and apply their knowledge with others every time they have completed their training or development programs. In this way, when they decide to leave the organization voluntarily, relevant knowledge is not lost [19].

CONCLUSION

Knowledge sharing research will continue to grow, reflecting the significance of knowledge as an important resource to the organization in developing its competitive advantage [19]. Effective knowledge sharing cannot be forced or mandated. Firms desiring to institutionalize knowledge-sharing behaviors must foster facilitative work contexts. A peer-to-peer support center can be implemented for the knowledge community so that individual knowledge bearers won't feel as though they're alone in their efforts. [21]. The true quality of a knowledge sharing initiative lies not so much with the tools, but with those who nourish it; and a cooperative knowledge community can form the backbone of many successful organizations. The conceptual linkage between attitude and behavior in knowledge sharing processes also needs further attention as how one thinks may not necessarily lead to how one acts [45]. An improvement in the understanding of knowledge sharing factors will create a favorable work environment that facilitates knowledge sharing behavior among employees throughout an organization.

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