

Determinants of knowledge sharing studies: organizational contexts in the social perspective

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ABSTRACT: Knowledge has been recognized as an intangible asset that is critical for the organization. Knowledge Management (KM) practices, in turn, will vary based on differences in organizational context. Successful KM activities are believed to be related to organizational design and structuring of knowledge assets, information technology, and personnel within them. Knowledge sharing as part of KM plays an important role in organizational knowledge activities. The organizational context factor is assessed based on a social perspective. The organizational context is the environment in which the knowledge sharing practice occurs. This article focuses on organizational context factors, where organizational factors contribute to promoting knowledge sharing intentions for individuals. This shows that socio-technical factors tend to stimulate knowledge sharing for individuals to share knowledge assets both tacit and explicit.

Keywords: knowledge management, knowledge sharing, organizational context.

1 INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management (KM) practices arise in the business environment, where companies strive to utilize KM to gain competitive advantage and increase profitability (Wang & Noe, 2010). The company observes that in a knowledge-based economy, knowledge held by employees is a strategic resource and not fully utilized (Van den Hooff & Huysman 2004). Various studies have proven that knowledge sharing is closely related to the organizational context (Foss et al 2010), Quigley & Bartol 2007, Wang & Noe 2010.

Kulkarni et al 2006, designed and tested a KM success model. The model is derived from the information systems success model that combines knowledge contributions and knowledge use as a result of KM initiatives, which consist of technological and organizational factors.

The problem that occurs when launching KM initiatives while adapting to different organizational contexts is the need of a comprehensive understanding of organizational context factors that might regulate employee's knowledge sharing behavior and

provide rules for various types of knowledge exchange.

Research shows the difficulty in knowledge transfer is a major challenge for KM (Birkinshaw et al 2002). Szulanski's (1996) analysis considers tacitness is one of the barriers to knowledge transfer. Tacit knowledge that can hardly be imitated is often considered a central attribute of competitive advantage (Coff et al 2006). The knowledge has been characterized in terms of the difficulty of communicating, observing, codifying, and articulating (Argote et al 2003, Berman et al 2002), Hansen et al 2005. In addition, knowledge is often regarded as power and public goods in an organization (Marks et al 2008). These emerging issues complicate the distribution of both individual and organizational knowledge within an organization.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), a company is a heterogeneous collection of resources, which is the basis of its competitive position (Barney

1991). Godfery & Hill (1995) categorize company resources into "physical resources", "human resources", and "organizational routines".

KBV in a company is a development of RBV (Grant 1996), in which knowledge is an important resource for sustainable competitive advantage (Turner & Makhija 2006). The essence of KBV is the idea that organizations are institutions for the creation and integration of knowledge (Turner & Makhija 2006). Grant (1996) writes that the essence of KBV is the idea that the company's main task and the essence of organizational capabilities, is the integration of knowledge.

Knowledge has multidimensional characteristics (Kulkarni et al 2006). On the basis of the research scope or focus, some secret knowledge according to the nature of tacit/explicit, others categorize knowledge to the individual / collective level based on knowledge locus or combine these four types of knowledge into a matrix (Felin & Hesterly 2007).

Kogut & Zander (1992) argue companies as "social communities where individual and social expertise are transformed into economically beneficial products and services". They believe that the capability of a company is determined by collective knowledge, which is "embedded in maintaining individual relationships structured by organizing principles". On the other hand, organizational knowledge is created through the conversion between secret and tacit knowledge among members. Organizational context factor can determine differential knowledge creation and integration results.

Table 1. Various types of organizational knowledge

	Individual	Social
Explicit	Conscious	Objectified
Implicit	Automatic	Collective

The two dimensions of explicit-tacit (implicit) and individual-collective (social) knowledge have been combined by experts to create a matrix of four categories of knowledge in an organization (Lam 2000). Social knowledge is "publicly or collectively available and embedded in corporate routines, norms, and culture", as stated by Spender (1996, p. 52). He suggested that the matrix shows a few about the interaction between four different types of knowledge and the role of the organizational context in facilitating the relationship between knowledge creation and application processes. In addition, different types of knowledge can invoke various knowledge-based theories from the company.

Lam's (2000) matrix (see Table 2) shows that collective knowledge is derived from a combination of individual knowledge and its transfer mechanism (Lam 2000).

Table 2. Type of Knowledge

	Individual	Collective
Explicit	Embrained knowledge	Encoded knowledge
Tacit	Embodied knowledge	Embedded knowledge

According to Argote et al 2003, a theoretical framework for organizing research on organizational learning and knowledge management has three contextual properties that influence each KM outcomes, namely creation, retention, and transfer. In addition, Argote et al 2003 identify three mechanisms for successful KM outcomes, namely ability, motivation, and opportunity.

According to Turner & Makhija (2006), the four stages of the KM process are knowledge creation and acquisition, knowledge transfer, knowledge interpretation, and knowledge application. The KM process begins with the stage of knowledge creation/acquisition, which occurs both intra or inter organizations.

Turner & Makhija (2006) conclude that the KM process does not occur by itself. For example, the organizational form and interaction among members can influence the flow of company knowledge.

Some researchers define knowledge sharing as a process, while others relate it to behavioral intentions of knowledge sharing. From studies that clearly define knowledge sharing perspectives, the majority are centered on ideas of intention/motivation, behavior, and process.

An intention is a personal belief in an effort to predict and explain human behavior. Bock et al (2005) define knowledge sharing as "the willingness of individuals in an organization to share with others the knowledge they have acquired or created". In addition, empirical studies have identified important factors that influence knowledge sharing (either directly or indirectly), including organizational context factors (e.g. organizational climate, anticipated extrinsic rewards, managerial guidance, and information technology infrastructure), interpersonal relationships factors (e.g. reciprocity and identification), and intrinsic factors (e.g. sense of self-esteem, knowledge of self-efficacy, and enjoyment in helping others) (Bock et al 2005), Marks et al 2008, van den Hooff & Huysman 2009). Bock et al (2005) state that "in the practical sense, knowledge sharing cannot be forced but can only be encouraged and facilitated".

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The process of knowledge in organizations may differ because of various knowledge attributes. The di-

versity of knowledge is related to differences in organizational form (Lam2000). Organizations differ in their capability to utilize the main knowledge types. Therefore, it is very important to understand the context in which knowledge is utilized.

In the Osterloh & Frey (2000) typology of organizational forms, generation and transfer of tacit or explicit knowledge are associated not only with intrinsic motivation but also extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, organizational forms (implying various organizational features) play a role in promoting various types of knowledge exchange and motivation.

Table 3. Combining motivational and knowledge requirements in organizational forms

		Knowledge Generation and Transfer	
		Tacit	Explicit
Motivation	Intrinsic	Knowledge-based production teams	Knowledge producing teams, e.g. quality circles
	Extrinsic	Independent knowledge workers	Profit centers, spin-offs, holdings

Organizations can be seen as social communities (Kogut & Zander 1992), where interactions among members occur to create value. Such an environment supports social networks for the exchange of knowledge. The socio-technical theory states that the work system in an organization consists of two subsystems: social and technical that are independent but interrelated (Trist et al 1997). In other words, this theory highlights the role of social and technical factors in the workplace. Researchers have used socio-technical theory within their framework for analyzing knowledge management/sharing capabilities.

Methods for practicing KS can be measured from a socio-technical perspective, such as computer-mediated communication and social networking. Bock et al (2005) investigate knowledge sharing intentions in an explicit and tacit manner through "various methods such as meeting systems and formal and/or informal information". The KM success model by Kulkarni et al (2006) focuses on explicit knowledge. They examine the impact of KM system quality and reciprocal interactions on "perceived benefit of knowledge sharing".

Lin, C.P (2007) discusses the extent to which social network relationships with coworkers influence tacit knowledge sharing. In line with that, this study considers the organizational context factors in terms of social and technical perspectives. Organizational structure and culture are categorized as social factors and IT support as a technical factor (Lee & Choi 2003).

Cabrera & Cabrera (2002) propose that KM practices cover information technology issues, organiza-

tional structures, and human resource policies. Grover & Davenport (2001) state a KM research framework and identify key contexts namely strategy, structure, culture, and technology - where all knowledge processes that occur among individuals, groups, and organizations "can be influenced by and influence the context". Gold et al (2001) argue that knowledge infrastructure consisting of technology, structure, and culture is the antecedent of effective KM and influences organizational effectiveness.

4 CONCLUSION

This study shows that knowledge sharing is critical to enable the development of successful knowledge management. In the capacity of knowledge sharing, organizations are able to utilize special resources and the capability of their members to generate new knowledge. Differences in organizational contexts lead to a varied emphasis on knowledge sharing practices. The diversity of the organizational context through managerial mechanisms can be a promoter of knowledge sharing. By building an adequate sharing environment, organizations can systemically preserve and continue their experience in employee professional knowledge.

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