

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (HRD) STRATEGIES FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN A HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION

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Abstract: The process of knowledge sharing is not just for transmitting or transferring the knowledge but more on the value and the impact of the knowledge itself. Effective knowledge sharing can be achieved through a process of socialization within supportive organizational culture. However, people's non-supportive beliefs in sharing knowledge either formal or informal ways can cause knowledge management efforts fail in an organization. The objective of the study is to understand the nature of sharing knowledge that will lead into the understanding of its awareness and readiness, focusing on its perceptions or views in an institute of higher learning. This paper presents the organizational/management views on knowledge sharing. A Multiple Perspective Framework (MPF) is used as a lens in understanding the phenomenon of study. Data are collected through interviews with academicians in a public higher learning institution. This study uses the content analysis methodology in analyzing the data. A total of nine items, served as indicators or factors of management's views on knowledge sharing. The HRD strategies are recommended based on these items.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing (KS), KS awareness, KS readiness, HRD Strategies, MPF

1. Background of Study

Knowledge resides within an individual. An organization cannot force this individual to share but should encourage or stimulate his intentions to share knowledge. However, not all knowledge needs to be shared. Knowledge that is viewed irrelevant or meaningless can jeopardize individual's reputation. For this reason, it is important for the organization to understand the willingness of individual employees' knowledge sharing behavior (Bock *et al.*, 2005). In an academic institution, knowledge sharing will flourish if this institution is

innovative, exercise dynamic changes and really looking for new sources of value. If an academician become too competitive and value solely on individual knowledge, he tends to hoard knowledge. He may be reluctant to share course materials and content with anyone else (Norris *et al.*, 2003). Knowledge sharing (KS) is becoming a key phrase, especially for those who have useful knowledge and want to share it with those who need it (i.e., industry, the public sector, or the public in general). However, to achieve this is not an easy task. Many universities in developing countries are completely unprepared for such demands, and even local knowledge users, for example, industries, are frequently hesitant to let students invade their facilities (Thulstrup *et al.*, 2006). The key success of most Danish universities in overcoming KS barriers are by integrating it with industry and other knowledge users. However, in Malaysia, the implementation of knowledge management is still new. In fact, the KS culture especially in higher learning institution is still at a minimum level (Maizatul Akmar and Yang, 2005).

2. Previous Works

2.1. *KS Awareness and Readiness*

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Figure 1). A person's behaviour is determined by his intentions to perform the behaviour and this intention is indeed a part of his attitudes toward the behavior and his subjective norm. Intention is the predictor of behaviour and is determined by three factors: attitude toward the specific behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. The TRA/TPB model had been used to understand these intentions and behaviours to share knowledge (Bock *et al.*, 2005; Ford, 2004,; and Lin and Lee, 2004).

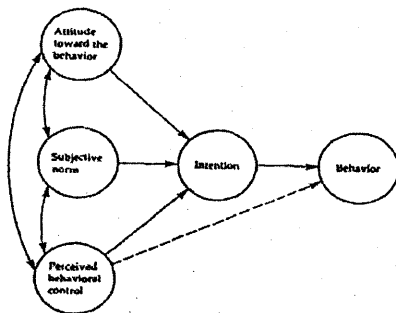


Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (TBP) (Source: Ajzen, 1991)

2.2 *HRD Strategies for Knowledge Sharing*

Raiden and Dainty (2006) discuss the knowledge-based structure for learning organization. They present a strategic framework in relation to the concept of “chaordic” Learning Organization (LO). The Learning Organization is closely related to KM where there are three stages of knowledge-based structure involved for the organizational learning process namely: knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing and knowledge utilization. The Human Resource Development (HRD) is concerned with the provision of learning and development opportunities that support the achievement of business strategies and the improvement of an organization, teamwork and an individual performance. HEIs are categorized as LO because the organization facilitates the learning of all its members. Within the LO, a new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, and people continuously learn how to work together. Therefore, the LO must have HRD approaches that will develop into self-responsibility and self development, continuous development, inter-organization learning and flexible structure that are responsive to environmental changes. The LO should be able to develop its own thinking system (personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, thinking systems) in understanding an organization as a whole (Raiden and Dainty, 2006).

Oltra (2005) in his framework links Human Resource Management (HRM) with KM. This framework presents the critical KM characteristics or their effective factors and proposes the KM-related HR practices to support KM. The HR strategies are inclusive of reward system and performance appraisal for KM, KM-training plan, KM job duties and job design.

McCarthy *et al.*, (2003) provide an understanding of the HRD’s roles and strategies in managing boundaries and interfaces in organizations with regard to learning. The authors believe that there should be a strategic HRD in developing individual as well as organizational development including facilitating their learning and knowledge sharing. The authors highlight an important key point that the idea of a community of practice (CoP) possesses many values that are emphasized in managing networks, boundaries and interfaces, i.e., trust and reciprocal contributions. For leaders to demonstrate their commitments in CoP, they need to fully understand the components of learning process: place and elements, the learning milieu, the senses of the learners, the learner’s emotions, the different forms of intelligence, and the different ways of learning. According to Martin *et al.*, (2005) CoP is important to KS because it demonstrates the circulation of knowledge throughout the organization.

The issue of managing human capital becomes critical in a knowledge based economy which focuses more on knowledge as a unique organizational business competitive advantage strategy (Ramlee and Abu, 2005). McGregor *et al.*, (2004) in their model of human capital in

the new economy, provide a guideline for constructing individual competencies required in the KM environment. The traditional practices of the HRM, which are divided into two boundaries, soft HRM and hard HRM are no longer suitable to be implemented currently. The modernization of work demands new conceptions of human capital. This idea is consistent with Louma (2000) who proposes the capability-driven HRD framework in creating and sustaining the internal capabilities of an organization. The capability is more than the tangible assets. It emphasizes on how people act and what they know, concurrent to the people's capability. The approaches of capability-driven HRD is closely related to this study because KM adaptation is nowadays being emphasized in an organization's competitive advantage strategy (Anantamula, 2004). Venzin (2003, p.137) supports that innovation (direct and spontaneous) is identified as a crucial organizational capabilities for an organizational improvements. Furthermore, the capabilities are needed for the creation of communities of strategic practices in KM.

All of these frameworks and models are applicable to the HRD strategies in KS process. However, most of these models did not present the overall picture of the HRD scope and its strategies in KS. In addition, the strategies proposed are presented separately (i.e., individual development and organization development).

3. Research Framework of the Study

3.1 Multiple Perspective Framework (MPF)

The uses of Multiple Perspective Framework (MPF) which identified three Technical (T) perspectives of Organizational or societal (O), and Personal (P), describes the various ways of thinking in the Information Systems development (Linstone, 1985 in Avinson *et al.*, 1998). The O and P perspectives allow the focus of human being and social factors in IS. Consistently, the KM approaches should also be seen as a holistic view to understand the whole process; it is not all about technology per se. Other researchers also consider multi view perspectives (Avinson *et al.*, 1998) in knowledge sharing area, i.e., socio-technical factors (Lin&Lee, 2006); psychological, organizational and technological factors (Chennamaneni, 2006). For instance, Riege (2005) categorizes various knowledge sharing barriers into three perspectives: technological (T), organizational (O), and individual (P). Thus, the MPF is applicable for this study because it allows the researcher to use it as a lens in understanding the nature of knowledge sharing from different perspectives, which then lead to the formulation of the HRD strategies for knowledge sharing.

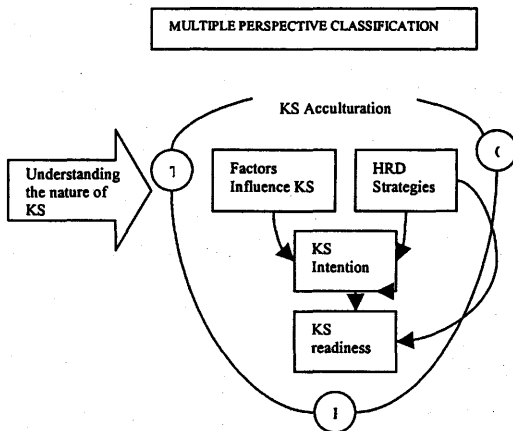


Figure 2: Multiple Perspective Framework in Exploring Knowledge Sharing Readiness.

4. Methodology

This study investigates the nature of KS in a public institution of higher learning environment. The design of the study is qualitative in nature where interviews are the primary data collection tools. The respondents are two senior lecturers cum administrator, and one junior lecturer. Each of the interviews is recorded and transcribed resulting in the production of a document. The interviews are informal face-to-face and semi-structured which lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. These interviews do not restrict the interviewees to speak only in English, because some preferred to use their native language the "Bahasa Melayu".

The content analysis method is used as the data analysis. Content analysis may be defined as the process of determining or establishing a fuller, detailed meaning of a portion of a document, manuscript, speech or any type of communications which is both reliable and replicated (Remenyi, 1992). It is a simple but laborious process of closely examining the transcript looking for concepts, particularly those which are repeated several times. In this study, the unit of analysis used is 'themes' which comprises of 'sub-themes'. From this, the researcher identifies the factors that demonstrate the themes.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Factors that Influence Knowledge Sharing

A total of nine factors that influence KS intentions are identified in this study. All of the factors are based on the perspectives of organizational or societal (O). The factors are perceived relative advantage, leadership commitment, innovativeness/creativity, blame-free

culture, competence and performance, measurement system, dynamic capability and perceptual ability, social networks and communities of knowledge identification (CoP).

One of the KS factors is perceived relative advantage. An institution is seen as to have positive perception on KS when it believes that by encouraging KS it can benefit the conduct of its businesses (i.e., freedom of managing knowledge and to be creative). At the same time, the leadership commitment toward practicing KS can motivate subordinates to share knowledge. For instance, sharing lecture notes with junior lecturers, tips for promotions (i.e., application for associate professorship) etc.

The climate of 'innovativeness', and creativity reflects KS in a higher learning institution in which, the institution exercises dynamic changes and really looking for new sources and values. At the same time, by having a culture of 'blame-free', it is essential for the institution to be an innovative organization where there should be a tolerant of failures and within which information flows freely (Bock *et al.*, 2005)

Individual competencies and performances that are equivalent with the need to be a knowledge based organization are important to really acculturate KS. In addition, the ability to share knowledge depends primarily on the individual's talent for effective communication and his social behaviour (Probst *et al.*, 2001, p. 192). Individual competency needs to be developed in an organization to benefit organizational competencies. As a result, managing competencies also required the institution to possess the dynamic capability and perceptual ability to improve and to recognize opportunities for applying capabilities.

A strategic measurement system is believed to enable to measure the consistency of sharing knowledge, for example, the personal appraisal procedures to evaluate performance on KS (Siemieniuch and Sinclair, 2004).

In order to minimize the boundaries and interfaces, a social network factors can overcome sharing knowledge in a restricted groups. In addition, KS can be more effective with the existence of community of practice (CoP) in the institution. The cultivation of CoP in the organization can help to close the gap between the people and the departments in the KS process (Martin *et al.*, 2005).

5.2 HRD Strategies for Knowledge Sharing

The HRD strategies that can initiate the KS intentions and facilitates the KS acculturation from the perspectives of an organizational (O) are proposed in this study:

1. Human capital development

A knowledge based institution requires a new conception of human resources. For example, being a flexible and competent workforce can increase the quality of human resources and thus determines the organizations success (Papalexandris & Nikandou, 2000). The development of human capital is important as well to support the KS practice. Therefore, there is a high expectations of new roles and practices of human resource developments (McGregor *et al.*, 2004).

2. Investment in skills development

Skills contribute to organizational productivity and performance, thus investment in skills is also linked to innovation and flexibility, i.e., generic skills - communication (Giles & Campbell, 2003).

3. Management competencies/skills development

Not only individual competencies development is needed, but managerial competencies development is important for an organization to manage and leverage human capital that is consistent to current changes of knowledge based organization (McCarthy *et al.*, 2003).

This includes a wide range of competency enhancement strategies, i.e., dynamic capability and perceptual ability.

4. Workplace learning environment

The KS will be much easier in an innovative culture organization where tolerance of mistakes/failure is taking place. Therefore, the workplace itself must be designed accordingly. Similarly, job redesign is required (Lock, 2003). The creation of learning culture where knowledge creation and action can flourish freely will enable human capital accumulation (Garavan *et al.*, 2001).

5. Decentralization of HRD activities

HRD has an important contribution in an organization. Thus, HRD orientation must be broaden to facilitate boundary management and networking, both within and outside the organizations (McCarthy *et al.*, 2003; Luoma, 2000). For example, the roles of line manager to implement HR policies and practices should be looked upon (MacNeil, 2003).

6. Creation and maintenance of CoPs

Facilitating the learning process in the organization indirectly helps the managerial to give full support and commitment in CoP. For example, by fully understanding the learning

process components: place and elements, the learning milieu, the senses of the learners, the learner's emotions, the different forms of intelligence, and the different ways of learning (McCarthy *et al.*, 2003).

6. Conclusion

The nature of sharing knowledge that helps to determine the factors that influence KS in this study are based on the pre-interviews made with three interviewees. Even though the small number of interviewees may be part of the limitations in this study, as a preliminary study the results reflect a very useful information in understanding the nature of sharing knowledge in a higher learning institution. Although the data collection is based on a qualitative method, the validation process is done during the interview (a member checks with the respondents). The researcher adopts an MPF as a lens in this study because it provides a holistic view in understanding the phenomenon of the study. The findings presented in this paper is based on the first perspective of the study, i.e., organizational (O) perspectives on KS.

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