

Higher Education Organizational Factors to Support Building Knowledge Sharing and its Culture

Dr. Ashraf Badawood¹, Dr. Hamad AlBadri²

^{1,2}College of Business, MIS, University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Emails: ambadawood@uj.edu.sa, halbadri@uj.edu.sa

Abstract: This article presents information on the factors that are required to build systems for knowledge sharing in the higher education organizations in the Arab area. Information on this will be sourced from secondary sources such as books, published journal articles, and conference proceedings. Though the practice has not yet become widespread in the region, there is evidence of efforts to ensure more use of knowledge sharing in the region especially in the United Arab Emirates. Initial analysis found out that extrinsic motivation, sense of self-worth, reciprocal relationship and subjective norm are some of the crucial elements that determine the academician's attitude in relation to knowledge sharing. Additionally, the organizational climate and perceived behavioral control have direct influences on knowledge-sharing behaviors.

Keywords knowledge management, Arab area, organizational culture, information technology.

1. Introduction

In today's business world, knowledge sharing has become one of the buzzword owing to its role in acquiring competitive advantage (Almahamid, Awwad, & McAdams, 2010). Due to this significance, countries have developed initiatives which aim to prepare their citizens for the popularly so-called knowledge economy. Higher learning institutions are the expected places where knowledge should be shared freely. Jones & Sallis (2013) and Liebowitz & Frank (2016) stated that the development and use of e-learning in institutions has served to stimulate and ease the process of knowledge sharing in learning institutions. Organizations have noted that their survival ultimately depends on knowledge sharing to some extent and hence, have embraced this facet in their daily business operations as a way of strategic management (Wang & Wang, 2012). The aspect of knowledge sharing involves the procedure and techniques used to get the most from individual's tacit and technical know-how. The knowledge that is acquired is of limited worth if it is not organized and stored for easy retrieval and sharing. Technological advancement has greatly boosted the efforts to share knowledge in institutions in different regions.

In the developed countries, the government has continually supported the academic institutions so that they are able to operate in the new knowledge based information environment. According to Bratianu and Orzea (2010), this is as a result of realization that human capital is among the main drivers of firm and subsequently economy performance particularly in this present knowledge based economies. This is carried with the goal of preparing students to meet the demands and needs of today's business society. Social media and other technology channels have transformed communication in different workplaces while also opening channels for access to vast amounts of data (Borghoff & Pareschi, 2013). Knowledge management through sharing thus enables utilization and integration of tacit and explicit knowledge through collaborative learning (Wang & Noe, 2010). Various governments in these developed and some of the developing

countries in the Middle East have assisted this knowledge sharing process through grant allocation and even technological support. Information technology plays a significant role in knowledge sharing as these two do not stand in isolation.

According to Fullwood, et al. (2013) the recognition and use of knowledge as an asset in universities does not normally occur in an obvious manner. There are various factors that must be present to facilitate the realization of such a goal. Policies and efficient infrastructure can play a big part in the process of knowledge sharing. However, reluctance of individuals could prevail and this could prove to be a big stumbling block (Tohidinia & Mosakhani, 2010). Brewer & Brewer (2010) advance that the existence of higher learning institutions is mightily justified by the stakeholders' intellectual prowess and the effort to accumulate and disseminate the same through knowledge sharing continuously. Researchers in this field have mentioned some of the hindering aspects that need to be addressed in order to ensure continuous knowledge sharing. Organizational incentive structures for example compensation schemes efficient information technology and pay for performance can help accelerate the rate of knowledge sharing.

2. Research problem

Knowledge sharing is an important unit of the knowledge management system in any institution. Institution workers being knowledge workers, sharing of knowledge ensure that academic staff is update continually with the latest knowledge available (Ramayah, Yeap, & Ignatius, 2013). Institutions for higher learning are appropriate for knowledge sharing to be applied due to various reason that include the fact that institutions of higher learning generally possess new information infrastructure, in academics sharing knowledge with each other is natural and the fact that this would enable students to get knowledge from the available sources as fast as possible (Howell & Annansingh, 2013). For this to be achieved though, there need to be factors that are present that need to make this process efficient and effective. The aim of this study is thus to identify the factors needed to build faculty knowledge sharing systems concentrating in the Middle East and the gulf region predominantly. The specific research questions were:

- i) How is information technology a success factor in the building of knowledge sharing systems in faculties in the higher institutions of learning?
- ii) To what extent does incentive system influence the level and efficiency of knowledge sharing?
- iii) How do management systems contribute to knowledge sharing in higher learning institutions in the gulf region?
- iv) What is the level of influence of organization culture on the knowledge sharing aspect in the universities in the gulf region?
- v) How do personal attitudes affect knowledge sharing behavior in the middle-east region?

3. Significance of the study

In the current world economy, it is becoming increasingly normal to refer the economy as knowledge based economy (Zhou & Li, 2012). Knowledge is becoming a crucial asset for survival in the business environment that is becoming very competitive. For many governments, ways to make use of knowledge so as to create the greatest value is becoming a central concern. This has been evident in the Middle East with efforts to introduce modern learning systems and approaches especially through collaboration with western academicians mostly by the gulf region countries such as the United Arab Emirates (Ahmad & Daghfous, 2010). The significance of this study is to identify the factors that are critical for establishment of knowledge sharing systems in higher learning faculties in this region. Such factors need to be critically assessed in any attempt to establish sharing systems in universities in this region of the aim is to efficiently establish and use these systems. The research article will be of help to policy makers in the region in designing effective policies and regulations when they are drafting the framework to help support establishment of such systems in the region.

4. Limitations of the study

Limitations were experienced in getting relevant data on this area especially research work that has been done exclusively on the whole of middle-east region. The information on the Middle East situation was scanty hence generalization was made in relation to this region. Additionally, secondary approach employed made obtaining some data challenging and this could have been simplified through the use of secondary resources. Some of the online sources required subscriptions which was a tedious process and costly too. These challenges notwithstanding relevant efforts and steps were taken to ensure relevant and sufficient data to draw conclusions were employed to help draw correct conclusions and recommendations.

5. Operational definition

Interest: factors needed to build faculty knowledge sharing systems in the Middle East and Gulf region area

Measuring instrument: The investigator will personally collect secondary data sources

Method of test: The study will be conducted using secondary data that is available online

Decision criteria: The data in the secondary sources would be used in determining the factors needed to build faculty knowledge sharing systems in the Middle East and Gulf region area.

6. Previous studies

Information technology

Development in the information technology sector has greatly influenced the way processes are carried out in different organization and institutions. Over the recent past, the countries in the gulf region have embraced various modern technologies which have had a positive impact on various fronts (Zolait, 2013). One such front is the knowledge sharing aspect in institutions in the region. According to Borghoff (2013) Development of intranets which are private networks has eased communication between people through making it possible to communicate at any time of the day and from anywhere on the globe. A knowledge portal which enables consolidation of heterogeneous information from different sources has played a significant role in assisting in knowledge sharing (Borghoff, 2013). This provides a standard interface for users and hence an effective knowledge management tool. For instance the United Arab Emirates has seen significant local and foreign investment in the information technology sector. This has fastened communication between faculties. Subsequently, it has made it easier to share knowledge from one institution to another. Information technology has a supporting role for other success factors such as incentive systems, personal attitude and leadership systems. Information technology has helped shape these other aspects through diffusion of better methods for leadership, reward systems and also uplifting personal attitudes through making it easier to share information.

Incentive systems

According to Hung et al. (2011), in any learning institution or even organization, the success of knowledge sharing implementation efforts heavily rely on the individuals in the set up being recognized to be carriers of knowledge. The institution and organization environment currently has a lot of competition for rewards, promotions as well as status and as a result the individuals working in such areas view their knowledge as a unique advantage to secure their position in the organization (Boer, Berends & van Baalen, 2011). This makes it challenging to influence these individuals to share their knowledge. Additionally, Chang & Chuang (2011) note that there are inherent costs associated with sharing information such as time and energy which contribute to reservation towards knowledge sharing. In order to address this issue, there has been a lot of emphasis on introducing reward systems for knowledge sharing in the institutions formal incentive systems (Cyr & Wei Choo, 2010).

An analytical approach has been carried out in recent years with economic models in mind with a view to discern relationship between knowledge management and incentive systems. Propositions from such analyses advance that the organizational strategies should be considered when coming up with a reward system for knowledge sharing (Lam & Lambermont-Ford, 2010). The contribution of an individual can then be measured and then the reward can be individualized depending on the contribution made. Linear reward system is another approach that can be used to efficiently capitalize on the knowledge asset available in institutions. This is based on the amount as well as the productivity of the shared knowledge (Hung, Durcikova, Lai, & Lin, 2011). Empirical evidence exists to confirm that organizational reward influences the institutions' or organizations' members' performance and behavior towards knowledge sharing activities. The incentive can be either extrinsic or intrinsic in nature. Incentive systems are success factors for any knowledge sharing systems to be built as knowledge sharing is noted to increase in instances where the individuals are recognized and their behavior is shared and reinforced (Hung, Durcikova, Lai & Lin, 2011). Adoption of proper incentive systems in the gulf region have been enabled by adoption of information technology which have enabled the individuals in this region to know about appropriate incentive systems.

Management systems

The type and management and the attributes of the leader play a critical role in any efforts of knowledge sharing. Lindner and Wald (2011) argue that knowledge sharing does not come about automatically in a team and the team leader has an important role to play in making it come about. Transformational leadership is crucial for knowledge sharing as it enables the individuals to perform better (Xue, Bradley & Liang, 2011). The process of knowledge sharing in many instances will fail to take place if there is no strong motivation from the leaders. Group focused and individual focused leadership are the two main constructs and when in teamwork individuals are motivated more to contribute to the group. Birasnav et al. (2011) noted that leaders play a vital role in influencing the attitude, behaviors and social process in a particular team. Lack of active role by the leaders also plays a part in inhibiting the process of knowledge sharing from the subordinate employees. This is because these workers see the leaders as being hypocritical by them encouraging knowledge sharing and them failing to share their knowledge (Harzing & Pinnington, 2010). The team leaders hence have to actively encourage or even facilitate knowledge sharing for it to occur.

Knowledge sharing is an intentional behavior and reliant on the motivational factors that influence behavior. The intention of the individual is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms and the perceived control (Rai, 2011). Encouraging behaviors from the leaders thus prove to be prerequisites for creating a behavioral context where individuals collaborate to share information. Previous research suggest that individuals are more willing to share knowledge if there exists a climate where individuals highly trust others especially their leaders (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). Leaders have the power to influence the attitude, behaviors and social processes in a team. Thus the leaders have a major responsibility to motivate all the employees through providing them with equal opportunities and avenues for development while also rewarding the efforts after scientifically measuring the performances. Thus the management and leadership systems are a success factor as the individuals in the institution will be able to share more if trust exists together with effective motivational channels. These are hugely dependent on the leadership and management systems

Organizational culture

Organizational culture is dependent on the values and behaviors which play a part in determining the unique social and psychological environment of an organization. The employee willingness to share their knowledge with others determines the success of knowledge sharing (Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). The leaders in such institutions thus must have an understanding of the institutions culture as well as the community culture. For instance, the issue of reciprocity is an important aspect in terms of culture's influence on knowledge sharing (Hau, Kim, Lee & Kim, 2013). Reciprocity alludes to the individual's need

to identify either a current or future compensation of some kind for sharing knowledge. Competition among institutions or individuals is another facet of organizational culture that may interfere with knowledge sharing according to Zheng, et al. (2010). Case studies in different organizations showed that institutions environment that emphasized on competition between individuals led to some barrier to knowledge sharing activities.

Different research works in the middle east region have shown that lack of supportive culture in the region have been detrimental to any knowledge sharing building efforts (Yaghi, Barakat, Alfawaer, Shkokani & Nassuora, 2011). Trust has been identified one of the critical dimensions of culture that influence knowledge sharing (Holste & Fields, 2010). A culture that emphasizes trust has been noted to assist in alleviating negative effects of perceived cost of sharing. The feeling of most of communities in the region is that use of western learning approaches will lead to eroding of morals of the students in this region. This mistrust from the general community can be a limiting factor to strategies to improve knowledge sharing through collaborative means with scholars from the western world.

Individual attitudes

Attitude refers to the degree to which a specific individual has a favorable or unfavorable appraisal for a given behavior (Seba, Rowley & Lambert, 2012). This subsequently has an influence on the individual performing or failing to perform that particular behavior. Attitude affects an individual's willingness to share or not to share knowledge. Empirical research conducted by Reychav & Weisberg (2010) in thirty organizations showed that attitude toward knowledge sharing significantly influence behavioral intentions. Expectations by individuals that their knowledge will be useful while also improving relationships with others have been noted to positively influence knowledge sharing attitudes which are related to knowledge sharing intentions and behavior (Chang & Chuang, 2011). If an individual's attitude towards knowledge sharing is favorable they will be more inclined to perform the behavior of sharing of the knowledge. Additionally, managerial intentions in way of encouragement have a positive relation to employee overall sharing behavior. Existence of advanced technology in institutions has been noted to positively influence their attitude towards knowledge sharing. This has been linked to the fact that it makes it easier to share any form of information through saving of both cost and time (Borghoff & Pareschi, 2013).

7. Research method and procedures

Approach

Qualitative approach was applied in this study as it enabled sourcing of in-depth and detailed information about this phenomenon. This helped in properly addressing the research problem which would be challenging if quantitative approach was employed. This information was collected from secondary sources available that had covered this topic.

Procedure

Secondary data sources such as academic journals and books as well were utilized in sourcing data for this research article. Reports and online articles from other different regions that had information on this topic were used in collecting the relevant information to draw reliable conclusions. The secondary sources were chosen on the basis of their reliability, accessibility and availability too so as to avoid inconvenience while undertaking the research. Factors such as relevance of information content were also considered. Data collected from these sources was recorded and transferred to relevant data analyzing programs to help in revealing patterns other analysis.

Data analysis

Drawing patterns, concepts and insights is the primary goal of carrying out qualitative research design analysis. Content analysis technique was settled on in this research to be used in data interpretation and

analysis since it was qualitative data that was collected. The researcher was thus required to focus more on identifying relevant patterns and content to assist answer the predetermined questions. Establishment of relations and comparisons to theories was the preferred analysis and examination approach for the secondary data that had been collected. Constant comparative analysis was carried out where data from different sources was compared so as to develop conceptualizations of the possible relationships between various pieces of data collected from varying secondary sources used in the research.

8. Results of the Study

Information technology influence on knowledge sharing success

Information gathered from different academic sources support the notion that information technology is a success factor when it comes to building knowledge sharing systems building. This is because they play a significant role in providing efficient channels for information to be coded and sent (Boer, Berends & van Baalen, 2011; Borghoff, 2013; Fullwood, Rowley & Delbridge, 2013). Additionally, technology influences the other factors such as leadership systems and individual attitude to some degree. When individuals are afforded with proper channels to share information they will be more willing to undertake this behavior (Borghoff, 2013). Empirical evidence in various regions proves that information technology has played a big role in helping to grow knowledge sharing systems and at a cheap cost (Borghoff & Pareschi, 2013; Lindner & Wald, 2011). Areas that technology has not been in extensive have been noted to exhibit limited activities of knowledge sharing.

Influence of incentive systems on knowledge sharing

Most of the data collected pointed out the factor the incentive system was a big determinant in the process of knowledge sharing. Most of the previous research especially in the developed world proved that in areas where knowledge sharing had been successfully implemented, there were appropriate incentive systems in place (Ajmal, et al., 2010; Boer, Berends & van Baalen, 2011; Chang & Chuang, 2011). Literature in reference to United Arab Emirates showed that the government was actively involved in having incentive systems in place to spur on knowledge sharing in institutions in the country (Ahmad & Daghfous, 2010).

Management and leadership systems effect on knowledge sharing

Most of the data collected from the secondary sources supported the fact that management is a success factor in the building of knowledge sharing systems in institutions. There was a strong correlation between leaders leading as role models in sharing of knowledge and subsequently the other workers being open to the same (Holste & Fields, 2010; Ajmal et al., 2010). Additionally, in instances where the leaders motivated the subordinates to share knowledge through creating a trusting culture resulted to more knowledge sharing activities.

Organizational culture influence on knowledge sharing

Data from previous publications supported the notion that organizational culture was one of the main factors that determine the eventual success of knowledge sharing efforts. Various sources held that a competitive culture was detrimental to any moves to introduce the aspect of knowledge sharing in an organization (Suppiah & Singh Sandhu, 2011; Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). This is in line with earlier literature that hypothesized in a competitive environment people are unwilling to share as they view their knowledge as power over the others. Lack of trust in the culture of an institution was noticed to inhibit knowledge sharing by the individuals in the institution in many cases (Tohidinia & Mosakhani, 2010; Holste & Fields, 2010; Wang & Wang, 2012). Lecturers from other regions were exhibited to have reservation towards continuous knowledge sharing as they were unsure of the cultural reaction of the people in this region. However in United Arabs Emirates where there was a warm reception of foreigners, knowledge sharing by these foreigners was more.

Personal attitude influence on knowledge sharing

Personal attitude was supported by the secondary data collected as being a success factor in building of knowledge sharing systems between faculties. Various researches earlier on advance that the attitude of a particular person significantly influence their decision whether to or not share knowledge (Wang & Noe, 2010; Wiig, 2012; Tohidinia & Mosakhani, 2010). This was the case from all the sources from all over the regions with most of the hinting it as being one of the most important of the factors that are critical for successful knowledge sharing systems to be built.

9. Recommendations.

Technology – more effort ought to be in investing in technology as this will significantly boost any efforts to establish knowledge sharing systems. This is because technology offers a means to get vast amount of information which can then be shared in voluminous state. Additionally, technology supports all the other success factors for them to be applied in the proper way through comparisons with other regions. Technology helps in getting such information at lower costs.

Incentive systems – institutions in the middle-east region should strive to provide rewards in order to improve academicians' motivation to share knowledge. This can be through extrinsic or intrinsic incentives which will be a way to recognize the individuals putting effort to share knowledge through different existing channels. Such efforts lead to more willingness and commitment to sharing hence more emphasis should be put into this. Rewards given to motivate the people in the institutions should be proportional to the amount of knowledge shared and its usefulness.

Leadership and management systems – more attention can be paid to training various peoples in the leadership position in various institutions to matters partaking knowledge sharing. These are the people who have the power to determine the success of any knowledge sharing efforts in a region. They can be involved in seminars and meetings that teach proper ways to encourage sharing of tacit knowledge. Additionally, they can be motivated to lead by example so that others follow their lead as this will help in growing trust among the people involved to share knowledge more.

Organizational culture – the culture in the higher learning institutions should be gradually altered to accommodate knowledge sharing. Steps such as reducing competitive culture among and in institutions can help in stimulating sharing of information more. More reward systems can be introduced in organization as many workers like reciprocity when they make effort in sharing of knowledge. Trust can be cultivated more by ensuring that all people are involved in knowledge sharing activities.

Individual attributes – more effort need to be put in showing the benefits of knowledge sharing to people in the various learning institutions so that those that have negative attitude to it can change. This can accomplished through using practical examples where knowledge sharing has been effective and beneficial to the general.

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