

Exploring the Role of Knowledge Sharing in Digital Era: A Conceptual Study

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study the role of knowledge sharing in digital era. Knowledge knows no boundaries because it belongs to humanity which illuminates the world. In traditional paradigm, *knowledge was power* but in today's scenario *knowledge sharing is power*. It is the pivotal aspect in the process, since a vast majority of knowledge management (KM) initiatives depend upon it. Nowadays, Information technology (IT) is considered as a common tool that facilitates knowledge sharing and widely recognized as a critical organizational resource irrespective of economic sector. We live in a digital age that gives us instant access to information at greater extent. The growth of digital content and tools are rapidly changing the way we create, consume and distribute knowledge. As per current scenario, now we are shifting to knowledge based society. It plays a key role in the overall development of intellectual capital of any organization. Knowledge is the fuel, which is driving technology, economy, and the society. Therefore, there must be systematic practices to share knowledge for the development of organizations as well as society.

Further, research articles, conceptual studies, review papers and other relevant content on the topic were accessed and reviewed through web sources and databases. However, this study contributes to the digitalization of knowledge sharing environment. Further several implications were discussed for the purpose of promoting and exploring knowledge sharing in digital era. Study limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge Sharing, Information Technology, Knowledge Management, Intellectual Capital, Digital Age

1. Introduction

In a growing global economy, managing knowledge effectively has become a source of competitive advantage. Nowadays, companies are adopting integrated approaches to identify, manage, share and capitalize on the know-how, experience and intellectual capital of employees. During the past decade, many companies invested heavily in electronic knowledge management (KM) systems hoping to increase their ability to manage the vast array of knowledge hidden within the many nooks and crannies of organizational life. However, experienced users of electronic KM systems now realize that managing knowledge is a much more complicated process. It is an open secret that today's business organizations greatly depend upon maximizing resources, eliminating redundancy and automating process to meet the business goals. Further, it is also clear that knowledge sharing (KS) has become as essential part of KM. The effective use of knowledge is a key ingredient in all successful organizations, no matter what business they are doing, what services they may provide. Using knowledge correctly in an organization requires an understanding that the mere availability of simple, disconnected bits of information is not knowledge and cannot adequately address the enterprise imperatives. While KM must focus on supporting knowledge sharing among individuals.

In the present scenario, digital technologies are changing our relationships with information and how we understand and interpret the world. New tools that are already so common ranging from social media to big data and online resources are changing the way we create, distribute and consume knowledge. Many of these changes have profound, far-reaching implications not only in terms of scale, access and availability of knowledge, but also for our relationship to that knowledge: our notions of what knowledge matters the most, where it comes from, how we know what to trust, and our own roles in creating and engaging with the nation of knowledge.

2. Literature Review

Knowledge sharing is an activity through which knowledge is exchanged among people, friends, families, communities (e.g., wikipedia), or organizations. Organizations have recognized that knowledge constitutes a valuable intangible asset for creating and sustaining competitive advantage. Knowledge sharing activities are generally supported by KM systems. However, technology includes one among the different factors that affect the sharing of knowledge in organizations, such as organizational culture, trust, and incentives. The system therefore must enable us quickly and effectively to find relevant information and expertise and that can aid into decision-making and problem solving. Tacit knowledge resides in the minds of individuals, in their skills, experiences and value judgments. Individuals are often the most difficult source to document because they feel that sharing what they know will make them expandable or that their knowledge on any given subject is what makes them unique. Another biggest challenge for KS is each time employees leave their job; they carry what they know with them. If they share tacit knowledge among employees it ensures that pertinent employees' knowledge stay around long after leaving the company. There are several factors which affect knowledge sharing in organizations, such as organizational culture, trust, incentives, and technology.

Explicit knowledge sharing occurs when knowledge is made available to be shared between entities. Knowledge sharing can happen successfully when the following criteria of articulation, awareness, access, guidance and completeness are met. Tacit sharing occurs through different types of socialization. Although, tacit knowledge is difficult to identify and codify, relevant factors that influence tacit knowledge sharing include informal networks such as daily interactions between people within a defined environment (work, school, home, etc.). The provision of space where people can engage in unstructured or unmonitored discussions, thereby fostering informal networks. Unstructured, less-structured or experimental work practices that encourage creative problem solving, and the development of social networks.

Embedded knowledge sharing occurs when knowledge is shared through clearly delineated products, processes, routines, etc. This knowledge can be shared in different ways, such as scenario planning and debriefing: providing a structured space to create possible scenarios, followed by a discussion of what happened, and how it could have been different.

2.1. Platforms of KS

Knowledge sharing (KS) has become an essential part of knowledge management (KM). The ultimate goal of KS is to distribute the right content to the right people at right time. To accomplish this goal each and every organization is using many distribution channels, here are some most popular platforms of KS, which are being widely used by many organizations.

Meetings are one of the most excellent ways and means of KS, where the people approach together formally in order to discuss about the problems, projects, experiences, opinions and take decisions. Nowadays, by using digital aids people can express their opinions, expertise and their facts about particular subject or topic virtually, which enhances the knowledge of other participants and leads to KS.

Training programs facilitates the process of learning skills, procedures and activities related to a particular job or task. It allows the trainees to interact with each other and with trainers/experts using intelligent tutoring systems, which offers synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. In such programs trainer shares his knowledge with the trainees and trains them to do a particular job or task. Seminars/conferences allow the people to discuss their views. With the advancement of technology such as “video conferencing” which enables people in different parts of the world/region to interact by sharing video screens.

2.2. Knowledge Sharing Tools

Once knowledge is shared properly by using effective platforms, now it is time to store this knowledge for future use, reuse and refinement. The tools mentioned here are practiced by modern organizations.

The enterprise resource planning (ERP) facilitates the configurable information systems packages that integrate information and related processes within and across functional areas in organizations. The ERP is one such program, which allows the effective deployment and mobilization of knowledge resources available across the organization. Apart from this, document management is used to create discrete documents. These tools revolve around the ability of an author to build a single document or set of documents from a variety of source material. Policy documents are a classic case because they often have to be customized for different reasons. On the other hand, today’s corporate portals have greatly been helping the companies to search, browse and personalization of information. Intranets in general and portals in particular, started with the objective of giving employees access to information needed a self-help approach. It helps to publish all types of documents ranging from human resources policies to product manuals.

One of the conventional tools used by organizations was web log, which is commonly known as (“blog”), is an online diary created by one or more bloggers. They typify the new class of “personal publishing” tools. A web log provides a simple interface for writing a new entry, typically via an online form. However, wikis are new concept to publish on-line information. Wikis impose no controls over who can create or edit pages. Making it very simple to update content supports, the ongoing growth of content and not imposing any restrictions encourages multiple people to add content to a single page. It is this easy of editing and natural support for collaborative work which makes wikis an ideal tool for communities of practice or team level knowledge sharing.

There are several challenges faced by organizations during knowledge sharing. Where, organization believes and encourages much teamwork, collective knowledge and relay research rather than individual research. It is only a handful of people who have knowledge for which they can hold their peers for rewards. Attitude is considered as one of the challenge for KS as it is more common in

people. People think that they know everything and feel pride in not having to seek advice from others and in discovering new ways for themselves.

However, changing organizational culture is required to overcome the challenges. Changing culture is not easy. It can be changed dynamically over the time. Culture of an organization has commonly held beliefs, attitudes, and values. It has the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group from another and in other ways that also encompasses rituals, artifacts, and other trappings of the work environment. Further, a culture audit is helpful in tracing out the deviation between what is articulated as the desired culture and what is done by providing questionnaires, interviewing the people and team sessions a cross section, which will definitely help in understanding the organizational culture.

3. Methodology

A systematic review has been conducted based on prior research studies on knowledge sharing and its role on digital era. An information search was made on e-databases with the purpose of accessing content related to the study. The key words used for this search were „digitalization“, „technology“ and „knowledge sharing“ etc. Articles and other study material were downloaded and sorted on the basis of well specified subject i.e. role of knowledge sharing in digital era. Research and conceptual studies conducted in India particularly in digital knowledge sharing were preferred. For emphasizing the concept, studies having “knowledge sharing”, “technology” and “role of knowledge management” keywords in the title and/or abstract have been taken. Further, a random bibliographic scan was performed on all the research studies to find out relevant study material.

4. Study Findings and Discussion

Knowledge sharing based on several arenas including organizational context, interpersonal, team, cultural, individual, and motivational factors. Each area of emphasis consists of related topics that we identified in our review of knowledge sharing research. Based on a qualitative study of fifty companies, De Long and Fahey (2000) found that the benefits of a new technology infrastructure were limited if long-standing organizational values and practices were not supportive towards knowledge sharing across units. A number of dimensions that are likely to influence knowledge sharing have been identified, but trust has attracted the most research attention. It has also been linked with the implementation of intranet-based KMS, individual knowledge sharing, and firms' capability of knowledge exchange and combination (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Collins & Smith, 2006; Liao, 2006; Ruppel & Harrington, 2001; Willem & Scarbrough, 2006). Similarly, an organizational climate that emphasizes individual competition may pose a barrier to knowledge sharing whereas cooperative team perceptions help create trust as a necessary condition for knowledge sharing (Schepers & Van den Berg, 2007; Wang, 2004; Willem & Scarbrough, 2006).

In addition to trust, research has also shown that organizations with culture emphasizing innovation are more likely to implement intranet KMS (Ruppel & Harrington, 2001) and facilitate information sharing through subjective norms that encourage sharing (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005; McKinnon, Harrison, Chow, & Wu, 2003). Lin & Lee (2006) found that executives' perceptions of the relative advantage of knowledge sharing for the business, compatibility to existing business process, and complexity to encourage knowledge sharing served as mediators between organizational climate and an organization's intention to encourage knowledge sharing. Mixed results have been

found in studies examining the relationship between learning culture and knowledge sharing. Taylor and Wright (2004) found that a climate that encouraged new ideas and focused on learning from failure was positively related to effective knowledge sharing.

The key finding was that knowledge sharing is not a real “social dilemma”, but knowledge workers see the importance of knowledge sharing and the altruistic behavior. “I enjoy helping others” is the most important factor that impacts the frequency of knowledge sharing. Other significant factors influencing contributing behavior are: “I can get a monetary reward”, “Management encourages and motivates knowledge sharing” and “Knowledge sharing is recognized in the organization”. The biggest identified challenge is the change of behavior from hoarding to sharing knowledge”.

This study has incorporated to implement technological advances that influence knowledge sharing behavior. The focus was on the individual and organizational factors with reference to knowledge sharing. In particular, the article examines adoption of technology as a key factor that influences the frequency of knowledge sharing. Contribution of information or knowledge may be perceived as a loss of individual power and reduced social influence, especially in anonymous situation in which a contributor cannot expect to gain recognition (Cress et al. 2006). Thus it could be explained by the fact that higher education plays an instrumental role in fostering abilities required for today’s knowledge workers, including knowledge sharing dispositions and good citizenship among graduates (Blasco and Tackney 2013). In addition to the perceived benefits, the costs of knowledge sharing have to be considered.

5. Limitations and Future Research Directions

To conclude, it is important to share the operational view of knowledge sharing research and to gather the managerial perspective toward virtual knowledge sharing. This study is conceptual in nature and only Indian perspective has been taken in to consideration. Therefore, it cannot be generalized. Similar study can be conducted in different industry or segment. Further, empirical research can also be conducted to overcome the issue of generalization.

6. Conclusion

To embrace the digital transformation and put the good practices in to knowledge sharing, digitalization is the predictor which enhances the business value. However, organizations have to grapple with various issues and challenges such as organizational culture, strategy, information technology, knowledge organization, etc. Despite all these issues and challenges companies worldwide have shown keen interest in knowledge sharing. As far as India is concerned knowledge sharing has to cover a lot of ground to come up to the level of technological advancement.

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