

Trust: Facilitator of Knowledge-sharing Culture

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Abstract

The culture of trust in the workplace has been shown to have a strong and robust influence that act as an important force behind the sharing of knowledge. In this study, using literature review, we had clearly identified trust as one of the key facilitator that influences the development and establishment of a knowledge-sharing culture. It is hope that the contributions from this study will support and encourage organisations in making decisions on taking a step forward in inculcating a knowledge-sharing culture that shares not only valuable knowledge but also new knowledge. This is partly due to the fact that organisations nowadays are still unaware of the potential benefit and impact of knowledge in making continuous organisational development and improvement.

Keywords: Trust; knowledge-sharing culture; knowledge; knowledge management (KM)

1. Introduction

In this day and age, knowledge is seen to be a key vital strategy and competitive asset required by organisations throughout [21][43]. In fact, knowledge is known to never deplete when used, unlike other natural and physical assets [10].

Subsequently, with the ever-increasing employment of knowledge, the notion of knowledge-sharing has been recognised as a main focus area and is consequently known to be the primary focus of the sharing of knowledge by placing relevant knowledge into good use. Lee and Choi [25] defined knowledge-sharing as actions of transferring or disseminating knowledge, which involves both tacit and explicit knowledge. For that reason, the act of sharing includes the transmission of knowledge from one individual to another or among many individuals, which adds value to organisational performance [34]. This is essential as sharing knowledge within organisations provides opportunities to discuss know-how and know-why practices in directing a particular organisation towards future development and growth.

With this, knowledge-sharing has become one of organisation's utmost challenges as workers are often reluctant to share knowledge. Consequently, with concerns that effective sharing of knowledge among workers may not take place in

organisations, Davenport and Prusak [8] iterated that it is thus imperative that knowledge be shared given that when organisations use knowledge resources, these resources tend to increase since both the giver and receiver are enriched as a result of the transaction taken place. Hence, it is essential to create a culture that cultivates the sharing of knowledge between individuals as initial transformation must start at the individual stage for knowledge-sharing to begin.

The creation of a culture that values creativity, continuous improvement and sharing of ideas are necessary for knowledge-sharing to succeed. Thus, a knowledge-sharing culture is crucial and necessary for organisations as to ensure that they are able to create and retain not only primary knowledge but new knowledge as one of its crucial asset. In view of this, it would be favourable to bring in the culture of knowledge-sharing into these companies since the role of knowledge has become a crucial survival aspect in many organisations. The key purpose of this study is to determine trust as a facilitator that influences the formation of knowledge-sharing culture among organisations.

2. Knowledge and forms of knowledge

Knowledge is something that originates from information processed by using data and is applied in the minds of the knower. As stated by Iske and Boersma [22], knowledge results from the interaction of individual's insights (past experience, intuition and attitude), information and imagination (generating ideas and visualizing futures). In the context of knowledge within organisation, Davenport & Prusak [8] explained knowledge as a fluid mixture of experience, values, contextual information, and expert's insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. In organisations, knowledge often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices, and norms.

Bakker, Leenders, Gabbay, Kratzer and Engelen [3] have classified knowledge into four distinct categories:

- 1) Knowledge of how to do things and know-how procedures and processes, etc.,

- 2) Knowledge of who are in the organization, for example whom to turn to with a certain question,
- 3) Knowledge of the task itself, i.e. know-what, task-content related for example facts, models, specifications, etc.,
- 4) Knowledge of why things are done, i.e. background knowledge.

Nowadays, the challenge for most organisations is to be able to capture knowledge and to leverage it throughout the entire organisation. This challenge has driven numerous organisations in seeking opportunities to codify knowledge, so as to convert it into a form that is easy to find, accessible, and portable. Once this wealth of knowledge is codified, it will ultimately be a key strategic asset to organisations throughout [5].

Knowledge within an organisation can be categorised into two forms, namely 1) implicit knowledge, and 2) explicit knowledge [37][38][39]. Explicit or sometimes known as codified knowledge is the knowledge which is systematically expressed in formal structures compatible with human languages that includes words and numbers and is shared in the form of data, grammatical statements, mathematical expressions, scientific formula, specifications and manuals. Therefore, explicit knowledge can be stored in a mechanistic or technological way that can be expressed via handbooks, information systems or database. Once codified and stored, it can be accessed and used easily by anyone in the organisation [7]. Hence, explicit knowledge represents the kind of knowledge that is easily communicated, shared, and formally transmitted between individuals

In contrast to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge however is obtained by internal individual process and stored in the minds of individual. Therefore, it is difficult to articulate or communicate adequately, and is usually based on experience and individuals' talent. Tacit knowledge is seen to be deeply rooted in an individual's actions and experiences as well as in ideals, values or emotions. Subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches fall into this category of knowledge [7]. It is ascertain that this type of knowledge is highly personal and cannot be easily formalised, as a result it cannot be communicated or shared easily.

3. Knowledge-sharing culture

In the context of knowledge management (KM), knowledge is considered as a part of the production resources which must be shared, applied and improved so as to generate creative ideas to problems or challenges. As argued by Yang and Wan [46], no KM agenda can succeed without a

shift in the culture of the organisation at large. According to both researchers, the ideal culture for KM is one where individuals within an organisation are: 1) constantly and continuously pursue sharing, learning, and knowing to enhance their job performance, 2) propagate what they know throughout the organisation, and 3) organise it in the KM reservoir.

As a result, KM has narrowed the definition of knowledge-sharing as being essentially a process of capturing an individual and organisation's expertise, no matter where it may resides and distributing it in helping to produce the biggest returns possible for both knowledge worker and organisation [24]. Subsequently, it is found that knowledge-sharing is indeed significant to an organisation's success [24] as it leads to quicker knowledge deployment to portions of the organisation that can very much benefit from it [44].

Knowledge-sharing, as explained by [25] are activities that transfer or disseminate knowledge between individuals, groups or organisations. It has been seen as a significant factor in terms of its relative competitiveness [4]. Hendriks [17] remarked that knowledge-sharing consists of at least two parties, one that possesses the knowledge and the other that acquires it. The first party should communicate its knowledge, consciously and willingly or not, in some form or another, i.e. through acts, speech, or writing, whereas the other party should be able to observe these expressions of knowledge, and make sense of them, i.e. through imitating the acts, listening, or reading the book.

It is ideal that knowledge-sharing activities be made voluntary in an environment whereby people would want to share what they know and make use of what others know. Thus, it is therefore essential for organisations to convince its workers to share their knowledge and to make them aware of the importance of knowledge-sharing [19].

Culture, in its definition refers to the "shared norms, beliefs, and behavioural expectations that drive behaviour and communicate what is valued" [16]. According to Hofstede [18], culture is "the collective programming of the mind". It distinguishes the members of one human group from another, whereby interaction of common characteristics that influences a human group in response to its organisational environment will influence workers' behaviour and decision-making [18]. Apparently, culture is an understanding of how things work and the elements of each organisation's culture are different from any other organisation. These elements include organisation's vision, mission, core values, beliefs, corporate ethics, and rules of behaviour.

As seen by Gupta and Govindarajan [15], culture is a significantly important aspect for facilitating knowledge-sharing. Therefore, to ensure that knowledge-sharing works, organisations must first of all introduce and inculcate a culture that accepts knowledge-sharing as part of its ritual. According to a study conducted by De Long and Liam [9], it is found that culture influences knowledge-sharing by as much as 80 percent. Apparently it is stressed by Stoddart (2001) that knowledge-sharing can only work if the culture of the organisation promotes it. Apparently, Yang and Wan [46] iterates that the stronger a culture of knowledge-sharing that an organisation has, the greater the degree of overall organisational performance it may achieve. In other words, if employees share their knowledge, they will become more experienced and knowledgeable, and would eventually be able to systematically think through the context of phenomena arising from the business operations. Thus, it is imperative to create an organisational culture that encourages its employees to share useful and applicable knowledge in the workplace, hence allowing employees to make viable decisions and in managing complicated situations.

As a result to effectively develop a knowledge-sharing culture amongst organisations, there is a need for change in the behavioural aspect of an organisation, in this case - trust. Trust, as explained later in this paper, is perceived to play a key role in fostering and motivating workers towards the creation of a knowledge-sharing culture in organisations.

4. What is trust?

Trust is defined as positive expectations, such as integrity, capability, truthfulness, goodwill and ability that employees have about the competence and reliability of fellow employees as well as within the organisation [12]. It is a set of beliefs about the other party (trustee), which lead one (trustor) to assume that the trustee's actions will have positive consequences for the trustor's self' [13] [31]. In fact, it is seen that a trustor who trusts a trustee's competence to make suggestions and influence their thinking are more likely to listen to, absorb, and take action on that knowledge [27]. Trust, however, as seen by [33] involves a willingness to make trustors to be vulnerable to trustees. The author furthermore posits that trust consists of myriad facets, specifically 1) trust in competence, 2) trust in openness and honesty, 3) trust in intentions and concerns, and 4) trust in reliability.

As identified by Mayer et al. [31], trust is also considered to be multi-faceted by having three different dimensions, which consists of capability, benevolence, and integrity. Capability refers to the

groups of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain. Benevolence is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive. Integrity involves the perception of the trustor that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that trustor finds acceptable. Even though each of these dimensions is unrelated to one another, they however according to Mayer et al. [31] are inseparable. For example, a trustor may trust a trustee to be very capable for the task he or she is performing, but not trust the trustee to have much goodwill to him or her [31].

Evidently, in an effort to integrate the diverse literature on how trust affects organisations, McEvily, Peronne and Zaheer [32] conceptualised trust as an organising principle through which organisations classify and coordinate their activities. They propose that trust influences organisations by shaping interaction between employees and motivating these employees to contribute and combine knowledge resources.

5. Trust in knowledge-sharing culture

In today's knowledge economy, scholars and researchers have placed trust as an important facilitator and determinant in a knowledge-sharing culture [3][29] as employees require the existence of trust in order to respond openly and to share knowledge [14]. A culture of trust seems to be required to encourage the application and development of knowledge within an organisation [35]. Therefore, trust in the context of culture leads to the increased of overall knowledge sharing within organisations [1].

In the literature specifically examining the relationship between trust and knowledge sharing, Nahapiet and Ghoshal [36] argued that trust affects knowledge sharing through creating and enhancing the necessary conditions for knowledge sharing to take place. Undeniably, conditions such as employees' ability to collaborate and cooperate with each other depends highly upon trust as open reciprocity and sharing of knowledge will not freely occur without it [41].

Trust between employees as well as trust within an organisation is equally important. It is therefore notable that when trust exists, employees are more willing to listen and absorb each other's knowledge [2][26][31][45]. Trust, on the other hand also influences the process of knowledge sharing by increasing openness in knowledge exchange, hence facilitating joint problems solving [32]. In addition, trust allows knowledge sharing to be less costly and increases the likelihood that knowledge acquired from fellow employees will be sufficiently understood and absorbed, as a consequence

permitting employees to place the knowledge in good use [1].

For these reason trust has become a facilitator in determining an individual's decision on whether to share his or her personal knowledge with others [6]. When this occurs, the willingness to provide valuable knowledge emerges. Without trust, however, the knowledge exchanged taken place may not be accurate, comprehensive, or timely due to the unwillingness to take the risks associated with sharing more valuable knowledge [20].

Trust as seen by many, could possibly help in facilitating open and substantive knowledge-sharing and creation due to the fact that lack of trust is a key issue that needs to be resolved especially in cross-functional or inter-organisational teams [23]. Subsequently, the lack of trust can be detrimental to the knowledge creation process [25]. Unless an organisation trusts its employees and the employees believes that it is safe to share knowledge, effective transferring of knowledge will not happen. Therefore, trust should by all means increase the prospect of knowledge-sharing [30] and knowledge can only be effectively used or manage in a culture that promotes trust. Lucas [30] further explained that trust creates "conditions for increased knowledge transfer and ensures its transferral is in a form that is useful..." As trust increases, it helps to alleviate and overcome the fear of risk in knowledge-sharing process [40]. Ellis [11] mentioned that knowledge-sharing still depends on the individual involved, and most individuals will not risk sharing what they know without a good reason of sensing the feeling of trust. Without a high degree of trust, employees will be dubious on the intentions and behaviours of others [30]. Consequently, trust between employees providing and acquiring knowledge will have a significant impact on knowledge-sharing. Therefore, a culture of knowledge-sharing should consist of norms and practices that encourage the free flow of knowledge through trustworthiness amongst employees.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we posit that trust still remains to be an undeniable factor that supports knowledge-sharing in the workplace and thus has received wide attention by numerous researchers and practitioners alike [1][28][32]. However, the issue of trust is often cited as one of the most significant challenge for organisations, as it is not easy to create and inculcate an organisational culture that engages in knowledge-sharing. Thus it is imperative for organisations particularly managers to create a knowledge-sharing culture that is able to promote the creation, collaboration and sharing of

knowledge that speeds up the free flow of knowledge through trustworthiness.

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