Prior Work on Sustainable Knowledge Sharing Practices

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Creating the appropriate environment to share knowledge freely among members is vital to the long-term success of organizations. We argue that organizational factors can enable the conditions that promote knowledge sharing for sustainable competitive advantage. An analysis of the extant literature reveals several organizational factors that must be in place to enable successful knowledge sharing. The literature provides empirical evidence to suggest that trust, communication, reward systems and leadership may be particularly important and so are discussed in more detail below. While it is acknowledged that these categories are by no means exhaustive or indeed mutually exclusive, they are however clearly important to enable successful knowledge sharing in practice and have implications for sustainable management and so deserve further scrutiny.

Keywords: knowledge sharing ; enablers ; organizational factors ; trust ; communication ; leadership ; reward systems

1. Trust

Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar [1] examined the antecedents for knowledge sharing from 2010 to 2015, and trust emerged as the most significant factor that was studied during this time. Trust has been proven to benefit knowledge sharing within an organization [2][3][4][5] and has been directly related to improved performance [6]. The extent to which co-workers are trusted recipients and sources determines organizational members' readiness to share and use tacit knowledge [7].

Nakano et al. [5] found that trust was a major influencer of knowledge sharing in the context of production units. Xue et al. [8] assert that trust affects the knowledge sharing behavior of individuals working in teams, while Fang et al. [9] analyzed multinational organizations and discovered that when trust is mutually held in the cultural values of the subsidiary and the headquarter, it becomes easy to transfer knowledge from the headquarter to the subsidiary. However, it is important to note that trust can take a very long time to develop among team members and only seconds to destroy.

Previous studies have examined the effects of different types of trust on knowledge sharing. For example, Lucas [10] discovered that interpersonal trust between co-workers and the reputation of co-workers had different effects on employee experiences in knowledge sharing within an organization. Lin [11] found that close friendships and social ties among co-workers facilitate trust, which in turn encourages knowledge sharing. Smedlund [12] found in a related study that the presence of a social network based on both interpersonal and established working relationships enhances tacit knowledge sharing and use.

The above literature demonstrates that trust is an important factor for knowledge sharing and, consequently, for overall performance within an organization.

2. Communication

Communication has been examined as an enabler of knowledge sharing and transfer in recent years, and it continues to be a topic of discussion among various researchers. Communication facilitates the achievement of goals within the workplace [5], and it is lauded to promote voluntary knowledge-sharing behavior [13][14]. Communication has been studied as an important variable concerning knowledge sharing in many contexts such as high turbulent environments [13], cross-functional teams [15][16] and virtual teams [17][18]. It has been shown to influence knowledge sharing in organizations [2][5] and affects overall performance [19]. Al-Alawi et al. [19], Mueller [4], Wickramasinghe and Widyaratne [2] contend that face-to-face communication is one of the most important factors to facilitate smooth knowledge sharing.

Communication was found to be closely associated with workspace structure [20]. Strong bonds are formed between team members in open working environments, leading to employees being more comfortable communicating [13][19]. Islam et al.

[21] discovered that an organization that promotes open communication between its team members can produce more effective knowledge transfer, lower the cost of error, and create new work-related knowledge. Gumus [22] investigated communication and its effect on knowledge sharing in terms of communication satisfaction and style and found knowledge sharing is more prominent within a group than out of a group. Nevertheless, Al-Alawi et al. [19] found that friendships or strong bonds complicate communication as co-workers feel they cannot communicate work-related problems to co-workers that they are friends with. This contradicts previous literature that states friendships enhance knowledge sharing [23].

3. Reward Systems

Jeon et al. [24] pointed out that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation positively influence the knowledge-sharing attitude of individuals, which in turn governs their behavior toward knowledge sharing and transfer. Rewards are inextricably linked to and significantly overlap with motivation. However, there is much debate in the literature concerning the link between rewards and performance, and their impact on performance is unclear.

Rewards can be categorized into two types. Extrinsic rewards comprise monetary incentives, such as bonuses and pay increases, whereas intrinsic rewards are based on recognition mechanisms, such as job security and promotions [25]. Many scholars demonstrated that rewards facilitate knowledge sharing [26][2][19]. However, some research has revealed that rewards are not capable of promoting knowledge sharing [3], nor have a relationship with knowledge sharing [27].

In their study, Tan et al. [3] demonstrated that monetary rewards motivate knowledge sharing, whereas Bock and Kim [25] found that monetary rewards created a negative attitude to knowledge sharing in their study. Tan et al. [3] advocated that performance-based reward systems are the most effective way to motivate employees to share knowledge within the organization. Durmusoglu et al. [28] discovered that when rewards are integrated into the culture of the organization, knowledge sharing increases. In a recent study, Halisah et al. [29] found that performance climate moderates the effect of knowledge sharing culture on employees' knowledge sharing intention.

In a meta-analysis of 44 research studies involving 14,023 individuals, Nguyen et al. [30] found that both extrinsic and intrinsic factors were linked to higher levels of knowledge sharing, while the effect was stronger for intrinsic motivation. Further investigation revealed that individual characteristics, organizational context and cultural context moderated the motivation and knowledge sharing relationship.

4. Leadership

Leadership has been highlighted as an important enabler of knowledge sharing in the organization. Leaders promote knowledge-sharing behavior through specific measures. More specifically, they are responsible for creating trust among employees [11][31] and motivating them to share knowledge by setting and conveying knowledge sharing goals [32].

Søndergaard et al. [33] assert that leadership is crucial in promoting knowledge sharing across different hierarchy levels in an organization and found a positive relationship between leadership and individual knowledge sharing in their study. Lee et al. [34] discovered that leadership is positively related to knowledge sharing and team performance, and recently, Muhammed and Zaim [35] discovered that leadership's support of the immediate manager is a key element in peer knowledge sharing behavior.

While some consider leadership to be one of the most important factors that influence knowledge sharing [1][34][36], it has been found to have no relationship to knowledge sharing in other studies [2]. The relationship between leadership and information sharing appears to be dependent on the style of leadership. For instance, Xue et al. [8] studied the concept of empowering leadership concerning knowledge sharing. Their research findings revealed that empowering leadership significantly affects the knowledge-sharing behaviors of individuals. Srivastava et al. [37] also found that empowering leadership was positively related to knowledge sharing and improved performance. Lin and Hsiao [11] examined the relationships between transformational leadership and knowledge sharing. They found that transformational leaders emphasize the meaning of tasks that subordinates engage in at work which, in turn, has an impact on knowledge sharing.

Similarly, Kim and Park [38] also found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and knowledge sharing. Additionally, Tripathi et al. [39] report similar findings to Shafi et al. [40], who investigated the relationship between servant leaders and knowledge sharing and found a positive association.

Some researchers have discovered, however, that leaders can operate as a barrier to knowledge sharing. Leaders have been observed to obstruct the flow of information, preventing them from executing certain jobs or sharing knowledge

efficiently [13]. Costa et al. [6] found that workers felt more dependent on their co-workers than their leaders in the workplace.

The literature discussed above demonstrates that leadership may have an impact on knowledge sharing, but there is no clear consensus on the subject and, therefore, it needs to be explored further.

5. Concluding remarks

Knowledge that is not well managed is easily lost, especially tacit knowledge, as it resides in the minds of people. Prior research has demonstrated that tacit knowledge sharing requires a shared social process and that many contextual factors can influence sustainable performance outcomes. However, researchers claim that knowledge sharing is insufficiently explored relative to other knowledge management processes [41] and is poorly managed in practice [42]. Furthermore, there is insufficient empirical research on the effects of organizational factors in specific contexts [43][5][6]. Based on our analysis of the literature, we propose that trust, communication, reward systems and leadership have a positive influence on knowledge sharing in a high-tech service context. Further analysis of each of these factors illustrates that they are complex and influential. It is also apparent that there is no absolute consensus on whether or how they influence knowledge sharing within a high-tech service organization.

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