

# Impact of Knowledge Adoption and Cognitive Learning in the Knowledge Transfer Process

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the influence of knowledge adoption (intention to adopt knowledge) and cognitive learning in the knowledge transfer process. The moderating impact of cognitive learning strategy is also explored. Building on cognitive learning theories, a model was developed to examine the knowledge recipient's intention to adopt knowledge and his/her cognitive learning. As this study follows quantitative approach, the model was tested empirically using a survey of 615 white-collar workers in Thailand. The results show that higher knowledge recipient's intention to adopt knowledge can enhance his/her cognitive learning. The results also show that utilizing cognitive learning strategy may only be suitable for some groups of knowledge recipients. Based on the study's findings, management teams can understand the importance of employees' intention to adopt knowledge in their learning of the transferred knowledge. Moreover, management teams can understand how to utilize the cognitive learning strategy for employees with different intentions to adopt knowledge.

## KEYWORDS

Cognitive Learning, Cognitive Learning Strategy, Knowledge Adoption, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Transfer, Perceived Cognitive Learning

## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is recognized as a key resource for creating organizational competitive advantage (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Srisamran & Vathanophas Ractham, 2014; Sturdy & O'Mahoney, 2018). In organizations, each individual possesses different skills and knowledge (Sveiby, 2001). In order to gain organizational competitive advantage, it is necessary for organizations to be capable of utilizing and managing knowledge (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Knowledge management has therefore become the foundation for the development of systematic approaches in managing and leveraging knowledge in organizations (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Au & Fung, 2019).

Knowledge transfer is one of the key knowledge management processes and is crucial for organizational competence (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Nguyen & Islam, 2018; Park, Howard,

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& Gomulya, 2018). As knowledge can reside in individuals (i.e. organizational members), transfer of knowledge can be achieved between individuals in organizations (Sveiby, 2001). In other words, knowledge can be transferred from a knowledge source to a knowledge recipient. Knowledge source and knowledge recipient are two main roles in knowledge transfer (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). A knowledge source refers to an individual who possesses knowledge while a knowledge recipient refers to an individual who receives the knowledge from a knowledge source (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). In order to transfer knowledge from source to recipient, a knowledge source must be willing to dispose or share the knowledge. Moreover, a knowledge recipient must be willing and able to receive that knowledge as well. Knowledge transfer can benefit both knowledge source and knowledge recipient (Zhu, Chiu, & Infante Holguin-Veras, 2018).

Nevertheless, one significant problem of knowledge transfer in organization is that, even though knowledge source has willingness to share his/her knowledge, knowledge recipient might not gain the knowledge received from the knowledge source. Sussman and Siegal (2003) mentioned that knowledge cannot be successfully transferred from a knowledge source to a knowledge recipient unless that knowledge is learnt by the recipient. This emphasizes the importance of knowledge recipient's learning in the knowledge transfer process. Sussman and Siegal (2003) also mentioned that, for learning to occur in knowledge transfer, knowledge adoption is key. Since knowledge involves cognitive structures and processes, knowledge recipient's perception of the received knowledge is also involved. The knowledge transferred from a knowledge source can be taken by a knowledge recipient and ignored by another. The knowledge recipient is likely to decide whether to adopt that received knowledge or not (Liao & Chou, 2012; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The differences in knowledge recipient's intention to adopt the received knowledge can have influence on his/her learning of the received knowledge. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate the impact of knowledge adoption (intention to adopt knowledge) and cognitive learning in the knowledge transfer process.

This study aims to find out the impact of knowledge adoption and cognitive learning in knowledge transfer process by studying the influence of knowledge adoption towards cognitive learning. Moreover, the moderating impact of cognitive learning strategy is also investigated. This paper is constructed as follows; first, the concept of cognitive learning, knowledge adoption, and cognitive learning strategy are reviewed. Next, the study's research design and methodology is described. Then, the data analysis is presented and discussed. This paper concludes with theoretical implication, managerial implication, and recommendations for future research opportunities.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Cognitive Learning**

Cognitive learning emphasizes individual's internal knowledge processing and acquisition of knowledge (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). From cognitive perspectives, learning corresponds to cognitive change. It relates to what learners know and how they acquire knowledge (Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Jonassen, 1991). Cognitive learning occurs when received knowledge (new knowledge) is integrated with prior knowledge and stored in long-term memory (Schunk, 1991). Ertmer and Newby (1993) provide more explanation where cognitive learning involves how individuals receive, organize, store, and retrieve information and knowledge in their mind. Previous studies attempt to measure cognitive changes in individual learning. Learner grades based on examinations continue to be the most common measurement for assessing learning outcomes (Dumont, 1996; Hiltz & Wellman, 1997; Rovai, 2002). Most examinations are developed based on recall test. Nevertheless, Rovai (2002) proposes some concerns towards utilizing learner's grades as measurement. In fact, grades might not reflect what learners have learned (Rovai, 2002). For instance, grading depends on instructor. Different instructors tend to approach grading differently. Even the same instructor is unlikely to demonstrate consistent manner in grading (Rovai, 2002). Therefore, grading might not be effective as a measurement for

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