

Chapter 11

Enabling Factors for Knowledge Sharing among Employees in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates enabling factors that promote knowledge sharing among employees in the workplace. The study was conducted on employees of Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) as a research case. Banks in particular and financial institutions in general are now becoming knowledge intensive organizations where knowledge is used as a key strategic resource to achieve their business goals as well as competitive advantage. This study uses an exploratory case study research method that allows deeper understanding and interpretation. Although there is plenty of literature on knowledge sharing, existing findings are not consistent due to the influence of contextual factors on knowledge sharing. This study identifies organizational, individual, task characteristics, and technological factors as main enabling factors that promote knowledge sharing in the workplace. Although organizations put much emphasis on technology to promote knowledge sharing in the workplace, non-technological factors (organizational and individual factors) appear more significant. As the study was conducted on a commercial bank within developing economies context, it contributes additional perspectives to confirm or extend existing findings on knowledge sharing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is an important tool to accomplish tasks in the work place. Knowledge sharing is the daily routine activities of employees in the work place whether the organization have clear procedure on knowledge sharing or not (Award and Ghaziri, 2007). Bartol and Srivastava (2002) defined knowledge sharing as individuals sharing of organizational relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise with one another. Through knowledge sharing, individual knowledge is converted into organizational knowledge so that it is used to create value for the organization. Knowledge is used to create new products and services and increase organizational profitability (see Award and Ghaziri, 2007; Kubo, Saka and Pam, 2001; Bock et al., 2005; Alhammad et al., 2009).

Knowledge is not a tangible product which can be easily transferred from knowledge owners to knowledge seekers (Hendriks, 1999; Lin et al., 2012). Most of the organization's knowledge resides in the mind and body of employees who create, recognize, archive, access, and apply knowledge to carry out their tasks (Bock et al., 2005). Knowledge is a resource for employees through which they get power and other benefits in the organizations. Supervisors cannot oblige employees to share their knowledge (Lin et al., 2012). Organizations installed different IT systems so as to promote knowledge sharing among their employees (see Yang, 2008; Al-Ma'aitah, 2008; Gupta et al., 2008). However, such effort was not successful to achieve the expected result in knowledge sharing (see Yang, 2008; Jeon et al., 2011). Effective knowledge sharing mostly depends on the positive attitude of employees who possess the knowledge. However what factors best motivate employees to share knowledge are not well known issue despite the presence of ample literature on the topic (Alhammad et al., 2009, Burgess, 2005). We found also paradoxical findings among researchers (see Jones et al., 2006; Donate and Guadamillas, 2010; Ismail et al., 2007;

Alizadeh et al., 2011). This implies that further research is required to increase our understanding about enabling factors that promote knowledge sharing in the work place. The main purpose of this research is to increase our understanding about motivational factors for knowledge sharing in the workplace. Specifically the research has addressed the following research questions

- Why employees seek knowledge from other sources?
- What factors motivate employees to share knowledge in the workplace?

The result of the research will help practitioners what interventions to undertake in their organization to create a knowledge sharing culture and develop a successful knowledge management system. Such local research will have also a theoretical contribution to extend existing knowledge sharing theory across different socio-economic contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge as a resource has a variety of benefits for the organization. It is one of the main inputs in the production process as well as in the service delivery (Grant, 1996; Lin, 2007). It helps organizations to improve the quality of services, innovate new products, reduce operational costs, improve relationships with customers and suppliers and easily adapt to the changing environments (Kharabsheh, 2007; Saenz, Aramburu and Rivera, 2009; Gold et al., 2001). Organizations can create value from knowledge when they can integrate knowledge held by individuals (Grant, 1996). Unused stock of knowledge is not considered as a resource (Grant, 1996; Blair, 2002). Organizations which can create, capture, organize, share and use knowledge have increased capability to survive in the market. They have also a better chance to excel beyond their competitors in the long term (De Long and Fahey, 2000; Curado and

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