Chapter 95
A Conceptual Proposition:
Does Social Capital Manipulate Knowledge Sharing Enablers' Effect?

Ahmad Vazehi Ashtiani
University Malaya, Malaysia

Sharmila Jayasingam
University Malaya, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper proposes social capital as a possible moderator of the relationship between commonly identified knowledge sharing enablers in the literature and knowledge sharing (KS). A literature review was carried out to determine the contextual influence of the level of social capital within communities of practice (CoPs). Propositions were developed based on a review of past studies addressing KS enablers and KS. The literature review revealed that prior studies built on resource-based theory (RBT) and knowledge-based view of the firm (KBV) focused on organizational enablers of KS without any concern for the contextual influence such as the level of social capital of CoPs. Further analysis indicated that social capital could possibly moderate the impact of commonly identified KS enablers. These insights are presented as propositions in this conceptual paper. This paper addresses a gap in the area of KS. It questions the results of past studies and proposes the needs to consider the level of social capital when identifying appropriate KS enablers.

INTRODUCTION

In today's knowledge-based economy, knowledge has become a critical success factor for establishing organizational competitive advantage. This has contributed towards an increase in number of organizations initiating and engaging in knowledge management (KM) initiatives. Their primary aim

with such engagement in KM is to ensure they are utilizing their knowledge resource more effectively and efficiently (Zboralski, 2009). Fundamentally, KM aims at achieving the objectives of an organization through a systematic process of managing and utilizing knowledge within an organization.

KM encompasses numerous processes ranging from acquisition and creation of knowledge to

organization, sharing, and utilization of knowledge (Mishra & Bhaskar, 2011). Among these KM processes, knowledge sharing (KS) has been elevated to a status as the driving force for any KM initiative and ultimately, the success of organizations (Lin, 2007b; Law & Ngai, 2008).

Despite being placed on a pedestal as a critical success factor, the sharing of knowledge, especially tacit knowledge has become the most difficult challenge for organizations. Knowledge resides in the mind of individuals. In order to gain access to this valuable resource, organizations rely mainly on their employees to share knowledge voluntarily. However, getting individuals to share their knowledge voluntarily is easier said than done. This can be attributed to the notion that knowledge is power (Du Plessis, 2007; Boer et al., 2011). Hence, most employees are not willing to loosen their control over their source of power (Schmetz, 2002). This leads to a major problem that has plagued organizations even today--knowledge hoarding (Ipe, 2003).

Due to its complex and challenging nature, numerous studies (Liao et al., 2007; Yu et al., 2007; Rhodes et al., 2008; Ho, 2009; Lilleoere & Hansen, 2011) attempted to identify the underlying factors that could improve KS. Dominant theories in KM such as resource-based theory (RBT), and knowledge-based view of the firm (KBV), served as the basis for most studies, which tried to understand challenges and issues associated with KS. In fact, most past studies built on these theories to identify measures to overcome the issue of knowledge hoarding. Commonly delineated factors include organization structure, information technology infrastructure, organizational culture, reward systems, and so forth.

Despite being proven empirically, we posit that the results of past studies on KS enablers should not be accepted at face value. We believe that social relationships between individuals should be given due consideration. Several studies have considered CoP and social capital as factors that may directly influence the extent of KS (E. C. Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Lesser & Storck, 2001; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Chow & Chan, 2008; Chen & Hung, 2010). We do not intend to contradict such direct relationships. However, we believe that the interaction between social capital and previously identified enablers should not be overlooked.

This study intends to build a case that may help explain the interaction between social capital and organizational factors, and its implication to organizations. We posit that the existence of strong social capital may serve as a manipulator of the effect of some of the commonly mentioned KS enablers.

KS ENABLERS: A REVIEW OF PAST STUDIES

Based on the theories of RBT and KBV, researchers introduced KM as an effective strategy to achieve business objectives (Kaplan et al., 2001; Eisenhardt & Santos, 2002; Pawlowsky & Schmid, 2012). From this standpoint, KM is modeled and categorized into three components in a causal direction. As shown in Figure 1, the components of the recommended causal model include KM enablers, KM processes and KM outputs:

Realizing KM as an effective business strategy has driven many studies in a quest to explain the relationships between KM enablers, KM processes

Figure 1. A general model of KM from RBT and KBV perspectives
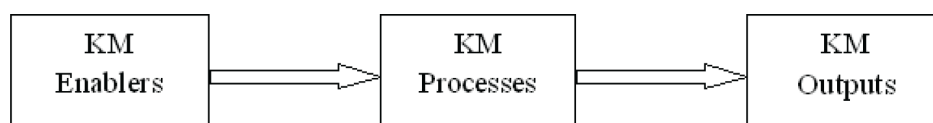
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