Chapter 33
Theory and Practice of Online Knowledge Sharing

Will W. K. Ma
Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

The concept of knowledge sharing finds historical support in theories on the acquisition and creation of knowledge. While the key to knowledge sharing depends on frequent and regular social interaction, the recent rapid development of the internet has enhanced much of the social interaction taking place among individuals at any time, at any place, and with any person. Through a review of the literature, this chapter defines online knowledge sharing, discusses the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors in explaining online knowledge behavior, explores the various forms of knowledge sharing in different online learning environments, and reviews the measurement of online knowledge sharing. The chapter also discusses online knowledge-sharing issues that should be addressed in future.

INTRODUCTION

Online knowledge sharing refers to the online communication of knowledge so that knowledge is learned and applied by an individual. Several key aspects of the term can be identified. First, it concerns interactions among individuals who communicate with one another. Second, the use of the term "online" signifies a focus on social interaction through online connections and/or online environments. Third, it involves the exchange of knowledge. Individuals come to understand the knowledge they acquire through the process of online communication and social interaction. More importantly, individuals are able to apply such knowledge in future in a similar or different context. Online communication among individuals thus enables knowledge sharing to take place in an online learning environment such that the learner understands the knowledge acquired and is able to apply it in similar or other contexts. Such a definition distinguishes the *online* context from traditional means of communication and differentiates knowledge sharing from purely emotional support.

BACKGROUND

Knowledge sharing represents a critical step in the knowledge-creation process from a variety of knowledge perspectives. Individuals create knowledge and become knowledgeable or develop expertise. The key to learning is to locate knowledgeable others and to learn from them. However, some knowledge cannot be explicitly described and transferred without a certain kind of interaction between experts and learners. In addition, knowledge may not exist in knowledgeable others or experts, but may be sticky knowledge embedded in communities of practice. Knowledge can be shared only through social interaction among individuals who truly understand the practice within a specific context. Furthermore, the social dimension of knowledge has evolved as an integral part of the process of knowledge creation and knowledge acquisition. Various knowledge perspectives emphasize that knowledge is imparted through continuous transactions between individuals, with social interaction at the forefront of such transactions. For example, Schraw (2006, p. 246) argued that learners actively construct meaning rather than simply assimilating it in a passive manner. The social dimension of learning therefore plays a central role in the construction of knowledge. Schraw suggested that most contemporary educators support such a constructivist view in one way or another. Prawat (1996) suggested that individual-social interaction underlies the knowledge-construction process and rejects the notion that the locus of knowledge is in the individual (p.217). Rather, knowledge is the product of a perfect inferential system between the individual and the social environment. The post-positivist perspective on knowledge states that knowledge sharing is a process of consensual understanding situated in everyday experience, and holds that knowledge is negotiated among those who encounter and use it.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE KNOWLEDGE LITERATURE

Nature of Individual Knowledge Sharing and Learning

A popular socio-cultural theory of learning is that of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, who explained the mechanism by which knowledge is acquired and represented through knowledge sharing and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). This mechanism comprises two planes: the social/individual plane and the public/private plane. Learning starts on the social plane, with learners acquiring new concepts and strategies through interactions with more knowledgeable others. Individual learners then use and extend the concepts and strategies thus acquired to other contexts, and meanings and interpretations are initiated through social interactions (social to individual). Learning then emerges in the public domain, with the knowledge being used by more knowledgeable others and made available to learners. Through interactions within the public domain, individual learners understand, adjust, and implement the knowledge they have learned in the private domain (public to private). Harre (1984) and Wertsch and Bivens (1992) concluded that the success of learning is based on the assumptions that knowledgeable members of a culture will assist others to learn and that learners will actively engage in learning activities to facilitate higher mental functions. Social interactions are initiated among individual learners and naturally result in knowledge sharing.

Related Content

Digital Signature Algorithm for M-Payment Applications Using Arithmetic Encoding and Factorization Algorithm
Shibin Davidand G. Jaspher W. Kathrine (2021). *Journal of Cases on Information Technology (pp. 11-26).*
www.irma-international.org/article/digital-signature-algorithm-for-m-payment-applications-using-arithmetic-encoding-and-factorization-algorithm/277654

Examining Digital Piracy: Self-Control, Punishment, and Self-Efficacy
Lixuan Zhang, Wayne W. Smithand William C. McDowell (2009). *Information Resources Management Journal (pp. 24-44).*
www.irma-international.org/article/examining-digital-piracy/1354

OWL: Web Ontology Language
Adélia Gouveiaand Jorge Cardoso (2009). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Second Edition (pp. 3009-3017).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/owl-web-ontology-language/14019

Blockchain-Based Incentive-Compatible Reputation Management System in Vehicular Networks
Rui Men, Xiumei Fanand Xuguang Yang (2022). *Information Resources Management Journal (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/article/blockchain-based-incentive-compatible-reputation-management-system-in-vehicular-networks/291695

Computing and ICT Literacy: From Students' Misconceptions and Mental Schemes to the Monitoring of the Teaching-Learning Process
Antonio Cartelli (2008). *Information Communication Technologies: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 3338-3347).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/computing-ict-literacy/22885