

Chapter 13

A Model of Intraorganizational Knowledge Sharing: Development and Initial Test

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has reported different knowledge management processes, considering each universally applicable. This article proposes that context influences company knowledge sharing policies and practices and their effectiveness. Through a literature review, a model of intraorganizational knowledge sharing is proposed. Within this model, three organizational antecedents of knowledge sharing policies and practices are included, namely: top management knowledge values, an innovation business strategy, and perceived environmental uncertainty. Further, top management knowledge values and knowledge sharing policies and practices are hypothesized to lead to knowledge sharing effectiveness. The model was constructed by taking into account industrial contexts in Taiwan, and was examined using survey data collected from companies in Taiwan. The results showed that top management knowledge values and innovation business strategy are positively and significantly associated with knowledge sharing policies and practices, which in turn lead to knowledge sharing effectiveness. Finally, this article identifies and discusses implications for international information management.

INTRODUCTION

In a knowledge-based economy, both theory and practice recognize that knowledge is one of the key strategic resources of a firm. It is also argued

that the richest resource modern companies have is the knowledge that resides within their employees because unlike other types of resources, the value of knowledge increases as it is shared (Quinn, Anderson, & Finkelstein, 1996). Thus, how to

foster knowledge sharing among employees so that companies can leverage their richest resource has become a key managerial issue (Michailova & Husted, 2003). Under this premise, companies increasingly develop a range of knowledge management practices, of which the key objective is to facilitate knowledge sharing among employees (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002; Carneiro, 2000; Earl, 2001; Grant, 1996a). In addition to these knowledge management practices, researchers also stress the importance of IT-based knowledge management systems, believing them to be an effective vehicle for knowledge sharing (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Scarbrough, Swan, & Preston, 1999; Sher & Lee, 2004).

However, previous literature tends to propose “best” knowledge sharing policies and practices, considering all of them to be universally applicable (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001). Contributive antecedents of these “best practices” have not been carefully examined. Without considering these antecedents, organizations cannot effectively establish and implement these knowledge sharing policies and practices (Holsapple & Joshi, 2000; Kalling, 2003; McDermott, 1999). Further, unlike previous literature that argues that organizational antecedents influence employees’ knowledge sharing behaviors (Constant, Keisler, & Sproull, 1994; Husted & Michailova, 2002; Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2000, 2001), we emphasize the importance and effectiveness of company knowledge sharing policies and practices, that is, organizational policies and practices that facilitate and motivate the diffusion of learning and knowledge within the organization (Husted & Michailova, 2002), in inducing employees to share knowledge (Ruggles, 1998). Examination of the effectiveness of organizational knowledge sharing policies and practices is necessary, but to date such research has rarely been conducted (Choi & Lee, 2003). Thus, the two important and yet under-researched issues, antecedents and effectiveness of knowledge sharing policies and practices, require investigation so that our

understanding regarding these two issues can be enhanced.

In this article, we seek to develop and validate a model of intraorganizational knowledge sharing in business organizations. In this model, organizational antecedents and effectiveness of knowledge sharing policies and practices are examined using survey data collected from companies in Taiwan. In recent years, companies in Taiwan, which once created rapid economic growth that caught the attention of the world, have experienced managerial challenges due to the trend of globalization. With the advent of the knowledge economy, the government in Taiwan has begun promoting the importance of knowledge-based competition to companies. The implementation of policies and practices aimed at facilitating and encouraging employee knowledge sharing has been observed among companies in Taiwan (Hsu, 2006; Sher & Lee, 2004). As will also be seen, top managers in Taiwan often show a paternalistic style of management (Chang, 1985; Redding, 1993) that may facilitate employee knowledge sharing. Thus, this style of management, along with government promotions, may act as facilitating backgrounds for intraorganizational knowledge sharing. However, Taiwan has distinct cultural traits from the west that may impede intraorganizational knowledge sharing such as emphasizing hierarchy (Hofstede, 1997) and the tendency of intimate individuals differentiating themselves from distant others (Triandis, 1989).

Neither the antecedents nor the effectiveness of intraorganizational knowledge sharing policies and practices has been carefully studied within business contexts in Taiwan. Thus, this study builds on theory and practice developed in the west to propose a model of intraorganizational knowledge sharing and tests it in a business context in Taiwan. Findings should have theoretical and practical implications for both local and global perspectives.

This article is structured as follows. First, we present our research framework. Then, a review

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