

ICT Based Communication Channels Preferences towards Knowledge Sharing among Multicultural Students

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ABSTRACT

Many researches conducted in knowledge sharing have been focusing on organisational context. Yet, not many studies exist that explore knowledge sharing in education institutions. This paper provides an insight of how attitude, environment, motivation indicators, and individual factors (culture, age, and gender) would help in determining the preferences of information and communication technology (ICT) based communication channels among the students in multicultural institutions. The study uses quantitative design approach where data is collected from students studying in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Gombak Campus. The participants consisted of students originating from the regions of Middle East, West Africa, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. Information was solicited by the use of a survey. The survey was administered to a total of 184 participants. The research model designed for the study is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Cognitive Theory. Factors involved in this study are attitude, environment, motivation, and demography, which includes cultural background. Six different communication channels have been looked through this study, i.e., instant messaging chat, social network, email, e-bulletin board, VOIP service, Telephone, and SMS. The results of the study can be used as a guide for identifying appropriate ICT based communication channels to be provided to the students for their knowledge sharing activities.

Keywords: Culture in Knowledge Sharing, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Communication Channels, Knowledge Sharing, Multicultural Students, Preferences

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the primary force that determines and drives our ability to act in general and particularly to act intelligently (Wiig, 1994). In recent years, organisation has invested a lot

to focus in knowledge management initiatives. This is in light with the realization of knowledge as among the most important factors in offering competitive advantage.

One of the most essential ingredients of knowledge management is knowledge sharing. Jennex (2008) had explained that culture forms the basis of how one process and use

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knowledge by providing beliefs frameworks for understanding and using the knowledge. Knowledge sharing activities can be to some extent easier to achieve when applied to a homogenous cultural environment as compared to multicultural environment. Hofstede (2001) recalls that significant differences between nations can lead to differences between national groups within the same organisation causing those groups to either understand knowledge differently, or have significant barriers to participating in the sharing of knowledge.

Business and learning environments have dramatically changed over the years due to the advancement of technology and globalisation. These factors have expanded the range of choices that people can use to share knowledge. Groupware systems have enable people from different locations to hold meetings at the same time. Computerised database systems have made the data manipulation activities easier. These have lead to the growing of online chatting programs, social networks, e-mails, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and other inventions that have redefined sharing of knowledge. The preferences of communication channels and people to share knowledge with are limited only to ones perception.

Internationalisation is an added ingredient to the changing environment, multinational companies and multicultural institutions have given knowledge sharing topic a different spin. With globalisation and internationalisation, these multicultural institutions and organisations are forced to adopt global visions and strategies. A major challenge of this environment setup, is integrating the different cultures to work as a unit, something that when not well executed can cause a big problem in multicultural communities.

Studies have shown the recognition of cultural influences in knowledge sharing. However many of the studies are done in the organisational context, and only view studies explore the knowledge sharing in education institutions (Soley & Pandya, 2003; Tong & Mitra, 2009; Ardichvili, Maurer, Li, Wentling, & Stuedemann, 2006; Tongpraset & Cross,

2008). This motivates us to address this issue by doing a quantitative study that investigates the impact of attitude, environment, motivation and individual factors (culture, age, gender) on students' ICT based communication channels preferences towards knowledge sharing.

RELATED WORK

Theoretical Support

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a persuasion theory that has been used by many researchers (Gagne, 2009; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005) to study knowledge sharing in various contexts. TPB contains three factors that are perceived to influence knowledge sharing i.e., attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norm regarding the behaviour and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). According to Ajzen (1991), if people evaluated the suggested behaviour as positive (attitude), and if they think their significant others wanted them to perform the behaviour (subjective norm), this results in a higher intention (motivation) of them following such a behaviour.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) is an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods while employing organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of human's evolved inner resources (Richard, 2000). SDT framework has three psychological needs that are perceived to motivate oneself to initiate a behaviour and specify nutriments that are essential for psychological well being of an individual. These needs are autonomy, competence and relatedness. SDT contains two types of motivations. The first is autonomous motivation (intrinsic motivation) that is person willingness to engage in an activity because it is enjoyable, the other is controlled motivation which refers to engaging in an activity out of pressure in form of threat, rewards or punishment (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Majority of the researches done on knowledge sharing focus on controlled motivation (Jennex, 2008). However, Gagne (2009) has

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