Chapter 62

Using ERG Theory as a Lens to Understand the Sharing of Academic Tacit Knowledge:
Problems and Issues in Developing Countries – Perspectives from Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a direct view of the higher education environment in a transition economy. It reports research findings on barriers to sharing knowledge among Vietnamese academic and managerial colleagues, focusing on three factors: time, capital, and management capacity. It draws on data from focus groups and from in-depth interviews of Vietnamese members of faculty from six major universities. A key finding of this study is that work-overload leaves little time for collaborative research. Together with insufficient English skills and bureaucratic management, it contributes to measurable levels of cheating and corruption in education that in turn lead to low quality and quantity of international academic publications and of patents. This finding indicates that there is a strong link with both Existence, Relatedness, and Growth (ERG) theory and Maslow's theory of need with both the quality and quantity of international publications produced by Vietnamese academics.

INTRODUCTION

"Knowledge is power" has been proved a self-evident truth. However, sharing knowledge is even more powerful and is a better way to sustain competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000; Kearns & Lederer, 2003). This is of particular interest in the context of Confucian culture that has deeply influenced the Vietnamese people and education system. It is

known that knowledge exists in two distinguishing forms: tacit and explicit knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) suggest that explicit knowledge can be shared easily in printed papers, audio recordings, visual formats or other digital forms such as email or online forums, while tacit knowledge resides in experts and is hard to acquire or share. The tacit knowledge that is shared in an organization forms only a tiny proportion of that which is available (Beijerse, 1999; Goldblatt, 2004). This research focuses on and discusses the problems and issues in sharing tacit knowledge in higher education in emerging economies, with Vietnam as the geographic case study region.

Effective knowledge sharing increases the competitive advantage of an organization (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Jivan & Zarandi, 2012; Matzler & Mueller, 2011), and is vital for effective decision making. However, implementing knowledge sharing efficiently is rarely straightforward. There are multiple internal and external barriers that an organization needs to overcome in order to achieve success from knowledge sharing activities (Riege, 2005; Sun & Scott, 2005; Szulanski, 2003). Knowledge sharing is not only a critical component of successful organizations in the corporate and public sectors. Outcomes from knowledge sharing play a crucial role in determining a universities' reputation and ranking (Milam, 2001). In universities, the role of teaching staff is to both disseminate knowledge and to contribute new knowledge through research. However, there has been scant attention paid to how staff share or do not share their knowledge (Metcalfe, 2006) especially in developing countries with low per capita income. Generally, people work both for economic consideration and for self-actualization, and need both appraisal of and encouragement for their achievements (Braun, Scott, & Alwin, 1994; Chan & Wyatt, 2007; Rowley, 1996). In the context of an economy that provides sufficient social welfare support and stable job security, knowledge sharing for self-actualization and

sense of self-worth are more dominant (Jones, 2002; Kinman & Jones, 2007). In contrast, in highly competitive environments with uncertain job security, knowledge sharing tends to be more for rewards or financial purposes (Akerlof, 1984; Barachini, 2009; Gu & Gu, 2011; Hsu, 2006).

Scholars and researchers have examined various mechanisms and environments for effective knowledge sharing. Some authors focus on the difficulty of knowledge sharing in terms of culture and hostile environments (Husted & Michailova, 2002; Michailova & Husted, 2003), while other researchers focus on the stickiness of knowledge as it relates to internal barriers for sharing knowledge (Szulanski, 2003). Others distinguish knowledge from data and information (Davenport, Delong & Beers, 1998), separate knowledge into tacit and explicit forms (Krogh, Nonaka & Ichijo, 2000; Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata, 2008), or focus on the enablers that foster the motivation for sharing, both extrinsic and intrinsic (Bock, Kyung-Shik, Ayoung & An, 2009; Galia, 2008; Cho, Li & Su, 2007). Many argue that intrinsic motivation plays an important role in sharing knowledge and extrinsic motivation does little or even has a negative effect on knowledge sharing (Hsu & Lin, 2008; Lin, 2007; Cho et al., 2007). On the other hand, many scholars point out that those extrinsic motivations are simultaneously important enablers for knowledge sharing between colleagues (Akerlof, 1984; Barachini, 2009; Galia, 2008).

This paper explores the context of sharing knowledge in the Vietnamese tertiary education system, and focuses on the themes of both absorptive capacity and corruption. This is achieved through a discussion of the relevance of wages, time, workload, management capacity and corrupt practices. These elements are considered as major problems leading to: low quality graduates, poor rates of publication, and the low ranking of Vietnamese Higher education institutions. This chapter represents perspectives from Vietnam and uses motivation theory (ERG and Maslow)

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