

Chapter 8

The Determinants of Interorganizational Knowledge Coaching Success: Looking Ahead to the Future of Knowledge Transfer

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ABSTRACT

With the global rise of the knowledge worker, there is an increasing interest in effective knowledge transfer practices within the firm. This interest is especially prevalent in regards to the transfer of tacit knowledge—knowledge that is difficult to describe and transmit to others. In this chapter, the authors consider how the emerging practice of knowledge coaching can be utilized as a means to transfer tacit knowledge between experts and protégés within the firm, and consider the individual-level factors that influence whether the practice yields success. In doing so, they report the results of a study examining the impact of individually possessed national cultural values on motivation to engage in knowledge coaching, and put forward several avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION

With the rise of the new century, there is a growing recognition that the sustainability and success of the firm relies not on the physical availability of resources—whether they be physical labour or materials—but the knowledge embedded within these resources. We see evidence of this paradigm shift in the proliferation of new terminology such as ‘knowledge worker’ and ‘knowledge capital’, indicating a movement away from thinking of value in quantitative terms, and towards thinking of it in qualitative

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terms. Further, with the growing rollout of automation, artificial intelligence, and machine learning across industries worldwide, some have predicted a future world of work far removed from our current employment landscape. Indeed, it has been suggested that by 2025, knowledge work automation tools and systems could take on tasks equal to the output of 110 million to 140 million full-time roles (Manyika, Chui, Bughin, Dobbs, Bisson, & Marrs, 2013).

Given that even traditional knowledge industries are now being influenced by automation, we are likely to see rapid and continuous change in these industries, whereby the greatest contributions of the individual will be qualitative in nature. I.e. possessing creative and innovative competencies will be vital. As such, in order to create and sustain value, the knowledge industries of the future will need to develop competencies around the development and dissemination of these creative skills amongst workers. In recognition of this emerging, knowledge-based view of the firm, scholars have therefore attempted to uncover the factors that influence the willingness of knowledge workers to disseminate their knowledge—a crucial consideration for human capital organisations that rely on scarce expert talent as a means of offering value to their customers (Foss, 2007).

In light of this emphasis on individually-possessed knowledge capital, one approach has been to examine the effects of an array of stable-individual traits, to better understand the influence they bear upon knowledge transfer (KT) behaviours. To illustrate, Cabrera, Collins, and Salgado (2006) found that self-efficacy and openness to experience influenced self-reported participation in knowledge exchange. Similarly, Cho, Zheng, and Su (2007) found that self-efficacy and agreeableness were positively related to preferences to use knowledge sharing mechanisms. These are just two of many studies that have examined the impact of trait variables on willingness to pass on knowledge (see also Lu, Leung, & Koch, 2006; Matzler, Renzl, Mooradian, von Krogh, & Mueller, 2011; Matzler, Renzl, Müller, Herting, Mooradian, 2008; Wang, Noe, & Wang, 2011). However, to the best of these authors' knowledge, there has yet to be an examination of the impact of values on individual-level KT.

As it stands, there exists a plethora of research around the factors that influence inter-organisational KT effectiveness (see Van Wijk, Jansen, & Lyles, 2008). Among these, we commonly see consideration of national cultural values as influencers of KT occurring across borders. For instance, in a study of a Japanese pharmaceutical company's foreign subsidiaries, Magnier-Watanabe and Senoo (2010) found that national cultural values exhibited effects on the local subsidiaries' knowledge management practices, including knowledge diffusion within the firms. While these and other findings shed light on the substantial predictive power of national culture in organisation-level models of KT effectiveness (e.g. Bhagat, Kedia, Harveston, & Triandis, 2002), some studies have suggested that the real dissension exists at the individual level. For instance, in their meta-analytic review, Van Wijk et al. (2008) found that cultural distance acts as the greatest barrier to KT across units *within*, not outside, the firm. It would therefore seem that firms acquiring knowledge from external partners have developed expertise in dealing with different cultures or limit their KT practices to partners with whom they are most familiar, suggesting that an examination of national culture's impact on intraorganisational KT is timely and most necessary.

By framing our discussion according to the principles of Rational Choice theory (Scott, 2000), we put forward a theoretical model illustrating how individually-possessed national cultural values will impact KT processes through several avenues. First, we argue that individually-possessed values will affect the perceived valence attached to KT incentives, influencing motivation to invest effort in these processes. Second, we argue that national cultural values will impact upon KT processes themselves,

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