

Chapter 11

Utilizing Communities of Practice to Facilitate Knowledge Sharing in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains the overview of knowledge sharing; the perspectives of knowledge sharing behavior; the barriers to knowledge sharing; the overview of communities of practice (CoPs); the relationships among CoPs, knowledge sharing, and information technology; and the utilization of CoPs to facilitate knowledge sharing in the digital age. CoPs can create the valuable opportunities for members to explicitly discuss the productivity of their participation in the group toward sharing knowledge in modern business. The strong CoPs facilitate the social interactions and encourage the members' willingness to share knowledge and ideas in the workplace. CoPs help promote a growing cycle of knowledge sharing activities that allow for the members to regularly meet, reflect, and evolve in the knowledge management (KM) environment. The chapter argues that utilizing CoPs to facilitate knowledge sharing has the potential to improve organizational performance and reach strategic goals in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

The theory of communities of practice (CoPs) has found much acceptance in the organizational and social sciences literature (Perron & Duffy, 2012). CoPs are the powerful mechanism for improving knowledge sharing among project managers, both within and between organizations (Lee, Reinicke, Sarkar, & Anderson, 2015). Creating and managing CoPs can help improve the explicit business performance goals (Yamklin & Igel, 2012). CoPs have been highlighted as an effective method for knowledge sharing in knowledge management (KM) and can be utilized in modern organizations (Kim, Hong, & Suh, 2012). CoPs in KM are the formalized process coupled with technological artifacts to build groups of people who effectively share knowledge across boundaries (Su, Wilensky, & Redmiles, 2012). CoPs are recognized as the promotion of knowledge sharing toward improving organizational innovation (Harvey, Cohendet, Simon, & Dubois, 2013).

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In recent years, the role of knowledge sharing has attracted much attention among those interested in knowledge as a situated practice (Marouf & Al-Attabi, 2010). Members of CoPs are at the essence of the learning process in the KM environment (Aubry, Müller, & Glückler, 2011). CoPs are considered as one of the most effective learning methods to build KM (Guptill, 2005). CoPs are the social learning perspectives that support strong participation and mutual engagement (Evans, Yeung, Markoulakis, & Guilcher, 2014). In higher education, where sharing knowledge is essential for scientific activities, CoPs play an important role in the academic practice (Nistor, Daxecker, Stanciu, & Diekamp, 2015). Gilbuena et al. (2015) stated that feedback on professional skills helps students recognize how to simultaneously represent themselves as the legitimate members of multiple CoPs.

Organizations can achieve their strategic goals by encouraging knowledge sharing, flexibility, and adaptation to change (Del Giudice, Peruta, & Maggioni, 2013). The concept of CoPs highlights the importance of utilizing social resources to optimize knowledge within organization (Gau, 2013). A growing body of research exists on the development of CoPs in online settings (Hodges & Cady, 2013). CoPs are the powerful solutions as they aim to bring together various professionals into a working relationship around their common interests in the workplace (Harris, 2014). CoPs are the practitioners' social networks focusing on developing new knowledge (Borzillo, Schmitt, & Antino, 2012). Bezyak et al. (2014) stated that CoPs allow individuals from various disciplines, life situations, and locations to exchange knowledge and perspectives. CoPs members who regularly engage in knowledge sharing based on common interests, can improve organizational performance (Chu, Khosla, & Nishida, 2012).

This chapter aims to bridge the gap on the thorough literature consolidation of knowledge sharing and CoPs. The extant literatures of knowledge sharing and CoPs provide a contribution to practitioners and researchers by describing the multifaceted applications of knowledge sharing and CoPs to appeal to the different segments of knowledge sharing and CoPs in order to maximize the business impact of knowledge sharing and CoPs in the digital age.

BACKGROUND

Organizational scholars have analyzed factors that inhibit knowledge sharing among subunits, in particular, the lack of direct relationships and broad communication among people from several subunits (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). In the product innovation literature, the debate is frequently made that the frequent interactions between research and development (R&D) and teams lead to project effectiveness because of the favorable integration of knowledge across organizational boundaries (Eisenhardt & Tabrizi, 1995). Efficient knowledge sharing is characterized by tight coupling among people from different organizational subunits (Hansen, 1999). In order to create product innovation strategies, effective KM with sharing knowledge among individuals, teams, organizations, and interorganizational networks, is the key driver of new knowledge and new ideas toward gaining innovative products, services, and business solutions (Kasemsap, 2016a).

The concept of CoPs was originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), who suggested that learning took place in social relationships rather than the simple acquisition of knowledge. While Lave and Wenger's work continues to provide the important source of theoretical insight into learning at work, it

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