

Chapter 44

Knowledge Sharing Cultural Dimensions from Team and Organization Perspective

Satyendra C Pandey
NALSAR University of Law, India

ABSTRACT

Process view of Knowledge Management (KM) suggests that KM can be broken down into a series of processes commonly labeled as knowledge creation, storage, sharing and application. Out of these, KM literature identifies knowledge sharing as most important and complex. Literature also suggests that knowledge sharing and culture is not studied under both the perspective of a team and organization. Other important success factors for KM are IT infrastructure and organizational structure. IT is important in how knowledge travels and is accessed in the organization. Structure acts both as a bridge and a barrier in KM process. Of all the factors identified, culture remains the most understudied and complex. This chapter seeks to investigate and set a precursor to study the relationship between cultural dimensions which are not very well defined, yet important in knowledge sharing behavior. Dimensions of culture which are found to be important are trust and cooperation. Chapter also highlights the need of studying this from team as well as organization perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management has remained in corporate dictionaries now for over a decade. There are stories of limited success with most of the businesses. Knowledge management if seen as a process can be seen and broken down into various stages which are labeled differently in different studies however commonly meaning the following four: (a) creation (b) storage (c) sharing and (d) application of knowledge. Out of these four, knowledge management literature identifies knowledge sharing as most important. Literature also suggests that knowledge sharing and culture is not studied under both the perspective of a team and an organization.

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Although studies in the past have mentioned IT infrastructure support and structure as other critical success factors which are responsible for making knowledge management successful. Technological component is important in determining how knowledge travels in the organization and how it is accessed (Leonard, 1995). Working together on a common platform, collaborating interactively and discovering and tracking knowledge stored in the system are all part of IT infrastructure of an organization (Grant, 1996; Leonard & Sensiper, 1998; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; O'Dell & Grayson, 1998). Studies relating to structure consider structure both as a bridge and a barrier in knowledge creating, sharing, transfer and application. Flexible structure with fewer layers can encourage vital interactions which in turn can encourage greater sharing and learning. However, theorists argue that of all the factors identified, culture remains the most understudied and complex. Several dimensions of culture are yet to be explored and lack a detailed analysis (Davenport, De Long & Beers, 1998; Janz & Prasanna, 2003; Alavi, Kayworth & Leidner, 2006).

This paper attempts to study the role of culture in the knowledge sharing from a theoretical standpoint, and discuss the importance of assessment of role of culture at both team and organizational level. More specifically, the paper reviews the existing literature to revisit the important dimensions of organizational culture in knowledge management. Trust and cooperation are the important dimensions discussed. Besides this at the organizational level to understand culture, Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) which constitutes 44 dimensions is considered to be used.

This paper is structured as following. In the second section, paper presents a discussion on why knowledge sharing is important in managing knowledge and its importance in the KM process. This is important to take forward the dialogue and build an argument, why this is being studied. Third section discusses the theories explaining the knowledge sharing behavior, summary of the theories presents the importance of social dimensions, best explained by organizational culture. Section four deals with the literature on organizational culture and past studies considering the relationship between culture and knowledge management. Trust, cooperation and cooperative learning are discussed in the subsection four. Subsequently the section also discusses the organizational culture profile modified by Harper (2000) which can be considered while studying culture at the organizational level. Section five discusses the need of assessment at both team and organization level i.e taking dual perspective into consideration. Paper closes with discussions and conclusions.

Knowledge Sharing: Why?

It is highly likely as a natural human tendency that those in possession of knowledge hoard on to it and look at it guardedly (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). It can also be argued that knowledge is possessed by its creator or by somebody who recognizes, have access to and apply it in carrying out a variety of tasks. This leads to an understanding that at workplace it is employees' willingness and knowledge sharing behavior that will determine the movement of knowledge in both across organizational boundaries and between individuals.

Drucker (2002) maintained, "The next society will be the knowledge society. Knowledge will be its key resource, and knowledge workers will be the dominant group in its workforce." Both practitioners and managers are unanimous in their opinion that success for company is largely dependent upon how well knowledge is shared across organization (Goh, 2002; Leonard & Swap, 2004). Knowledge sharing

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