

# Chapter 15

## Ethics in Knowledge Dissemination

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### ABSTRACT

*In the modern socio-economic scenario, knowledge dissemination has turn out to be an essential topic. Effective knowledge dissemination is significant for the organizations as knowledge is shared not only with people working within the organizations but with a long list of stakeholders attached with the organization. Dissemination of knowledge has drawn a wide attention to related ethical considerations, as sometimes information shared in unregulated and subversive ways or unreliable or false information is shared with people. To understand the role of ethics in knowledge dissemination in organizations this chapter provides a discussion of implications of the questions of relevance, predicament and systems of ethical knowledge diffusion. Further the author illustrates distortion of information or knowledge for self-interest, their causes and effects with relevant examples. The chapter identifies the ethics of “informal” and unauthorized transfer of information, and proposes solutions and approach to deal with the problem.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary environment, knowledge is increasingly viewed as the primary determinant of organizations to renew and innovate (Patel, 2011) and ethics establishes a framework for making decisions based on values and also for determining what is right and wrong. In this chapter we discuss the knowledge, knowledge sharing and its consequences in organizations where ethics is compromised. The scandals which show the impact of jeopardizing the knowledge processing in a corporate context (McElroy, 2002) demonstrates knowledge sharing as intended action which is based on the personal authority of knowledge. There are several studies which have empirically explored the impact of organizational, technological and individual factors on knowledge sharing for instance, Riege (2005) and Husted &

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3009-1.ch015

Michailova (2002). However empirical work of research about the effect of ethics upon knowledge sharing is limited (Patel, 2011). The author commence the chapter by defining knowledge, and knowledge management, exploring its interactions with ethics citing instances from the real life cases. In the end the author propose the suggestions to control the dysfunction of knowledge management processes. Consequently, this chapter explores the ethical concerns raised about the sharing of knowledge specifically in organizational context and the influence of those apprehensions for better organizational environment. Further it reviews literature from the recent works on knowledge dissemination or sharing and how to deal with the complexities of knowledge transfer in business within the ethical perspective. To understand the importance of knowledge sharing in organizations this chapter provides a discussion of implications of the questions of effectiveness, predicaments and misuse of data and information. In the next section the author defines knowledge in detail.

## **KNOWLEDGE**

According to Merriam- Webster dictionary knowledge is, “the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association”. Basically the knowledge is information that a person has already and new information he/she assimilates. In order to have a good understanding of knowledge we must look upon how different researchers tried to define it.

Foskett (1982) defines knowledge by making a distinction between knowledge and information, “Knowledge is what I know, and information is what we know”.

Davenport, De Long, and Beers (1998) argue that knowledge is a “high-value form of information.”

Zeleny (1987) said that, “Knowledge refers to an observer’s distinction of objects through which he brings forth from background of experience a coherent and self -consistent set of actions.”

Davenport and Prusak, (1998) defined it as, “A fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers.”

Recently Gorgens and Kusek (2010) said that, “Knowledge is the capacity to use information, which requires learning and experience.”

Two kinds of knowledge defined by Nickols (2000) is parallel to often-quoted distinction of Michael Polanyi (1966) between explicit knowledge (sometimes referred to as formal knowledge), which can be articulated in language and transmitted among individuals, and tacit knowledge (also, informal knowledge), which is non-verbalized, intuitive and unarticulated. Explicit knowledge is commonly defined as knowledge that can be formally expressed using a system of symbols (e.g., words, formulae), describable and tangible (Wiig, 1993). The former is ‘codified into rules, instructions, specifications, standards, methodologies, classification systems, formulas’ (Choo, 1998). It is further divided into knowledge that is represented as ‘strings or symbols (words, numbers, formulas) or is embodied [i.e., made tangible] in physical entities (equipment, models, substances) (Choo, 1998). Making this distinction between forms of explicit knowledge (i.e., whether the knowledge can be codified using a system of symbols, or embedded or encapsulated as an artifact) is imperative to managing knowledge effectively (Evans, Dalkir & Bidian, 2014).

Much of the recent thinking about the structure and process of knowledge sharing builds on Takeuchi and Nonakas (1995) model of the circular, ongoing relationship between tacit and explicit knowledge.

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