

Chapter 2

Optimizing Knowledge– Work Through Personal Knowledge Management: The Role of Individual Knowledge– Workers’ Motivation, Ability and Opportunity

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge-work is a discretionary behavior, and knowledge-workers should be viewed as investors of their intellectual capital. That said, effective knowledge-work is mostly dependent on the performance of individual knowledge-workers who drive the success of knowledge-intensive organizations. Therefore, the study takes the perspective of personal knowledge management in enforcing the effectiveness of knowledge-work activities. This study empirically demonstrates that knowledge-workers’ behaviors are dependent on their motivation, ability and opportunity to perform knowledge-work activities. This study provides insights and future directions for research on knowledge-work as a discretionary behavior in organization and the factors influencing it. Scholars can investigate the effect of empowerment of individuals on their tendency to knowledge-creation, knowledge-sharing and knowledge-application. Since personal-knowledge often raise the issue of knowledge ownership, further attention to ethical issues may bring valuable insights for KM in organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's emerging age of knowledge economy has created a new class of employees, knowledge-workers (Packirisamy, Meenakshy, & Jagannathan, 2017), whose intellectual capital and whose tasks are widely unstructured and abstract (Shujahat, Sousa, Hussain, Nawaz, Wang, & Umer, 2017). As opposed to non-knowledge-work, the most important part of knowledge-work happens in the heads of employees even though the final result of their work has a manual character (Mládková, 2015). Most authors agree that there is a discernible trend in the workplace toward requiring employees to engage in some form of higher-level thinking, or cognitive processes, and to analyze information before undertaking actions (Jacobs, 2017). In these conditions, organizations are facing new challenges that will require the skills and creativity of knowledge-workers (Alexander, 2014). Research in knowledge management (KM) has acknowledged that individuals drive knowledge processes. The spotlight is on knowledge-workers, who are the true source of knowledge and are seen as the height of competitive advantage through continuous learning and innovation (Carleton, 2011). Nonetheless, there remains limited attention to the role of individuals in the discourse on KM (Rechberg & Syed, 2014; Carleton, 2011).

Extant literature has mostly focused on factors influencing KM effectiveness. The dominant literature in this field has viewed KM as an organizational initiative - highlighting the prominence of various organizational factors that impact KM effectiveness. Within this paradigm, KM is emphasized as a system that targets improving organizational effectiveness (Jennex, Smolnik, & Croasdell, 2009). Accordingly, KM success is a function of technological, organizational and environmental factors; including strategy, leadership/management support, knowledge content, processes, technology and structure (e.g. Yew Wong, 2005; Jennex & Olfman, 2005; Jennex et al., 2009; 2016; Basu & Sengupta, 2007; Lin, 2014; Sedighi, van Splunter, Zand, & Brazier, 2015). The literature lacks a framework for measuring KM effectiveness at the individual level, where individuals' participation will, directly or indirectly, affect organizational performance (Muhammed, Doll, & Deng, 2009; Hoq & Akter, 2012; Rechberg & Syed, 2014). Therefore, a new paradigm is needed that recognizes knowledge-workers as valued human assets; not as expendable cost centers (Serrat, 2017; Carleton, 2011; Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016).

Historically KM was mostly concerned with explicit knowledge (knowledge-codification) and organizational knowledge. That said, the focus was less on the role of individual employees in the KM discourse (Muhammed et al., 2009; Hoq & Akter, 2012). Linking the individual-knowledge perspective to organizational success suggests a shift from traditional KM to personal KM (PKM) – focusing on individual and tacit knowledge (Cheong & Tsui, 2011; Muhammed et al., 2009). From the PKM perspective, knowledge is primarily created by individuals and then shared among a community of knowing (Ambulkar, Blackhurst, & Cantor, 2016; Muhammed et al., 2009). The value added of knowledge-workers is their tacit-knowledge and their capability to transmit it to actions (Davis, 2002). They capitalize on their personal and embedded-knowledge and depend less on codified and organizational-knowledge (El-Farr, 2009). Thus, knowledge-workers are the ones who are engaged in knowledge-work activities, and within them resides KM success (Hoq & Akter, 2012). From this perspective, knowledge-workers are seen as strategic-knowledge resources (Patalas-Maliszewska, 2013) and having significant value to organizations (Vaiman, 2010).

How to manage, improve and measure knowledge-work became central in the literature - arguing that effective knowledge-work activities such as knowledge creation, sharing and application are core goals for effective KM systems (Timonen & Paloheimo, 2011; Palvalin, Vuolle, Jääskeläinen, Laihonen,

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