Chapter 6
Interpersonal Trust and Knowledge Seeking in China

Michael J. Zhang
Sacred Heart University, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, a study that investigated the roles of interpersonal trust in knowledge seeking in China is presented. Specifically, the study examined and tested the effects of two distinct types of interpersonal trust (cognition-based and sincerity-based) on Chinese employees' willingness to seeking two different types of knowledge (explicit and tacit). Using data from a survey of 243 Chinese MBA students at two universities in China, the study found both types of interpersonal trust positively related to explicit knowledge seeking as well as tacit knowledge seeking. The study also found that cognition-based trust had a stronger relationship with seeking of both explicit and tacit knowledge than sincerity-based trust. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In today's global and knowledge economy, firms need to mobilize their knowledge resources through knowledge sharing at different geographical locations in order to gain and maintain competitive advantage (Regnr & Zander, 2011). For multinational firms operating in China, one key challenge in knowledge management is how to increase knowledge sharing among Chinese employees who are often hesitant to share critical knowledge with others (Lin & Dalkir, 2010; Su et al., 2010). Prior research conducted in Chinese and Western settings has identified interpersonal (dyadic) trust as one key antecedent of knowledge sharing (Nonaka, 1994; Szulanski,

1996; Husted & Michailova, 2002; Lucas, 2005; Renzl, 2008; Tong & Mitra, 2009; Holste & Fields, 2010; Huang et al. 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Evans, 2013; Shang, 2014). However, while the knowledge sharing process involves knowledge seeking, knowledge contribution and knowledge adoption (Hansen, 1999; van den Hooff & de Ridder 2004; Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Cleveland & Ellis, 2015), most of the previous studies have focused on the impact of international trust on knowledge contribution behaviors (Bock et al., 2006; Santosh & Muthiah, 2012; Wan et al., 2015). Whether and how interpersonal trust influences other subprocesses (seeking and adoption) of knowledge sharing has received much less research attention (He et al., 2009; Wan et al., 2015). Furthermore, even though two main types (affect-based trust and cognition-based trust) of interpersonal trust and their effects on knowledge sharing have been recognized in the extant literature, the conceptualization of affect-based trust in the Chinese culture can be subtly different from that in the Western cultures (Chen & Chen, 2004). Whereas affect-based trust in the Western cultures is mainly based on benevolence and integrity, the Chinese view of affect-based trust emphasizes trust in one's sincerity and honesty. Hence, in order to increase our understanding of how interpersonal trust affects the knowledge seeking behavior of Chinese employees, it is necessary to incorporate the Chinese view of affect-based trust. This chapter is concerned with a study that explored the impact of interpersonal trust on knowledge seeking in China. The study examined and tested the effects of two main types (sincerity-based and cognition-based) of interpersonal trust prevalent in China (Chen & Chen, 2004) on Chinese people's propensities to seek different types (explicit and tacit) of knowledge from others in the workplace. The findings from the study not only generate additional insights into how to promote knowledge sharing in China, but also increase our knowledge of how interpersonal trust affects other subprocesses of knowledge sharing.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Interpersonal Trust

In the trust literature, trust has been considered as a multi-faceted and complex concept. The traditional view of trust is interpersonal (or dyadic) trust, which exists between two persons (Mayer et al., 1995, McAllister, 1995). More recently, information systems researchers have argued that trust can operate at a collective (or institutional) level (McKnight et al., 2002; He et al., 2009). For instance, McKnight et al. (2002) coined the term 'impersonal trust' to describe consumers' beliefs in a website's structures in the e-commerce setting. While seeking knowledge from a collective source such as a knowledge repository or a community of practice has

Related Content

Pattern Discovery in Gene Expression Data
Gráinne Kerr, Heather Ruskinand Martin Crane (2009). *Intelligent Data Analysis: Developing New Methodologies Through Pattern Discovery and Recovery (pp. 45-64).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/pattern-discovery-gene-expression-data/24211

Financial Crisis Modeling and Prediction with a Hilbert-EMD-Based SVM Approachs
Lean Yu, Shouyang Wangand Kin Keung Lai (2009). *Intelligent Data Analysis: Developing New Methodologies Through Pattern Discovery and Recovery (pp. 286-299).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/financial-crisis-modeling-prediction-hilbert/24225

User-Centered Maintenance of Concept Hierarchies
Kai Eckert, Robert Meuseland Heiner Stuckenschmidt (2011). *Ontology Learning and Knowledge Discovery Using the Web: Challenges and Recent Advances (pp. 105-128).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/user-centered-maintenance-concept-hierarchies/53883

Ontology-Based Information Extraction under a Bootstrapping Approach
Elias Iosif, Georgios Petasisand Vangelis Karkaletsis (2012). *Semi-Automatic Ontology Development: Processes and Resources (pp. 1-21).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ontology-based-information-extraction-under/63896

Image Mining for the Construction of Semantic-Inference Rules and for the Development of Automatic Image Diagnosis Systems
Petra Perner (2007). *Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining: Challenges and Realities (pp. 75-97).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/image-mining-construction-semantic-inference/24902