



Chapter XI

Exploring the Influence of Rewards on Attitudes Towards Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

This study theoretically examines and empirically tests factors expected to affect an individual's knowledge sharing attitudes, intention and behavior in an organizational context. The research model is constructed based on the economic exchange theory, the social exchange theory, the self-efficacy theory and the theory of reasoned action. Results from the field survey of 467 employees of four large and government-invested organizations show that

‘anticipated reciprocal relationships’ and ‘perceived personal contribution to the organization’ are the major determinants of the individual’s attitudes towards knowledge sharing. ‘Anticipated extrinsic rewards,’ believed by many as the most important motivating factor for knowledge sharing, are not significantly related to the attitudes towards knowledge sharing. As expected, positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing are found to lead to a positive intention to share knowledge and, finally, to actual knowledge sharing behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Among the processes of knowledge management such as creation, sharing, utilization and accumulation of knowledge, sharing is what differentiates organizational-level knowledge management from individual learning or knowledge acquisition. In fact, 94% of 260 responses from multi-national organizations in Europe believe that knowledge management requires people to share what they know with others in the organizations (Financial Times, 1999).

However, as Davenport (1997) argues, sharing knowledge is often unnatural. People will not share their knowledge, as they think their knowledge is valuable and important to themselves. Hoarding knowledge and looking suspiciously upon knowledge from others are the natural tendencies. In addition, these natural tendencies are difficult to change. In a study of 431 U.S. and European organizations, conducted in 1997 by the Ernst & Young Center for Business Innovation, the biggest difficulty in knowledge management was “changing people’s behavior” (Ruggles, 1998).

Therefore, rather than just encouraging or mandating knowledge sharing, fostering the motivation to share knowledge must precede. The purposes of this research are to develop an understanding of the factors that support or constrain the individual’s knowledge sharing behavior in an organization, and how those factors eventually influence knowledge sharing behavior. We propose ‘anticipated extrinsic rewards,’ ‘anticipated reciprocal relationships’ and ‘perceived personal contribution to the organization’ as the major determinants of the individual’s knowledge sharing attitudes, and these attitudes as determinants of the intention to share knowledge. Then, we suggest that the knowledge sharing intention is an immediate predictor of the knowledge sharing behavior. The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) is adopted as the theoretical basis to explain how these determinants affect knowledge sharing behavior.

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