

Chapter 66

Knowledge Worker Faire Compensation: Ethical Issues and Social Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

One of the key characteristics in knowledge management is the importance of human resources. Therefore, main stream literature has been discussing the concept of knowledge worker, its characteristics, and duties versus rights, and human resources policies in its dissimilar perspectives (knowledge workers retention, personal mastery, intellectual property rights, among others). Although, empirical studies seem to disregard if knowledge workers feel that are well compensated, or what dimensions entail faire compensation. Hence, this chapter aims to recognize knowledge workers feeling about faire compensation, and what elements are essential to achieve it through a conceptual framework. For that, the chapter is divided into six sections: the research questions; knowledge worker (key characteristics and responsibilities versus rights); fairness (etymology and the contribution of Rawls); linking the theoretical basis; empirical results (methodological remarks, findings and discussion); future research directions (the surrealist assumption, Dali surrealism and the metaphorical assumption).

INTRODUCTION

The last decades have witnessed production of research on knowledge work, due to a conviction that economic achievement of post-industrial societies progressively depends on skills to utilize knowledge (Stehr, 2001; Castells, 2000). There-

fore, beyond manage knowledge organizations need to realize that human resources are essential to promote knowledge creation, utilization and sharing. In spite of this level of criticality that human resources introduce the concept of “knowledge worker” entails an ambiguous perception (Pyöriä, 2005; Alvesson, 2004; 2001). This is a consequence of an attempt to resume its distinctive

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1601-1.ch066

features, as for instance: processes information (Davenport, Järvenpää & Beers, 1996); utilizes information and communication technologies (Garavelli *et al.*, 2003); has problem-solving skills (Tsoukas & Vladimirov, 2001); produces non-routine work (Lillrank, 2002); has increasing levels of autonomy (Darr, 2003); and, is collaborative (Kristensen & Kijl, 2008).

Furthermore, in order to attract these workers (Gayton, 2008) with high levels of personal mastery (Senge, 2006) it is essential to create an effective Human Resources policy. Literature has been recognizing this quandary and assumes that human resource management practices need to be internally consistent so that they mutually reinforce each other, namely career structure and reward systems (Currie & Kerrin, 2003). In that sense, an array of organizational incentives can be highlighted: monetary and non-monetary rewards, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002); despite dissimilar motivation strategies for knowledge workers (Petroni & Colacino, 2008).

As a result, this contribution endeavours to discuss knowledge workers feeling about faire compensation, and what elements are essential to achieve it through a conceptual framework based on the theory of justice (Rawls, 1971). The author still refers that the argument will consider the concept of fairness about compensation as a combination of three dimensions of organizational justice: distributive, procedural, and interactional (e.g. Cropanzano & Randall, 1992).

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since this contribution is not promoting a traditional approach to human resources managing, namely knowledge workers. Despite the novelty of the subject it entails a minor component of the author PhD research project (for further details chapter 16), leading to the following research questions:

1. Do you consider that knowledge creation, management and sharing into the organizational environment are fairly rewarded?
2. State what is meant to be a fair compensation regarding knowledge creation, management and sharing in an organizational environment?

The initial research query examines if knowledge workers feel that are fairly rewarded, as well as the question was also posed to middle managers and top managers in order to understand each group perception. Yet, it is compulsory to notify the potential Readers that is an open choice question with the subsequent answering possibilities: never, rarely, usually, often, always, and I do not respond. On the other hand, the second question seeks to recognize fair compensation dimensions through an ask for agreement option.

KNOWLEDGE WORKER

Key Characteristics

Following Kelloway & Barling (2000) it is possible to illustrate knowledge workers as investors, because these choose when they want to use their knowledge. So, knowledge workers are likely to employ their knowledge as an extension of their skills, motivation and opportunity. Or, Davenport & Prusak (2000) define knowledge workers as those who create knowledge, or the prevailing component of their work is knowledge. Although, this definition was enhanced in order to include the ones who also distribute and employ knowledge (Davenport, 2002). Concluding, the author will follow Horvath (2001) definition: “anyone who works for a living at the tasks of developing or using knowledge”. Additionally, for Efimova (2003) knowledge work can be explained through the iceberg metaphor: unlike traditional work its interactions seem invisible, because informal circumstances may represent until 80%.

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