

The Development of Tacit Knowledge Sharing Behaviour among Employees in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Due to the economic growth in Thailand, many organizations have recognized the importance of maintaining their employees' knowledge and tried to create the knowledge sharing environment. In general, knowledge sharing is initiated from an individual level and extended to organizational level. Since knowledge sharing among employees is a procedure which passes on abilities and capabilities from one person to another. This study attempts to investigate the factors and relationships that influence tacit knowledge sharing behavior in an organizational context. Based on the widely accepted theory of reasoned action (TRA), we tried to develop a comprehensive model covering factors influencing intention to share both explicit and tacit knowledge. For the empirical validation, 270 responses from employees in private-sector organization in Thailand were collected via an online questionnaire. This research evaluated the influence of a series of potential factors on knowledge sharing behavior. Attitude toward knowledge sharing and subjective norms had a positive significant impact on intention to share explicit knowledge and also on intention to share tacit knowledge. In addition, intention to share explicit knowledge had direct significant relationship with intention to share tacit knowledge. Finally, intention to share tacit knowledge reflected a positive effect on knowledge sharing behavior.

Keywords: Explicit knowledge, Tacit knowledge, Theory of reasoned action (TRA), Knowledge sharing behavior

1. Introduction

Knowledge is now being seen as the most important resource and is crucial for an organization to sustain its competitive advantage (Suppiah & Sandhu, 2010). As the 21st century, one of the critical factors for sustainable competitive advantage is how to leverage knowledge resources to develop strategic plans for business. Therefore, organizations need to manage or retain critical knowledge in effective way (Bock & Kim, 2002; Ipe, 2003). In the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant 1996; Spender 1996), knowledge is the foundation of a firm's competitive advantage and the primary driver of a firm's value. Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) argue that knowledge is initiated from interaction among employees in organizations. Organizations cannot create or develop knowledge without individual. If individual does not have to share their knowledge with other people and other groups, limited knowledge may affect the effectiveness of the organization. According to Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee

(2005 as cited in Nonaka & Konno, 1998, p.88) knowledge resides within individuals, especially, within knowledge workers, namely, employees who create, collect, access, and apply knowledge in carrying out their tasks. Consequently, individuals' knowledge does not transform easily into organizational knowledge, and ultimately the transfer of knowledge across individual and organizational boundaries depends on employees' knowledge-sharing behaviors.

Furthermore, Foss, Minbaeva, Pedersen & Reinholt (2009) also argue that the organizational and group knowledge sharing are always rooted in individual behaviors.

Yang & Farn (2007 as cited in Nonaka, 1994, p.518) address two types of knowledge within organizations: explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is easily transferred to others and can be stored and disseminated with technology. However, tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action, experience, and social relationship. Tacit Knowledge is transferred by observing behavior, communicating or coordinating among employees. Therefore, tacit knowledge is a complex procedure which requires communication among co-workers in order to capture knowledge. Consequently, tacit knowledge is difficult to be transformed rather than explicit knowledge.

This study attempts to investigate the factors and relationships that influence tacit knowledge sharing behavior in an organizational context. Based on widely accepted theory of reasoned action (TRA), we tried to develop a comprehensive model covering factors influencing intention to share both explicit and tacit knowledge. We study three major types of relationship. In the first, employees' attitude toward knowledge sharing combined with subjective norm are positively correlated with intention to share explicit knowledge. In the second, employees' attitude toward knowledge sharing, subjective norm and intention to share explicit knowledge are positively correlated with intention to share tacit knowledge. Finally, employees' intention to share explicit knowledge is positively correlated with tacit knowledge sharing behavior.

2. Literature Review

The reviewed literature includes the studies of attitude toward knowledge sharing, subjective norm, intention to share explicit knowledge, intention to share tacit knowledge, and measuring tacit knowledge sharing behavior, which are shown as follows:

2.1 Attitude toward knowledge sharing

We adopted the theory of reasoned action as a framework for the study. Here, an individual's decision to engage in a specific behavior is determined by their intention to perform the behavior, which in turn is determined jointly by their attitude toward and the subjective norm (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Attitude toward knowledge sharing is the degree of one's positive feelings about sharing one's knowledge. An individual's general feelings about behavior are composed of salient beliefs including the perceived possibility and judgment of consequences resulting from behavior (Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005; Huang, Davision & Gu, 2008). The previous study of Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee (2005) argue that the more favorable the attitude toward knowledge sharing is, the greater supported the intention to share knowledge will be. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Employees' attitude toward knowledge sharing is positively related to intention to share explicit knowledge.

H2: Employees' attitude toward knowledge sharing is positively related to intention to share tacit knowledge.

2.2 Subjective norm

The subjective norm is the person's perceptions regarding others' expectations from him or her about knowledge sharing with each of one's referents (Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee, 2005; Tohidinia and Mosakhani, 2009). A reference group has influence to intention to share knowledge with other person. (Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005; Lin & Lee, 2004; Ryu, Ho & Han, 2003). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: Employees' subjective norm is positively related to intention to share explicit knowledge.

H4: Employees' subjective norm is positively related to Intention to share tacit knowledge.

2.3 Intention to share knowledge

Intention to share explicit knowledge is the degree to which he or she believes that one will engage in an explicit knowledge sharing act. Explicit knowledge is codified and transferred mostly by technology, such as providing document via e-mail. While intention to share tacit knowledge is the degree to which he/she believes that one will engage in a tacit knowledge sharing act, the importance tacit knowledge is a communicating way. Tacit Knowledge is embedded in social relations and is also transferred primarily through direct contact and observation of behavior (Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005). Reychav & Weisberg (2009) revealed that the relationships between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge among employees in an organization intention to explicit knowledge sharing may contribute to an increased sense of ability on the part of the employee to tacit knowledge sharing as well. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: Employees' intention to share explicit knowledge is positively related to intention to share tacit knowledge.

2.4 Tacit knowledge sharing behavior

Tacit knowledge sharing behavior is the degree to which a person actually shares knowledge with others. For example, employee share knowledge based on his work experience or share knowledge based on the professional expertise (Lin & Lee, 2004; Reychav & Weisberg, 2009). Wu (2003) argued that tacit knowledge of employees is consisted of their ideas, experience, and competencies. Tacit knowledge enables employees to use their knowledge effectively to work. Reychav & Weisberg (2009) said that tacit knowledge includes the ability to notice and interpret situations. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H6. Employees' intention to share tacit knowledge is positively related to tacit knowledge sharing behavior.

3. Research methodology

To test the proposed research model, we adopted the survey method for data collection, and examined our hypotheses by applying factor analysis. We developed the items in the questionnaire either by adapting measures that had been validated by other researchers or by converting the definitions of constructs into a questionnaire format. The items measuring attitude toward knowledge sharing, subjective norm and intention to share explicit knowledge and intention to share tacit knowledge were adapted from Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee (2005), Reychav & Weisberg (2009) research.

Finally, the items measuring dependent variable, namely, tacit knowledge sharing behavior were also adapted from Reychav & Weisberg (2009), Xue, Bradley & Liang (2010) research. The population for this study is Thai employees in private-sector organizations. We have administered a survey of 270 employees in private-sector organization to examine five factors influencing their behavior to share tacit knowledge. Regression analysis and factor analysis using principle axis factoring extraction and varimax rotation were used to test the research model and hypotheses. Those five constructs are Attitude toward Knowledge Sharing, Subjective Norms, Intention to Share Explicit Knowledge, Intention to Share Tacit Knowledge and Tacit Knowledge Sharing Behavior among Employees.

4. The Findings

4.1 Demographic data

Most respondents are female (56.3 percent of all respondent) who work in a private company with the age of 26-30 years old (56.7 percent of all respondent) education level in bachelor degree (63 percent of all respondent) and have minimum five years working experience.

This study is quantitative research with online survey. Nominal scale is used for collecting demographic data as well as Interval scale (five-point Likert scale) is applied to study factors. The Cronbach's alpha statistics of measures for each factor--attitude toward knowledge sharing, subjective norm, intention to share explicit knowledge, intention to share tacit knowledge and tacit knowledge sharing behavior are 0.870, 0.834, 0.866, 0.869, and 0.865 respectively. All reliability statistics are over 0.7, which express that all measurements for each factor have good reliability (Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee, 2005). For recommended values, factor loadings greater than 0.50 are considered to be significant. Most factor loadings of the items in this research model are greater than 0.50.

This study is approximated a sample Size with 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), variance (σ) of 1.01 (Hwang, 2008), margin error of 5% (0.05), lowest mean of 2.89 (Bock and Kim, 2002), and $E = [\text{margin error}] * [\text{lowest mean}]$; the sample size for infinite population (n) is 187.68 (given by the formula: $n = [Z^2 \sigma^2] / E^2$) (Bock and Kim, 2002).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research evaluated the influence of a series of factors influencing on knowledge sharing behavior. Attitude toward knowledge sharing and subjective norm had a positive significant impact on intention to share explicit knowledge and also on intention to share tacit knowledge. In addition, intention to share explicit knowledge had direct significant relationship with intention to share tacit knowledge. Finally, intention to share tacit knowledge reflected a positive effect on knowledge sharing behavior.

For managers who intend to facilitate tacit knowledge sharing behavior, knowledge sharing environment must be created by instituting the attitude toward knowledge sharing or by an influential group which can dominate employees' beliefs. Furthermore, the managers of IT department can develop a knowledge management system to get and to give information to employees in an organization. The system also supports employees to share knowledge from their work experiences. This paper has tried to provide a comprehensive understanding about tacit knowledge sharing facilitators among employees in the private-sector organization. Since there was

quite limited number of this area of Thai people context, this paper can provide theoretical basis for future researches as well as practical implications for managers and practitioners. Moreover, this study is one of the first pieces of integrative research regarding tacit not explicit sharing behavior.

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