

FACTORS THAT AFFECT KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG EMPLOYEES IN  
MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATION

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MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATION

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*To my parents, my brothers and sisters*

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In The Name of ALLAH, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Knowledge is regarded as the most important resource, and it has often been described as the driving force towards the sustainable and key source of competitiveness. Knowledge management has been described as a collection of strategies and practices used in an organization to discover, create, share, transfer, and enable adoption of insights, experiences and knowledge resources embodied in individuals or embedded in organizations as processes or practices. Knowledge sharing is seen as the most important aspect of knowledge management. No doubt, many studies have shown that knowledge sharing is essential for firms' performance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between trust, management support, mutual reciprocity, self-efficacy, altruism and knowledge sharing as well as to identify the level of knowledge sharing among multinational employees in an organization in Saudi Arabia. In order to test these relationship five hypotheses was proposed. Two hundred and forty five questionnaires were distributed to the sample population. One hundred eighty nine questionnaires were used to test the results of this study. Multiple regressions were used to analyze the data. The results of the study indicate that trust and management support have a positive influence on knowledge sharing. However, interestingly and surprisingly, the multiple regression results showed that the mutual reciprocity, self-efficacy and altruism have insignificant influences on knowledge sharing. In addition, trust is considered as the factor the contributed the most to knowledge sharing. Taking these factors into consideration will guarantee the success of knowledge management initiatives in the organization.

## ABSTRAK

Pengetahuan di klasifikasikan sebagai satu sumber yang paling penting dan sering ditafsirkan sebagai satu keperluan kepada kestabilan organisasi dan kunci utama dalam menghadapi persaingan. Pengurusan pengetahuan adalah pengumpulan strategi dan praktis yang digunakan di dalam organisasi untuk kenalpasti, penghasilan, perkongsian, perpindahan dan membolehkan penerimaan pemahaman, pengalaman dan sumber pengetahuan diserapkan ke setiap individu atau dibangunkan di dalam organisasi sebagai proses atau praktis. Perkongsian pengetahuan dilihat sebagai satu aspek penting di dalam pengurusan pengetahuan. Tidak dinafikan, banyak kajian yang telah dibuat menunjukkan yang perkongsian pengetahuan adalah penting untuk prestasi sesebuah organisasi. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat hubungkait diantara kepercayaan, sokongan pengurusan, persetujuan untuk memberi dan menerima diantara satu sama lain, keberkesanan identiti, kelakuan yang mementingkan hal orang lain dan perkongsian pengetahuan seterusnya mengenalpasti peringkat perkongsian pengetahuan dikalangan pekerja multinasional sesebuah organisasi di Arab Saudi. Untuk menguji hubungkait ini lima hipotesis telah dicadangkan. 245 soal selidik telah diedarkan kepada sampel populasi. 185 soal selidik telah digunakan untuk menguji keputusan bagi kajian ini. Pelbagai regresi digunakan untuk menganalisa data yang diperolehi. Keputusan kajian yang dibuat menunjukkan kepercayaan dan sokongan pengurusan mempunyai pengaruh positif ke atas perkongsian pengetahuan. Walaubagaimanapun, penemuan menarik yang diperolehi daripada kajian ini adalah persetujuan untuk memberi dan menerima diantara satu sama lain, keberkesanan identiti dan kelakuan yang mementingkan hal orang lain tiada signifikan yang mempengaruhi perkongsian maklumat. Sebagai tambahan, kepercayaan adalah faktor paling menyumbang kepada perkongsian pengetahuan. Mengambil kira semua faktor ini di dalam pertimbangan akan memastikan kejayaan inisiatif pengurusan pengetahuan di dalam sesebuah organisasi.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Knowledge is the valuable asset and the base of firms' competitive edge (Bock *et al.*, 2005) and managing it has become an important task to firms. According to Chen *et al.* (2007), while knowledge management grown to be a tool of managers in 1990s; knowledge sharing has become the core of management practice. It creates individual's intelligence that founds in the norms, procedures, practice, software, systems and the routines of the organization, which are not easy to duplicate (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). The flow of knowledge depends on the behaviors of all employees towards knowledge sharing. However, if one of the workforce shares his knowledge with others, that may not reflect her or his own personality. People are worried if they share knowledge with others they will lose the power of their knowledge in the organization (Davenport, 1996). Therefore, encouraging knowledge sharing is recognized as the difficult activity in knowledge management (Ruggles, 1998).

In this new era, knowledge is considered as a factor of production together with property, workforce and assets (Sohail and Daud, 2009). Since the world has become a global village, the employee's knowledge is considered as the key competitive weapon for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which helps the firms to stay ahead of the competition. In any firm, knowledge is considered the most vital resource, and it has frequently been expressed as the driving force towards sustainability and key basis of competitiveness.

The knowledge management area has been known in the industry since 1990s (Seng *et al.*, 2002) and since then, knowledge has grown to be an industry's golden child. Many organizations give main concern to create learning centers for knowledge sharing among employees. According to Ruggles (1998), knowledge sharing is considered as one of the most crucial activities of knowledge management. According to Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (1999), "willingness to share knowledge with the participants" is the primary component for a successful implementation of any process of knowledge management.

Knowledge has been observed to have an important role in creating a sustaining economic value among the traditional resource; land, workforce, and capital (Jain *et al.*, 2007). There is a growing necessity for knowledge-based products and services, owing to the fact that it has been changing the structure of the global economy. The role of knowledge in achieving competitive benefits has become an important management issue in all sectors. As a result, lots of organizations are exploring the emerging field of knowledge management.

## 1.2 Research Problem

In knowledge management, human factor is one of the major hindrances to effective knowledge sharing. Over the years, human diversity and its impact on different parts of group processes and organizational performance have been the main concern of much research (e.g. Luring and Selmer, 2012). Many studies have investigated different categories of diversity such as management diversity (Thomas and Ely, 1996), multinational enterprise management (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989), multinational teams (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000), organizational demography (Martins *et al.*, 2003) or individual internationalization (cultural and linguistic) and demographic (age and gender) diversity (Luring and Selmer, 2012). It has been investigated that both the weaknesses and strengths of diversity in organizations coming from different demographic, linguistic, national, cultural and community backgrounds of their members (Hambrick *et al.*, 1996).

According to Homan *et al.* (2008) the creation and sharing of knowledge have recently drawn the specific interest of diversity studies. This interest is shown from a rising number of articles examining the benefits of diverse groups with regard to knowledge resources and variation in perspectives (e.g., Maznevski, 1994; Watson *et al.*, 1993). In addition, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing within organizations are gradually becoming very important tasks for guiding knowledge-intensive organizations (Kogut and Zander, 1992). Knowledge creation and knowledge sharing within organizations are recognized to produce better performance because of improved cohesion, decision making and coordination (Zarraga and Bonache, 2003). Therefore, organizations which can use their collective knowledge and expertise may be more creative, efficient, and effective (Nonaka, 1994; Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, research has repetitively shown that various groups frequently fail to use their full knowledge potential successfully (Boone and Hendriks, 2009; Harrison and Klein, 2007). Consequently, the diversity in knowledge and point of view are needed but



failure in managing it has resulted in poor performance and less effective decision making (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2007).

At the same time, some studies have documented that diversity in human population might possibly lead to social classifications that could set challenges for knowledge sharing behavior and the interaction (Orlikowski, 2002). On the other hand, other studies have shown that useful and task - relevant diversities in skills and views could also be valuable for knowledge sharing behavior (Cummings, 2004; Bell, 2007). Even though, these arguments might appear conflicting at first, differences in the outcome of diversity may result from different types of diversity, having different effects on individuals' interest in locating and sharing knowledge. The same effect has earlier been shown before in relation to group cohesiveness and performance (Lauring and Selmer, 2012).

However, few efforts have been made so far to connect several categories of diversity to knowledge sharing (Lauring and Selmer, 2012). This effort is essential since not all types of diversity are similarly related in facilitating knowledge sharing in a knowledge intensive organizational environment (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007; Pelled, 1996; Harrison *et al.*, 2002; Williams *et al.*, 2007). For this reason, this study attempted to investigate the relationship between trust, management support, mutual reciprocity, self-efficacy and altruism on knowledge sharing among employees from diverse nationality on IDB Group in Saudi Arabia. The new finding of this study could give helpful guidelines for human-resource managers at the organizations.

Knowledge sharing is the basis of numerous organizations' knowledge-management strategy. Even with an increasing importance of knowledge sharing practices for market performance and organizations' competitiveness, different obstacles make it complicated for knowledge management to reach the goals and deliver a positive

return on investment (Riege, 2005). Review of relevant literature, has revealed that Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, have not received much attention in terms of studies that examines knowledge sharing. In addition, there has not been any research carried out to study knowledge sharing in an organization with multinational employees. Therefore, this research attempts to contribute to the understanding of knowledge sharing in an organization with multinational employees and uses Saudi Arabia as the context of the study.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

UNESCO (2009) has confirmed that "cultural diversity is necessary for humankind as bio-diversity is to nature, and that it is one of the roots of development both in terms of economic growth and satisfactory intellectual, emotional and moral existence." It, therefore, follows that an announcement like this, distinct the views that society as well as business enterprises gain financially from cultural diversity (Cox and Blake, 1991; Thomas and Ely, 1996; Luring, 2009). In business terms, however, it is not the mere existence of differences in ethnic affiliation, behavioral patterns, or languages that is argued to yield competitive advantage. Rather, it is the managed diversity of knowledge, skills, and the mixture of different perspectives that is described as leading to new and innovative ways of improving business procedures (Cronin and Weingart, 2007; Distefano and Maznevski, 2000). Alternatively, knowledge connected resources are the major business consideration of human diversity. Over the years, human diversity and its effect on different areas of group processes and organizational performance have been proposed (Luring and Selmer, 2012).

Cultural diversity is generally related to varieties of national membership (e.g. Adler and Gundersen, 2008; DiStefano and Maznevski, 2000). However, differences in nationality as such do not create differences between individuals. Rather, it is the variety of identifications, behavioral patterns, linguistic skills and bodies of knowledge linked to growing up in different places that provide the potential for human diversity (Roberson, 2006).

Recently, many researchers have been writing on the issue surrounding the relation between cultural diversity and knowledge resources (Lauring, 2009). However, only few researchers have analytically examined how the processes of interaction are needed for developing these resources, and how these resources are growing in culturally diverse organizations (Holden, 2002).

Again, it has been discussed that knowledge is considered of little value if it is not distributed in an organization. And to share this knowledge between individuals, some kind of interactions should take place between them (Argote and Ingram, 2000). Moreover, since interaction patterns are conducted by social structures (e.g., language, communication styles) it is not likely to totally separate the distribution and employment of knowledge from other social activities taking place in an organization. It is thus recognized that while knowledge can be perceived as raw data and information, when used and shared, it has to be treated as part of a larger social field or communities of practice (Orlikowski, 2002). Therefore, a variety of social barriers may hold back individuals from communicating their knowledge further than specific social communities. This has significant implications for the outcome of individual interaction with regard to exchange of ideas and information, especially in culturally diverse settings (Lauring, 2009).

Chiu *et al.* (2006) considers the organizations without wealth of knowledge as worthless organizations. Nowadays, knowledge is considered to be an asset in an organization, even though many researchers have shown that most employees within an organization are resistant to share their knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Chiu *et al.*, 2006).

It has been known that one of the main challenges in any organizations these days is the capability of managers or organization to inspire their employees to exchange their knowledge, experiences and ideas between themselves (Chiu *et al.*, 2006). For example, it is predictable that through the orientation of new employees into the organization, the older staff has to be assigned to the new staff as a “partner” so the old staff would be willing to share their knowledge and experience with the new staff for the new worker to take over into the system (Schein, 1978). However, it has been exposed that, the older employees sometimes feel not being able to share their knowledge and experience with the new employee which may affect the productivity of the firm.

Today's economy gradually needs people to participate with each other in groups from cross-cultural and geographic boundaries. In theory, these groups have to create significant competitive advantage by bringing together different ideas, pools of knowledge, and approaches to work.

However, it is important to recognize that employees may decide to share (or not share) knowledge for different reasons. For example, as will be reviewed later, research has shown that individuals may share knowledge because they enjoy helping others or because of their mutual reciprocity (e.g., Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2005), or may resist to share because they believe in terms of knowledge as power, which means that employee fear if they share their knowledge the act will harm their position or status.

Many studies have been conducted to examine the factors that affect knowledge sharing, for example; Seba *et al.* (2012) examined the relationship between leadership, organizational structure, trust, reward, time and information technology affecting attitude and intentions towards knowledge sharing. Sandhu *et al.* (2011) investigated the factors that affect knowledge sharing among public sector employees; Ardichvili (2008) examined personal benefits, normative considerations, interpersonal, technological, cultural, supportive corporate culture and trust toward knowledge sharing; Lin (2007) examined the impact of extrinsic motivation (reciprocal benefits, expected organizational rewards) and intrinsic motivation (enjoyment in helping others, knowledge self-efficacy) on knowledge sharing and Al-Alawi *et al.* (2007) examined interpersonal trust, communication between staff, information systems, rewards and organizational structure toward knowledge sharing.

Reviewing the literature, the researcher has found that many studies as some mentioned above have examined on factors that affect knowledge sharing. Examining the context where the studies were conducted, the researcher found that the respondents of the study were from similar nationality. It is reasonable to say that, the factors that affect knowledge sharing among employees from the same nationality are different from the factors that affect knowledge sharing among employees from different nationality. Therefore, it is worth to study the relationship between factors that affect knowledge sharing in an organization with multinational employees.

In addition, in terms of where the studies were conducted, most of these studies were in Taiwan (Lin's, 2007; Lin, 2008), South Korea (Hong *et al.*, 2011) Far Eastern country and India (e.g. Fong, 2005; Joseph & Jacob, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2005), Norway (Dean *et al.*, 2006), UEA (Seba *et al.*, 2012), and Denmark (Lauring and Selmer, 2012; Lauring, 2009). From the review of previous literature, the researcher found that studies on knowledge sharing in Saudi Arabia are rather limited. The researcher has found only

two studies on knowledge sharing that were conducted in Saudi Arabia, for instance, the study of Al-Adaileh and Al-Atawi, (2011) and Eid and Nuraddeen, (2011).

Review of relevant literature, has revealed that Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, have not received much attention in terms of studies that examines the relationship between trust, management support, self-efficacy, mutual reciprocity and altruism and the knowledge sharing. In addition, there has not been any research carried out to study knowledge sharing in an organization with multinational employees. Therefore, based on that there is a need to investigate the factors that affect knowledge sharing among multinational employees in IDB Group in Saudi Arabia.

Trust is considered as the center of every relationship within the organization and also considered as the most cost-effective enabler of knowledge sharing within the organization (Dyer and Singh, 1998). Management support has been identified as important influencers of effective knowledge sharing (Seba *et al.*, 2012). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is “people's judgments about their capabilities to organize and perform courses of action required to designate types of performances. It concerns not with the skills one has but with judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one owns.” According to Blau (1964), mutual reciprocity refers to in the process of an exchange; a provider expects to benefit from the receiver. In the context of knowledge sharing, altruism can be referred to as persons sharing their experience and knowledge with others without thinking of the benefit in return (Pierce and Gardner, 2004).

The aim of this research was to investigate the influence of trust, management support, self-efficacy, mutual reciprocity and altruism on knowledge sharing. In addition, this research attempted to identify the level of knowledge sharing among the multinational employees in IDB Group in Saudi Arabia.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

According to the problem statement mentioned above, this research attempted to investigate the factors that affect knowledge sharing in an organization with multinational employees and use Saudi Arabia as the context of the study.

Therefore, in addressing the underlying issues relating to this study, the following questions were raised:

- 1) What is the level of knowledge sharing among the employees?
- 2) What is the relationship between trust and knowledge sharing?
- 3) What is the relationship between management support and knowledge sharing?
- 4) What is the relationship between mutual reciprocity and knowledge sharing?
- 5) What is the relationship between self-efficacy and knowledge sharing?
- 6) What is the relationship between altruism and knowledge sharing?
- 7) Which factor contributes the most to knowledge sharing?

## **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study were:

- 1) To examine the level of knowledge sharing among the employees.
- 2) To investigate whether trust has an influence on knowledge sharing.

- 3) To investigate whether management support has an influence on knowledge sharing.
- 4) To investigate whether mutual reciprocity has an influence on knowledge sharing.
- 5) To investigate whether self-efficacy has an influence on knowledge sharing.
- 6) To investigate whether altruism has an influence on knowledge sharing.
- 7) To identify which factor contributes the most to knowledge sharing.

Based on literature support, the following hypotheses were developed and elaborated in Chapter 2.

H1: Trust has an influence on knowledge sharing.

H2: Management support has an influence on knowledge sharing.

H3: Mutual reciprocity has an influence on knowledge sharing.

H4: Self-efficacy has an influence on knowledge sharing.

H5: Altruism has an influence on knowledge sharing.



## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

As the world becomes a global village, most of the workforce around the world has been searching for a job in a better place in different country that can offer them a good income and a good standard of living. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that can offer a good environment to skilled workers from Arab and Muslim countries as well as non-Arab and non-Muslim countries. According to the Central Department of Statistics and Information (2012), the population of Saudi Arabia is 29.2 million people. The population of internationals in the country is more than 10 million people, whereby 5.5 million of them are currently working at government and private organizations. This leads to cultural diversity among employees in the organizations. Therefore, organizations have to take advantage of existing knowledge owned by international employees to come up with new knowledge and ideas.

This research focused towards investigating factors that affect knowledge sharing, which are trust, management support, mutual reciprocity, self-efficacy and altruism. In addition to this, this research attempted to identify the level of knowledge sharing among employees in the organization. Since the focus of the study is on multinational employees; so the study was conducted at IDB Group in Saudi Arabia, which employs multinational employees. The respondents of this research were employees from middle management (manager and assistant manager) and lower level (supervisor, staff).

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Although there are numerous studies examining knowledge sharing in organizations, there were limited studies that have been conducted in Saudi Arabia. In specific, little is known about studies, which examine the factors affecting knowledge sharing among multinational employees.

A considerable number of researches related to knowledge sharing have been conducted; however, most of them only investigated factors associated with knowledge sharing among employees of similar nationality. Therefore, finding from this study contributed to the understanding of knowledge sharing in organizations among multinational employees. In addition, this study contributes to the empirical investigation of the factors that affected knowledge sharing in Saudi Arabia. The results of this study provide a guide for the organizations in Saudi Arabia on factors that affected knowledge sharing and how to encourage employees to share their knowledge, especially in the organizations that have multinational employees.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter gives an orientation to the study by giving an introduction on the background of the study which guide to the problem statements. On the basis of the problem statement, the research questions and objectives were developed. The scope of the research was stated as well. Furthermore, this chapter provides brief discussions on the significance of the study.

## **1.9 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured into five chapters. Chapter One, presents an introduction and the background of the study. In addition, problem statements, research questions, research objectives, the significance of the study, and scope of the research are presented in this chapter.

Chapter Two focuses on reviewing previous literature related to this study. Chapter Three defines the methodology, sampling and the instruments that were used in this study. Chapter Four shows the results of the analysis. Chapter Five gives a summary, conclusion of the study as well as several recommendations for future research.

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