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HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (HRD) STRATEGIES FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The changing trend of organizations in the information age is focusing more on knowledge as their unique business competitive advantage strategy. Organizations are increasingly dependent on knowledge workers as they compete through their employees' know-how (Reich, 1991). Since knowledge becomes a prominent source for organizational competitive advantage in the uncertain economic environment, therefore organizations should create supporting culture for knowledge sharing (Nonaka, 1991). People would be the most important source in this new environment as their ideas, suggestions, criticism, experience and skills becomes a vital source for organizations improvements. Organizations must realize that the basis of growth of modern society has shifted from natural resources and physical assets to intellectual capital. It has become the source of innovation, growth and value (Arora, 2002). As a result, investment in human capital (HC) becomes critical in a knowledge based economy (k-economy) (Ramlee and Abu, 2005; ACCSM, 2005).

The process of KS is not just for transferring the knowledge but more on the value and the impact of the knowledge itself (Smith, 2005). Technology is not the main issue that deter the KS acculturation, rather than the human resource itself. It is difficult to



trigger KS because knowledge resides within the individuals (Bock et al., 2005; Riege, 2005; Davenport et al., 1997), and peoples' non-supportive beliefs in sharing knowledge either formally or informally can result in knowledge management efforts to fail in an organization (Smith, 2005).

In higher education institutions (HEI), KS will flourish if this institution is innovative, exercise dynamic changes and is really looking for a new source of values. When innovation and creativity are the hallmark of the present competitive arena, an organization should be swift in finding the right kind of knowledge in the right form, from the organizations (Bhatt, 2001). KS is becoming a key phrase, especially for those who have useful knowledge and want to share it with those who need it (i.e., industry, the public sector, or the public in general). However, to achieve this is not an easy task. Many universities in developing countries are completely unprepared for such demands, and even local knowledge users, for example industries, are frequently hesitant to let students invade their facilities (Thulstrup et al., 2006). In fact, it is not enough to establish only capacity in an organization but it must also be shared. For this reason alone, many universities in developing countries are believed to still lack in using academy capacity in real practice (i.e, integration of education, research and real life applications), even if it is essential for KS (Thulstrup et al., 2005).

In order for organizations to develop their organizational capacity and ensure that the capacity is fully utilized, they must also develop their human resources in order to nurture and harness peoples' intellectual capital (i.e., knowledge, skills, attitudes), so that they can contribute to sharing knowledge effectively.

PREVIOUS WORKS

KS Awareness and Readiness

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) is used to understand the factors supporting or inhibiting individual's KS intentions. A person's behaviour is determined by his intentions to perform the behaviour and this intention is indeed a part of his attitudes toward the behavior and his subjective norm. The important point is that people behave in a manner that is consistent with their intentions, which means that behavior is predicted by the behavioral intentions. This implies that if we want to predict behavior, we have to know the intention of the person involved.

The TRA model had been used to understand these intentions and behaviours to share knowledge (Ford, 2004; Lin and Lee, 2004; Bock et al., 2005;). The TRA is also important in order to understand the relationship between intention to share and actual KS (Ford, 2004).

As applying the TRA into this study, KS behavior is predicted by the behavioral intentions of individual's and this intentions must be in a voluntary manner. We cannot force people to share knowledge but we should encourage them to understand the importance of sharing knowledge so that they will act accordingly (Ardichvili et al., 2003; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Guns and Valikangas, 1998). This implies that intention needs to be towards the behaviors, not the outcome of the behavior, e.g. add knowledge to a knowledge repository is the intentions to share knowledge. For examples, in PIHE, KS becomes the necessary action that must be practiced by academicians. This is because the main business of PIHE is knowledge itself, and therefore the institutions must ensure that they are effectively and efficiently managing and making use of knowledge, i.e., an academician is expected to create, use and share knowledge in his main duties such as teaching and supervision, conducting research and publications, administration, consultancy, expertise contribution, community service and academic awards.

HRD Strategies for Knowledge Sharing

The issue of managing human capital becomes critical in a knowledge based economy which focuses more on knowledge as a unique

organizational business competitive advantage strategy (Ramlee and Abu, 2005).

A knowledge based institution requires a new conception of human resources. For example, being a flexible and competent workforce can increase the quality of human resources and thus determines the organizations success (Papalexandris & Nikandou, 2000). The development of human capital is important as well as to support the KS practice. Therefore, there is a high expectation of new roles and practices of human resource developments (McGregor et al., 2004).

HRD has an important contribution in an organization. Thus, HRD orientation must be broadened to facilitate boundary management and networking, both within and outside the organizations (McCarthy et al., 2003; Luoma, 2000). For example, the roles of a line manager to implement human resource policies and practices should be looked upon (MacNeil, 2003).

McGregor et al., (2004) in their model of human capital in the new economy, provide a guideline for constructing individual competencies required in the knowledge management (KM) environment. The traditional practices of the Human Resource Management (HRM), which are divided into two boundaries, soft HRM and hard HRM are no longer suitable to be implemented currently. The modernization of work demands new conceptions of a human capital. This idea is consistent with Louma (2000) who proposes the capability-driven HRD framework in creating and sustaining the internal capabilities of an organization. The capability is more than the tangible assets. It emphasizes on how people act and what they know, concurrent to the peoples' capability. The approaches of capability-driven HRD is closely related to this study because KM adaptation is nowadays being emphasized in an organization's competitive advantage strategy (Anantatmula, 2004). Venzin (2003, p.137) supports that innovation (direct and spontaneous) is identified as a crucial organizational capabilities for organizational improvements. Furthermore, the capabilities are needed for the creation of communities of strategic practices in KM.

Human capital represents the human factor in an organization with regard to those that are capable of learning, changing, innovating and providing the creative thrust. If properly motivated this can ensure the long run survival of the organization (Bontis, 2001). Human capital refers to the tacit knowledge (knowledge, skills, attributes) embedded in the minds of employees. Organizations that have a positive culture towards innovation should seriously consider managing their human capital resources in order to trigger KS.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Multiple Perspective Framework (MPF)

The uses of Multiple Perspective Framework (MPF) which identified three Technical (T) perspectives of Organizational or societal (O), and Personal (P), describes the various ways of thinking in the Information Systems (IS) development (Linstone, 1985 in Avinson et al., 1998). The O and P perspectives allow the focus of human beings and social factors in IS. Consistently, the KM approaches should also be seen as a holistic view to understand the whole process; it is not all about technology per se. Other researchers also consider multi view perspectives (Avinson et al., 1998) in knowledge sharing area, i.e., socio-technical factors (Lin&Lee, 2005); psychological, organizational and technological factors (Chennamaneni, 2006). For instance, Riege (2005) categorizes various knowledge sharing barriers into three perspectives: technological (T), organizational (O), and individual (P). Thus, the MPF is applicable for this study because it allows the researcher to use it as a lens in understanding the nature of knowledge sharing from different perspectives, which then leads to the formulation of the HRD strategies for knowledge sharing.

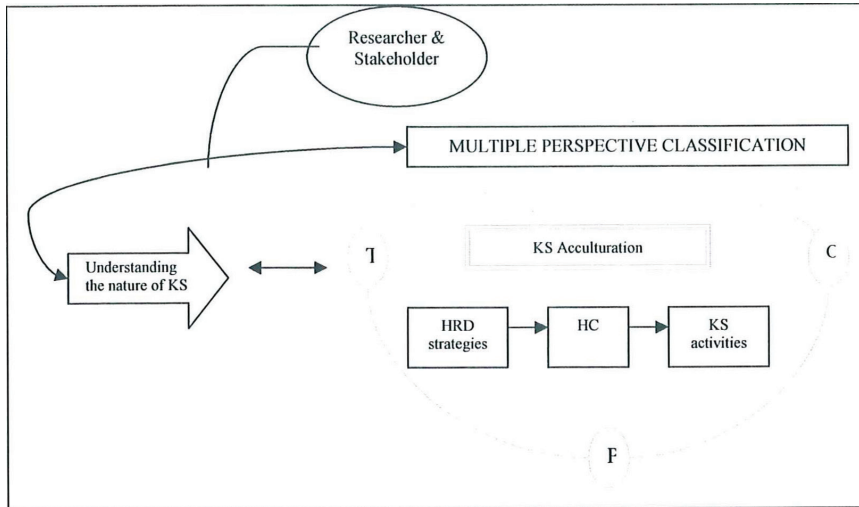


Figure 1: Multiple Perspective Framework in Exploring Knowledge Sharing Readiness

METHODOLOGY

The design of the study is qualitative in nature where interviews are the primary data collection tools. The respondents are two senior lecturers cum administrator, and one junior lecturer. Each of the interviews is recorded and transcribed resulting in the production of a document. The interviews are informal face-to-face and semi-structured which lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. These interviews do not restrict the interviewees to speak only in English, because the interviewees preferred to use their native language the “Bahasa Melayu” when responding to the questions. The interview questions are formulated based on relevant literature as shown in Table 1 below:

Dimensions	Number of Items	References
Nature of sharing knowledge in HE (KS awareness)	6	Norris et al., (2003)
Barriers of KS	2	Sun & Scott (2005), Riege (2005)

Table 1: Reference for Instrument's Development

The content analysis method is used as the data analysis. Content analysis may be defined as the process of determining or establishing a fuller, detailed meaning of a portion of a document, manuscript, speech or any type of communication which is both reliable and replicated (Remenyi, 1992). It is a simple but laborious process of closely examining the transcript looking for concepts, particularly those which are repeated several times. In this study, the unit of analysis used is 'theme' which comprises of 'sub-themes'. From this, the researcher identifies the factors that demonstrate the themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Factors that Influence Knowledge Sharing

A total of nine factors that influence KS intentions are identified in this study. All of the factors are based on the organizational or societal perspectives (O). The factors are perceived as relative advantage, leadership commitment, innovativeness/creativity, blame-free culture, competence and performance, measurement system, dynamic capability and perceptual ability, social networks and communities

of knowledge identification (CoP).

One of the KS factors is perceived relative advantage. An institution is seen as to have positive perception on KS when it believes that by encouraging KS it can benefit the conduct of its businesses (i.e., freedom of managing knowledge and to be creative). At the same time, the leadership commitment toward practicing KS can motivate subordinates to share knowledge. For instance, sharing lecture notes with junior lecturers, tips for promotions (i.e., application for associate professorship) etc.

The climate of 'innovativeness', and creativity reflects KS in a higher learning institution in which, the institution exercises dynamic changes and really is looking for new sources and values. At the same time, by having a culture of 'blame-free', it is essential for the institution to be an innovative organization where there should be a tolerance of failures and within which information flows freely (Bock et al., 2005)

Individual competencies and performances that are equivalent with the need to be a knowledge based organization are important to really acculturate KS. In addition, the ability to share knowledge depends primarily on the individual's talent for effective communication and his social behaviour (Probst et al., 2001, p. 192). Individual competency needs to be developed in an organization to benefit organizational competencies. As a result, managing competencies also required the institution to possess the dynamic capability and perceptual ability to improve and to recognize opportunities for applying capabilities.

A strategic measurement system is capable of measuring the consistency of sharing knowledge, for example, the personal appraisal procedures can evaluate performance on KS (Siemieniuch and Sinclair, 2004).

In order to minimize the boundaries and interfaces, a social network factor can overcome sharing knowledge in restricted groups. In addition, KS can be more effective with the existence of community of practice (CoP) in the institution. The cultivation of CoP in the organization can help to close the gap between the people and the

departments in the KS process (Martin et al., 2005).

HRD Strategies for Knowledge Sharing

The HRD strategies through human capital development that can initiate the KS intentions and facilitate the KS acculturation from the organizational perspective (O) are proposed in this study:

1. Investment in skills development

Skills contribute to an organizational productivity and performance, thus investment in skills is also linked to innovation and flexibility, i.e., generic skills - communication (Giles & Campbell, 2003). In addition, training programmes not only enhance interpersonal skills and mental models but also stimulate close relationship for KS which is a valuable investment (Chua, 2003).

2. Management competencies/skills development

Not only individual competencies development is needed, but managerial competencies development is important for an organization to manage and leverage human capital that is consistent to current changes of knowledge based organization (McCarthy et al., 2003). This includes a wide range of competency enhancement strategies, i.e., dynamic capability and perceptual ability.

3. Workplace learning environment

The KS will be much easier in an innovative culture organization where tolerance of mistakes/failure is taking place. Therefore, the workplace itself must be designed accordingly. Similarly, job redesign is required (Lock, 2003). The creation of learning culture where knowledge creation and action can flourish freely will also enable human capital accumulation (Garavan et al., 2001; Poell et al., 2003; Connelly & Kelloway, 2003).

4. Creation and maintenance of CoPs

Facilitating the learning process in the organization indirectly helps the management to give full support and commitment in CoP. This is inclusive of fully understanding the learning process components: place and elements, the learning milieu, the senses of the learners, the learner's emotions, the different forms of intelligence, and the different ways of learning (McCarthy et al., 2003).

5. Managing knowledge identification

Identification of staffs' talent and specific competencies is one of the ways to reduce the gap between what is required at work and what workers know plus what they are competent to do (Smith, 2005). Therefore, the management i.e. the head of department, the dean, etc. should play important roles in identification of peoples' talent and competencies.

6. Psychological contract

The management should seriously work on the psychological contract between an organization and its staff. This contract outlines both parties' expectation on work (mutual expectation) (McNeil, 2003). For example, a contract between an institution and academician which highlights on staffs' responsibilities by being actively involved in acquiring and sharing knowledge.

7. Incentives and rewards

Reward system and also performance measurement should be taken into consideration for KS activities (McDermott and O'Dell, 2001; Yahya and Salleh, 2002). Activities such as acquiring and sharing knowledge must be tailored towards the reward system and performance management.

CONCLUSION

The preliminary study on understanding the nature of sharing knowledge helps to determine the factors that influence KS. Even though the small number of interviewees may be part of the limitations in this study, however, as a preliminary study the results provide useful and insightful information in understanding the nature of sharing knowledge in a higher learning institution. Although the data collection is based on a qualitative method, the validation process is done during the interview (a member checks with the respondents). The researcher adopts an MPF as a lens in this study because it provides a holistic view in understanding the phenomenon of the study. The findings presented in this paper are based on the first perspective views, i.e., organizational (O) perspectives on KS.

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