Intention to Knowledge Sharing: From Planned Behavior and Psychological Needs Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Intention to knowledge sharing is a growing concern that has been largely discussed in extant literature using Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior (TPB). However, the studies have mostly neglected the influence of individual psychological needs of knowledge workers on intention to share knowledge. Combining the TPB with McClelland’s three psychological needs approach, the study aims at uncovering such influence on intention to knowledge sharing. Survey data collected from 123 Information Technology (IT) based knowledge workers in Sri Lanka are analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. It was found that attitudes toward knowledge sharing behavior, subjective norms, and need for affiliation are influential in determining knowledge sharing intentions of knowledge workers. Moreover, the findings suggest the need for careful consideration of individual psychological needs of knowledge workers in understanding their intentions toward knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Industry, Information Technology (IT) Business, Knowledge Dissemination, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing Intentions, Knowledge Workers, Psychological Theory, Sri Lanka, Theory of Planned Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is considered as a critical resource in realizing a firm’s sustainable competitive advantage (Drucker, 1988; Foss & Pedersen, 2002; Grant, 1996; Jennex, 2007, p. 2; Nonaka, 1991) mainly due to its unique, inimitable, and non-substitutable nature (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). However, knowledge alone barely provides such advantage unless it is shared (Hinds, Patterson, & Pfeffer, 2001). Simply put, knowledge sharing is conceived as an exchange of knowledge from a giver to a receiver (Usoro & Kuofie, 2008, p. 120). Previous studies have claimed many benefits of knowledge sharing practices (Arthur & Huntley, 2005; Chantarosombat, Srisa-ard, Kuofie, & Jennex, 2010; Collins & Smith, 2006; Cummings, 2004; Kamaşak & Bulutlar, 2010; Lin, 2007b; Yang, 2008) and suggest that individuals’
willingness and past sharing behaviour (Xue, Liang, Hauser, & O’Hara, 2012), organizational culture, practices and policies (Brazelton & Gorry, 2003) are catalysts in knowledge sharing efforts. However, it is increasingly being acknowledged that even under the best of circumstances, knowledge sharing is neither widespread nor successful (Andriessen, 2006; Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Davenport, 1994; Du-Plessis, 2008; Hinds & Pfeffer, 2003; Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005; Lin, 2007a; Szulanski, 1996; Yang, 2008). The phenomenon of knowledge sharing is largely investigated in the West and a sparse of studies exist in the South; particularity in South Asia (Ranasinghe & Gamini, 2008; Senaratne & Herath, 2009; Su, Li, & Chow, 2010). However, studies conducted in South Asia have found that knowledge workers are reluctant to share knowledge in their organizations (Azudin, Ismail, & Taherali, 2009; Ranasinghe & Gamini, 2008; Senaratne & Herath, 2009) and such reluctance is triggered by culture (Al-Shammari, 2005, p. 254; Azudin et al., 2009; Ismail, 2012; Jennex & Olfman, 2005; Ribiere & Tuggle, 2007) and behavioral outcome of employee cognition (Bock et al., 2005; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002; Senaratne & Herath, 2009). This finding is supported by the study of Fishbein and Ajzen (1981) who asserts that the immediate antecedent of behavior is intention. Later studies have attempted to predict knowledge sharing behavior through their intention to share knowledge (Bock & Kim, 2001; Chatzoglou & Vraimaki, 2009; Lin & Lee, 2004; Ryu et al., 2003; Sihombing, 2009; Wang & Noe, 2010; Zhikun & Fungfai, 2009), yet the findings are equivocal. With this in mind, this paper aims to investigate the determinants of knowledge sharing intentions of knowledge workers choosing IT companies in Sri Lanka.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background of the study, while section 3 outlines the research method. The results and findings of the study are presented in section 4. Finally, section 5 provides the conclusion and discussion to the study followed by research implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Intention to Share Knowledge

Knowledge sharing behavior is a widely discussed phenomena and it is a social action involving the collective behavior of a group of people (Bock & Kim, 2001; Chatzoglou & Vraimaki, 2009; Lin & Lee, 2004; Ryu et al., 2003; Sihombing, 2009; Wang & Noe, 2010; Zhikun & Fungfai, 2009). Extant literature suggests that a key enabler of knowledge sharing is the intention of employees to share knowledge (Lilleoere & Hansen, 2011; Marianne, 2013; Xue et al., 2012). An intention is a “person’s location on a subjective probability dimension involving a relation between himself and some action” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 228) and link with behavior. The association between intention and behavior was first established by Fishbein and Ajzen (1981) in their Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and later modified through Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

TPB posits that intentions to perform different kinds of behavior can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control; and these intentions, together with perceptions of behavioral control, account for considerable variance in actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This is a widely accepted notion in social psychology (So & Bolloju, 2005) which is an extension of the TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) by adding a third construct which is perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). This extension was made consequent to the limitations of the original model in dealing with behavior over which people have incomplete volitional control (Ajzen, 1991).