Chapter 7
Developing Individual Level Outcome Measures in the Context of Knowledge Management Success

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ABSTRACT
Success of organizational level knowledge management initiatives depends on how effectively individuals implementing these initiatives use their knowledge to bring about outcomes that add value in their work. To facilitate assessment of individual level outcomes in the knowledge management context, this research provides a model of interrelationships among individual level knowledge management success measures which include conceptual knowledge, contextual knowledge, operational knowledge, innovation, and performance. The model was tested using structural equation modeling based on data collected from managerial and professional knowledge workers. The results suggest that conceptual knowledge enhances operational and contextual knowledge. Contextual knowledge improves operational knowledge and is also a key predictor of innovations. The innovativeness of an individual’s work along with operational knowledge enhances work performance. The results support the proposed model. This model can potentially be used for measuring knowledge management success at the individual level.

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INTRODUCTION

At an organizational level, an important aspect of knowledge management (KM) success is to have systems and processes that enable getting the right information to the right person at the right time (Jennex, Smolnik & Croasdell, 2007). How these systems and processes impact an individual’s knowledge and the subsequent work outcomes are an equally important aspect, if not of greater significance. One of the most important objectives of various organizational systems and processes is to empower individuals to take informed actions that will create value for the organization. A pragmatic view of individual knowledge and how it is related to other performance outcomes is lacking in the literature. This research addresses this gap and empirically tests a model of individual task knowledge and its relationship with other individual level outcomes in the context of KM success.

A significant amount of KM success literature focuses mainly on systems and processes; often with little emphasis on the individual who use these systems to solve problems and create value (Guo & Sheffield, 2006). Knowledge is often viewed as an organizational resource that has to be managed well in order to gain competitive advantage. Such an organizational view of knowledge is comparable to the resource based view of the firm (Grant, 1996; Grover & Davenport, 2001). From the organizational view of knowledge, specific processes and systems including information systems (IS) are used to manage this organizational resource. These processes and systems often form the key elements of most organizational level KM initiatives. In the KM literature, knowledge is seldom studied as an individual resource that improves the individual’s productivity and innovation. Individual’s productivity and innovation can contribute to organizational success.

Several researchers acknowledge the importance of individual knowledge in the implementation and success of organizational level KM initiatives (Grant, 1996; Grover & Davenport, 2001). The task-related knowledge of individuals can be considered as a critical component of how individuals act to create value for organizations. This task knowledge reflects the individuals’ knowledge related to their work. The task knowledge accumulates over time and may include the learning that takes place within the organizational context (Kim, 1993; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The lack of a broader understanding of KM and its outcomes at the individual level can potentially hamper the overall research efforts in this field (Guo & Sheffield, 2006). Acknowledging that there are different types of task knowledge, we contend that enhanced task knowledge should be one of the primary outcomes of individual knowledge management. We further explore the various dimensions of task knowledge, their inter-relationships, and relationships with other relevant individual outcomes in an organizational context such as individual performance and innovation.

Within a broader context of KM success at the organizational level, we focus on the individual level to examine the task knowledge and performance outcomes and their relationships. Organizational and individual factors that contribute to the individual KM outcomes are discussed. Specifically, we focus on (1) developing measures of task knowledge, which includes conceptual knowledge, contextual knowledge, and operational knowledge, (2) exploring the relationships among the three types of knowledge, and (3) relating the various dimensions of individual task knowledge to the innovation and performance of individual knowledge workers.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

KM success is viewed from many different perspectives in the KM literature. From an IS perspective, KM success is often equated with knowledge management system (KMS) success.