Exploring Causes, Taxonomies, Mechanisms and Barriers Influencing Knowledge Transfer: Empirical Studies in NGOs

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge transfer is one of the significant elements in the knowledge management process. Knowledge transferors share different types of knowledge with the recipients with a view to fulfilling the latter’s knowledge needs. The importance of identifying the appropriate knowledge transfer mechanisms and the barriers to knowledge transfer are paramount. However, neither the knowledge management literature nor the NGO-sector literature has adequately addressed the issues of causes of knowledge transfer, taxonomies of knowledge, mechanisms and barriers of knowledge transfer in comprehensive way in the context of the Bangladeshi NGO sector. The highest number of NGOs in the world is deployed in Bangladesh. Little is known about such transfer within the NGO context based in Bangladesh. This paper makes an endeavour to bridge these grey areas of knowledge management and NGO-sector. Having collected the qualitative data from Bangladeshi NGOs and using the content analysis technique, the study identified the causes of knowledge transfer, taxonomies of knowledge, mechanisms of knowledge transfer and the barriers to knowledge transfer in the context of Bangladesh. By understanding the mechanisms and the determinants of knowledge transfer, company and NGO managers and public policy makers can influence knowledge transfer more effectively. Future researchers may extend this study by carrying out similar research in a different context.

KEYWORDS
Absorbtion, Bangladesh, Knowledge Transfer, NGOs, Transmission

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge transfer, being one of the vital ingredients in the knowledge management process (Argote et al., 2000; Jasimuddin et al., 2012; Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2012), is receiving extensive attention (Hasnain et al., 2013). Knowledge transfer is essential for an organisation’s survival (Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2013 Jasimuddin et al., 2011). Learning and implementations of others’ experiences for social and organisational benefit necessitate the relevance of the concept of knowledge transfer. Successful transfer between different parties strengthens trust and ties (Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2008). Such trust ensures future knowledge transfer from the recipients of the knowledge. Knowledge transfer may occur between independent organisations (inter-organisational) or between the sub-units of a single organisation (intra-organisational) (Darr et al., 1995; Jasimuddin et al., 2005; Islam et al., 2015). Transfer of knowledge across and within firms also appears to be a fundamental element of
strategy formulation and research (Zhang & Jasimuddin, 2015; van Wijk et al., 2008; Jasimuddin, 2008; Jasimuddin & Zhang, 2009).

Presently NGOs in Bangladesh are at the top in contributing to the country's development (Devine, 2003). Winning the trust and confidence of the illiterate and ill-informed people of remote and inaccessible areas is the prime responsibility of the NGOs (Panda, 2007) for successful operations. The knowledge provider seeks and analyses whether the conditions of transfer are conducive to its strategic intents. The following questions are emphasized when making the decision; to whom knowledge to be transferred? What type and content of knowledge is to be transferred (Hass and Hansen, 2007), and what are the mechanisms to be used to transfer knowledge? What is the requirement of transferring knowledge? What are the barriers to the transfer process encounters?

This study revolves around the aforementioned questions in the NGO-context of Bangladesh. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 introduces the data used in the qualitative analysis. Section 4 presents and discusses the results. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic concept of knowledge transfer may be compared to the well-known communication process model of Shannon and Weaver (1949), where two actors remain engaged in transferring a message, both of them educating each other. There may be noise between communications, and one should understand the other’s message, otherwise the entire communication process fails. A significant number of authors have defined knowledge transfer in different ways. For example, Davenport and Prusak (1998) have a holistic and wide-ranging view of knowledge transfer emphasising the important issues like ‘absorption’ and ‘actions’ on the basis of transferred knowledge are taken into account. They showed that knowledge transfer consists of transmission (sending or presenting knowledge to a potential recipient) and absorption by that person and group i.e. \[\text{Transfer} = \text{Transmission} + \text{Absorption (and use)}.\] Motivation is one of the reasons of knowledge transfer (Jasimuddin et al., 2006; Stenmark, 2001). At the NGO-level, knowledge transfer helps in empowering the beneficiaries (Sultana and Islam, 2009; Afrin et al., 2008). The contribution of NGOs in socio-economic development is also acknowledged by many authors (Begum, 2008; Nawaz, 2011; Gauri and Galef, 2005).

The NGOs mainly transfer knowledge as per the functional coverage. At present NGOs have a wide range of functional coverage, including microcredit (ADB, 1999; Mahmud, 1998; Gauri and Galef, 2005; Lovell, 2005, Nawaz, 2011), empowerment/income generation (Begum, 2008) education (Ahmad, 1999; Begum, 2008), health and nutrition (Mahmud, 1998; Gauri and Galef, 2005), and environment (Begum 2008), natural calamities/disaster management (Rahman, 2000).

Several researchers, most notably, Hansen et al. (1999) and Zhang and Jasimuddin (2008) focus on the mechanisms of knowledge transfer. Generally speaking, knowledge transfer in organisations can take place in many diverse ways (Hansen et al., 1999; Jasimuddin 2007). Several authors (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Jasimuddin, 2007; Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000) have emphasised the roles of mechanisms for smooth and effective knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer mechanism is a vehicle by which knowledge is transmitted between the parties concerned (Jasimuddin et al., 2014).

Bangladesh is a country where approximately 22,000 NGOs (Devine, 2003) operate with different objectives and activities. The NGOs mainly transfer knowledge to the beneficiaries. Knowledge transfer may occur between similar minded NGOs/organisations/SBUs with similar missions, for example, BRAC [Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee] Bank and BRAC University. However, knowledge transfer may also occur between NGOs and other ‘for profit’ organisations, such as the Grameen bank (not an NGO) transferring its microcredit knowledge to other organisations (Grameen phone, mobile phone provider). Extensive knowledge transfer also occurs between the NGO headquarters and different projects.
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