Investigating the Mediating Role of Knowledge Sharing on Employee Engagement: Evidence from a Developing Nation

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a research model that explores the social factors affecting knowledge sharing and employee engagement and examines the mediating role of knowledge sharing on employee engagement. Data was collected from 191 employees from a large holding company and the research model was empirically tested using partial least squares analysis. The results show that coworker congruence, organizational commitment, and participative decision-making affect knowledge sharing and employee engagement. The findings also reveal that knowledge sharing has a full mediation effect between coworker congruence and employee engagement and between decision-making and employee engagement. In addition, knowledge sharing also has a partial mediation effect between organizational commitment and employee engagement. This study is a pioneering attempt to understand the effects of social factors on knowledge sharing and employee engagement. The findings of this study will be helpful to organizations using knowledge sharing systems as mechanisms to promote knowledge sharing and employee engagement.

KEYWORDS

Coworker Congruence, Employee Engagement, Knowledge Sharing, Organizational Commitment, Participative Decision-Making, Task Interdependence

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge sharing forms the cornerstone of activities promoting individual innovativeness (Mura et al., 2013), enterprise innovation (Carvalho & Gomes, 2017), employee performance (Javadi et al., 2012), and organizational citizenship behavior (Teh & Sun, 2012). Employees—especially knowledge workers—create, share, and apply knowledge in carrying out their tasks. Knowledge is communicated through interactions among the employees of an organization. The interactions transfer knowledge from one employee to another, creating so-called intellectual capital, which is essential for progress and the achievement of a competitive advantage for all of the organization’s stakeholders (Connell & Voola, 2013; Johannessen & Olsen, 2009; Weissenberger-Eibl & Schwenk, 2009). With the effective sharing of knowledge and the free flow of ideas among employees within organizations and with partner firms, organizations succeeded in getting products and services to market more quickly, which would consequently boost their revenues (Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Wasko & Faraj, 2000) and assist them in improving customer services (Garcia-Murillo & Annabi, 2002). Moreover, knowledge

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sharing can minimize the brain drain of organizations by acknowledging the value of employee competence through appropriate rewards, thereby increasing the engagement and retention rates of an organization’s employees (Fathi, Eze & Goh, 2011). Some scholars have highlighted the role of information technology (IT) as a focal enabler to knowledge sharing (Davison, Ou & Martinsons, 2013; Naim & Lenka, 2017; Zhang, Vogel & Zhou, 2012); others have focused on the role of pro-social behaviors—which are intangible and voluntary—in influencing knowledge sharing (Hau et al., 2013; Lin, 2007; Yeo & Gold, 2014).

When an organization’s leadership embraces a culture of open communication and encourages participation in decision-making, the level of employee engagement tends to increase. By the same token, cultivating a knowledge-sharing environment tends to improve employee engagement. An engaged employee will be more aware of the business context and will work with his/her colleagues to improve organizational performance. This would not have been possible without the creation of a conducive environment for knowledge sharing. For example, a shared vision, mission, and values play a fundamental role in cultivating intellectual and emotional employee engagement (Simon, 2011). Engaged employees are well-informed about the organization’s goals, work procedure, and job requirements. Engagement can be a central component of employees work satisfaction and performance (Marino & Presti, 2018; Sinha et al., 2014; Tomar, 2017). Knowledge sharing is an essential means by which employees can contribute to the success of an organization and, ultimately, to the betterment of its competitive advantage (Jackson et al., 2006). Managers are eager to know what it takes to build employee engagement because it has direct impacts on employee productivity, loyalty, and satisfaction, which ultimately have a positive influence on organizational performance (Rangnekar, 2012; Verma & Verma, 2013). Sharing of knowledge and experiences amongst company employees is part of the knowledge-management process. Even though knowledge sharing is not a job prerequisite, it helps to build a competitive intellectual asset. An organization’s ability to share knowledge among its employees is key to its competitive advantage. It has been noted that knowledge sharing is a valuable intangible resource that sustains an organization’s competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). Hence, the author argues that knowledge sharing is an enabler of employee engagement and should be treated as a mediating variable.

Academics and business communities envisage knowledge sharing as a critical issue and an important research agenda. The motivation for this study is two-fold. First, the area of knowledge sharing is a relatively new research topic in the context of Arab countries in general and particularly within the context of Saudi Arabia. Second, the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on employee engagement has been rarely researched. This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence knowledge sharing among employees and the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on employee engagement. These factors are coworker congruence, task interdependence, organizational commitment, and participative decision-making (PDM). Specifically, this study seeks answers for the following two research questions:

1. Do coworker congruence, task interdependence, organizational commitment, and PDM affect knowledge sharing?
2. Does knowledge sharing mediate the effects of coworker congruence, task interdependence, organizational commitment, and PDM on employee engagement?

This study is different from previous studies for several reasons. First, the social factors as well as the impact of knowledge sharing on employee engagement are not fully understood in Saudi Arabia due to the dearth of research on developing countries. Second, this study examines the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on employee engagement. The findings will be of special interest to managers who are planning to implement knowledge-management systems in their organizations for knowledge-sharing purposes and to enhance employee engagement.
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