Socio-Behavioral Factors in Virtual Knowledge Sharing: Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Recently, there has been extraordinary propagation in the number of virtual teams for knowledge sharing; however, finding out what affects team member’s behavior is important. This paper integrates the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to construct a model for investigating the socio-behavioral factors behind virtual knowledge sharing. The results of previous studies in this domain paved the path for these factors to be categorized in three conceptual components based on TPB: attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control.

Keywords: Attitude, Perceived Behavioral Control, Socio-Behavioral Factors, Subjective Norm, Theory of Planned Behavior, Virtual Community, Virtual Knowledge Sharing

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge means different things to different people in different research domains (Soule, 2003). According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), individuals create knowledge through social interaction. Inherently, knowledge resides within individuals and more specifically, in the employees who create, recognize, archive, access, and apply knowledge in carrying out their tasks (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). To spread knowledge between employees and also from repositories and databases inside the organizations, the knowledge sharing process and behaviors need to be improved.

For the purpose of sharing knowledge across the time and location, virtual collaborative technologies need to be implemented. The propagation of collaborative technologies facilitated the rapid progression of virtual communities. Many people participate in virtual collaborative networks for investigating knowledge to solve problems at work. However, if people do not have rich knowledge about subjects, the virtual networks will have kind of a limited value (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006).

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It is important to find out why individuals choose to share or not to share knowledge with other members through online social networks. Identifying the social and behavioral factors underlying the virtual knowledge sharing behaviors would help both academics and practitioners to gain ideas of how to facilitate the socio-environments to foster the knowledge sharing through virtual networks. Based on this purpose, two complementary social theories TRA and TPB are applied.

Virtual community is defined as an online social network in which people with common interests and objectives interact for the purpose of sharing knowledge and participating in social interactions. There are some influencing factors of social interactions and a set of resources embedded within the online networks that sustain virtual communities (Chiu et al., 2006). A virtual community is a knowledge providing entity with the willingness to share knowledge with other members through online collaborative systems (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentiling, 2003). Therefore, studies on virtual communities concentrate on factors related to both personal behaviors and social networks. Virtual communities are informal environments, which exist in the minds of their members with specific shared problems or interest areas, and are associated by the connections of members with each other (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Participators in virtual networks are different from general (common) Internet users; shared subjects, interests, goals or practices for the purpose of knowledge sharing bring individuals in virtual networks together from different parts of the world. According to Ardichvili et al. (2006), national cultural differences affect directly the knowledge sharing behavior. Therefore, determining the influence of cultural diversity in various national and ethnic groups is one of the most important pre-requisites for successful contribution in online knowledge sharing. The cultural diversity and physical distance separating knowledge-sharing parties could have an influence on the ability and/or willingness of the parties to share knowledge. There are some behavioral factors affecting the virtual community members. Investigating and improving these factors will improve the efficiency of these virtual teams.

Objective of Study

Previous studies identified the influencing factors of virtual knowledge sharing. This research explained and categorized these influencing factors according to the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to demonstrate the importance of such factors in human social and behavioral context. Because of the critical role of human elements in the success or failure of any process, our approach to further evaluate the constituents from the human context is utterly significant. Humans are the most valuable assets that play the most critical role to every project. By identification of these factors, and their categorization according to TPB, it helps to concentrate on them more easily for improving. In the knowledge sharing process, there are other essential factors involved such as technical aspects but technology alone does not motivate knowledge sharing within organizations (Davenport, 1994). Without consideration and improvement of human aspects, increasing the efficiency is next to impossible; to serve this purpose, this study focuses on the factors relating to the characteristics of the human beings and the people and reevaluates them from the perspective of the behavioral theory; to be able to overcome the imposed barriers and improving the overall performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior

When individuals participate in a virtual network, they seek something more than information, knowledge or solving a problem; they also consider it as an opportunity to meet other people, to seek friendship, support and a sense of belongingness (Andrews, 2002; Zhang & Hiltz, 2003). They try to develop social relationships for sharing knowledge in

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