

Article Review & Reflection

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Title of Article: Knowing Sharing in an American multinational company based in Malaysia

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Summary

The article, “Knowledge Sharing in an American Multinational Company Based in Malaysia”, provides insight about the perception of knowledge sharing (KS), barriers to knowledge sharing and strategies to promote knowledge sharing from the point of view of executives at an American technology firm based in Malaysia. In the technology industry, the innovation needed to continuously propel companies to produce leading and competing products is the direct result of previous learning and the intellectual capability of staff members. With this concept in mind, the current research study was designed to capture the opinions of the most-high ranking leaders of the company.

During the initial stage of the research design, a classification of organizational mechanisms related to knowledge sharing was developed. The second stage of the project consisted of a case study of Sensata Technologies, which is formerly known Texas-Instruments S& C in Malaysia, in which executives completed surveys regarding their perception of KS. Survey Participants were asked to respond to a Likert Five Point questionnaire regarding the value of KS, barriers to KS, and activities to promote KS (Ling, Sandhu, & Jain, 2009). Respondents differed in terms of race, gender, age, marital status, and length of time at the organization. In terms of theoretical perspective, the concept of knowledge provides a framework for researchers to discuss KS. Various interpretations of the definition of knowledge served as the guiding principle for the

research. Ling, Sanku and Jain (2009) define knowledge as the “boundaries encompassing entities,” which more specifically refers to the behaviors, operational thoughts, standard operation procedures and organizational routine combined with an individual’s insight about their previous work experience, which is relevant to their present job.

The majority of the participants were male and of the Malay ethnic group, followed by a significant number of Chinese and Indian representatives. Researchers discovered that while the majority of the executive recognized the benefit of KS activities, 22% did not consider knowledge sharing to be important to the organization. Moreover, 27% were not willing to share knowledge. A lack of trust and fear of knowledge being misused or taking credit for information were some of the reoccurring reasons as barriers to knowledge sharing. The authors concluded that it is a concern for 22% of executives at a knowledge-based company to not identify KS as important to the organization. Moreover, 27 % of the participants were not willing to share knowledge and another 19.8% were neutral in regarding involvement in KS. The following reasons were identified as the prohibition of KS: “lack of formal and informal activities to cultivate KS, lack of rewards and recognition systems that would motivate people to share knowledge and absence of a system to identify the colleagues with whom knowledge could be shared(Ling, Sandhu, and Jain, 2009, p.135). It is recommended that organizations create the desire for KS, before implementing new programs and initiatives (Ling, Sandhu, and Jain, 2009).

In this paper I will analysis the article and reflect upon attitudes towards knowledge sharing, the barriers to knowledge sharing and possible strategies to enhance

organizational attitudes to knowledge sharing. I will demonstrate a relationship between knowledge sharing and communities of practice.

Analysis

“Knowledge sharing in an American multinational company based in Malaysia” is valuable to practitioners and scholars because it builds a solid foundation of the multiple definitions of knowledge and creates awareness of the perceptions of upper level management regarding the significance of KS. The thorough literature review presents a wealth of information on the various interpretations of knowledge. For example, Davenport’s defined knowledge as information along with experience and reflection, which contrasts with Dretske’s viewpoint that knowledge is linked to beliefs and sustained by information (Ling, Sandhu, and Jain, 2009). The variety of perceptions orients the reader towards developing clarity about what type of information and/or experiences can be classified as knowledge.

The authors also spend a considerable amount of time distinguishing knowledge sharing from knowledge management (KM). KM is about the creation, transfer and storage of knowledge (Karkouljian, Halawi, & McCarthy, 2008). KS is the prerequisite to KM because unless members are willing to discuss their lessons learned, it is futile to develop and implement strategies to preserve knowledge. Again, the authors contribute to the readers’ comprehension by making this distinction to signal that knowledge sharing and knowledge management are not interchangeable concepts.

This research project consisted of two phases, an initial topology of organizational mechanism and followed by the case study. Readers were not informed of the results of the topology of organizational mechanism. Often time topologies are associated with mathematical computations; therefore, it is necessary that the authors further explain the design of the topology and the value gained from this portion of the research. The content of the topology is unclear, perhaps it could be a documentation of the organization's epistemological process or a classification of activities that can be identified as related to KS. More analysis of the first phase of the research would have produced richer results and gave readers a holistic view of the project.

Admittedly, the researchers stated a limitation of the study was that it did not include participation from non-executive level staff due to difficulty in gaining access to individuals because of rotating shifts. Furthermore, the authors stated "most of the operators would have difficulty in understanding the survey objective and content" (p. 125). Reasons were not given to support the operators' perceived lack of understanding the objective of the study. As it currently stands, the authors' statements seem biased to intellectual capability of the operators, thereby insinuating that they were not able to comprehend the purpose of the study.

Reflection

The case study was conducted at a technological company; the rapid changes in the technology industry seems that it warrant executives at Sensata Technologies to engage in KS activities to produce the innovation required to sustain the company. It is appalling to learn that 27% of survey participants were not willing to share information with their colleagues. It is evident that there is a sense of fear, mistrust and competition in

this environment. Being that these are the key decision makers in the organization, I am more curious about the position of other members related to KS. As a result of this article, leaders of Sensata now have feedback on KS within their organization and hopefully will forge ahead to make KS a part of their daily operation.

Promoting the concept of KS has to be an intentional process supported by the implementation of practical activities. Establishing communities of practice was mentioned in the article as a viable solution to some of the change KS challenges listed. The communities of practice concept could be a good starting place because there is already a shared experience and commonality among the executives that responded to the survey. Designating physical space and allotting time for executives to come together and discuss how their roles in the organization link together may help create a stronger appreciation for KS.

For this company, the community of practice would have to consist of large groups of executives to counter the possibility of creating factions forming between executives that value KS and those that do not. Designing a community of practice has to form in two parts, initiated by organizational leaders and enhanced organically through the members. The article "Collaborative Cultures and Communities of Practice" (Sergiovanni, 2004) highlights a school that implemented an effective community of practice because the faculty and staff were ultimately committed to helping students learn and personally develop. Communities of practice do not occur individually, but it is a part of the larger organizational culture by building shared vision and commitment. In the case of Sensata, organizational leaders will have to identify the shared vision from all of its members. If the shared vision is to create the most innovative technological products,

then perhaps the executives will form strategies that are representative of the company's shared vision and will enable the company to meet its goals.

For Sensata and other companies looking to assess the perception of KS other things have to be taken into consideration, such as the flow of leadership. Even simple things such as at the decision making process may impact the value of KS. Consulting with members at various levels of the organization before making decision may also help to create an organizational culture supportive of KS.

After reading the materials for EAD 802 Building a Learning Organization and articles on both KS and KM, I am learning that building team learning and KS requires continuous effort. As distributor for Ardyss International, a networking marketing company, I am responsible for training distributors whom I directly recruit and they train distributors who they directly recruit. Currently, I have an organization consisting of thirteen people.

As the leader of this team, I desire that our organization is committed to learning and knowledge sharing. The corporate system is structured so that distributors can be take advantage of training conference calls and events, but the challenge is to influence members of the organization to share the knowledge they have gained from attending training events or their personal experience with other team members. Since the majority of members in our organization reside in Alabama, I rely of technology, such as conference calls, emails and Facebook, to help us communicate. I have asked them to reflect and share their experiences with other members on our team, but received no responses. Nevertheless, I will continue to inquire about their learning with hopes that reflecting and sharing become a key aspect of our organizational culture. In order to

document conversations and knowledge, I am looking for Internet resources that will allow members to make posts to discussion boards about various topics.

Realizing that KS is a way of being in an organization has been the most significant learning I have gained from this exercise; it is the norm and not limited to a few activities. Leaders of organizations must model behavior that aligns with the KS concept in order to influence organizational culture and that requires continuous effort.

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