

Conceptual Model of Organizational Trust and Knowledge Sharing Behavior among Multigenerational Employees

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between organizational trust and knowledge sharing among their multigenerational employees. On the other hand the purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual model to examine the relationship with antecedents of trust, organizational trust and knowledge sharing behaviors with the moderating effect of multigenerational demographic.

The Literature of Knowledge sharing behavior, Knowledge Management, trust and related theories assist as starting-points for developing the conceptual model. Based on the vast literature review, all the dimensions of variables have been identified and discussed in depth.

This study attempts to reduce the existing gap in literature regarding the relationship between organizational trust and knowledge sharing among employees with differences in generations. It is anticipated that this study to have a significant contribution to the advancement of KM research literature and provides managers and scholars to get to a better insight on the relationship between the established trust among multigenerational of employees and their knowledge sharing.

Keywords: knowledge management (KM), knowledge sharing, trust, multigenerational workforce

1. Introduction

A crucial component of effective Knowledge Management (KM) is knowledge sharing (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Studies today argue that effective knowledge sharing is critical to providing an organization with a unique competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Gold et al., 2001). To enhance a company's collective learning and knowledge assets, an organization must develop an effective knowledge sharing framework that allows its employees and partners to share knowledge (Bock, Sabherwal, & Qian, 2008; Osterloh & Frey, 2000).

Trust is a backbone of intention to share tacit knowledge in organization. It can be influenced by several internal and external factors. Personal characteristics are studied as major player to create trust in organization (Wassan & Rasool, 2011; Cheng, 2008; Fleig-palmer & Schoorman, 2011; Khesal, Samadi, & Musram; 2013). Previous studies usually includes factors such as reward expectation, ability, benevolence, integrity, and justice as determinants of organizational trust (Thorgren & Wincent, 2011; Mayer et al., 2013; Fang & Chiu, 2010).

Another major challenge to share the tacit knowledge within organizations is the demographic differences (e.g., age, gender and ethnics) among employees (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003; Chatman et al., 1998) specially the age difference. For instance, the studies show that more than fifty percent of existing employees in firms belonging to younger generations whereas the rest of population belong to older ones (Farren, 1999; Girault & Sauvé, 2008). Since employees tend to have more interaction with those who have more similarities (e.g., age, gender, experience and expertise) with them thus establishment of a credulous relationship between employees from different backgrounds in order to share their knowledge and skills is a difficult task (Zemke, 2000; Eisner, 2011; Kueh & Voon, 2007).

The main objective of this study is developing the conceptual framework to study the relationship between ability, benevolence, justice/fairness, integrity, reward expectation, organizational trust and knowledge sharing behavior with the moderation of generation gaps.

1.1 Significance of Study

This study would complement the expanding field of research by developing a comprehensive conceptual research model for studying the relationship between the antecedent of organizational trust, organizational trust and knowledge sharing behavior among Multigenerational employees. This study will provide better views for employees to gain insight on other employees' perceptions regarding their cooperation during work. In fact, the outcomes of this study can be used to explain some of the perceptions gained by employees in the ways that they form a trustworthy relationship with each other as well as its effect on their knowledge sharing behavior. Besides, it provides better insight on the specific effect that each generational group of employees has on the affiliation between the established trust and knowledge sharing behavior. This research would advance a better theoretic understanding and acknowledgment of constructs linked with organizational trust and knowledge sharing behavior. It is expected that the results of the study will significantly contribute towards the theoretical advancement in the field of Knowledge Management.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Sharing Behavior and Related Theories

The knowledge sharing is considered as an important part of knowledge management (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Kharabsheh, 2007; Okyere-Kwakye & Nor, 2011). Knowledge sharing occurs in situations that employees ask their associates for knowledge in order to solve their problems (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Fathi, Eze, & Goh, 2011). The concept of knowledge sharing is believed to have been derived from various theories such as Social Exchange, Social Identity, Human Capital, Expectancy theory (Al-Mashari, Zairi, & Ginn, 2005; Chiesi, Spilich, & Voss, 1979; Okyere-Kwakye & Nor, 2011; Pan & Scarbrough, 1998; Tiwana & Ramesh, 2001; McNeish & Mann, 2010; Nonaka, 1994; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

However, the concept of knowledge sharing is defined as the exchange of knowledge, either tacit or explicit, between organizational members (Lee & Yu, 2011; Lee, 2001; Hansen & Haas, 2007). According to literature, knowledge sharing behavior is a complex concept and is described through three dimensions such as (a) Communication/Collaboration, (b) Motivation/Willingness, and (c) Cooperation/Respect (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Hansen & Avital, 2008; Lee, 2008; Lorenz, 2008; Sheng, Chang, Teo, & Lin, 2013).

2.1.1 Knowledge Sharing Behavior Dimensions

Communication in an organization is an essential component in the process of successful knowledge sharing in an organization where workers must feel they are being listened to, respected and valued (Lorenz, 2008). Today's highly competitive business environment creates a need for faster decision making and having employees of different generations, in which as the result, provides more benefit for organization if there is successful communication and sharing of knowledge between employees (Pitt & Clarke, 1999; Watson & Hewett, 2006; Lorenz, 2008).

However, according to Jamison (2007), constructive communication in the transfer of knowledge can be difficult across age groups due to high levels of distrust and sense of competition between generations. Knowledge sharing is primarily is described as a function and consequence of the meeting and an interaction of minds (Fathi et al., 2011; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Moreover, knowledge sharing is not only the distribution of information but it is also collaboration and interaction (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Lee & Al-Hawamdeh, 2002; Chiu et al., 2006).

Beckett-Camarata, Camarata, & Barker (1998) discussed assume that the organizational management must create motivation among the employees to communicate shared knowledge and in turn create a sense of connectedness among them. Therefore, sharing of knowledge requires a motivation from both the receiver and the source to work together. However, there are many negative impacts of ageism on an organization such as distrust and competition among employees that prevent effective construction among generations (Khesal, Samadi, & Musram, 2013).

In fact, the level of involvement in the knowledge sharing process is influenced by the level of motivation exhibited by the employees. According to Osterloh and Frey (2000), it is common that some knowledge holders believe in holding on to their knowledge as a way of holding on to their positions in the firm and as the result, some knowledge seekers feel that they will be seen as less capable if they need someone else to explain a

concept to them. Thus, motivational aspects need to be created by the organizational management so that employees are willing to cooperate with each other in knowledge sharing activities (Osterloh & Frey, 2000).

Employees have to depend on trust in their cooperative activities to justify their expected benefits from the exchange (Zohoori et al., 2013). Knowledge sharing will lead to constructive cooperation amongst employees who can then be innovative in their ideas, products, services and technologies (Fathi et al. 2011). Cooperation is seen as an act of creating strong networks with employees in other work areas (Chakravarthy, Zaheer, & Zaheer, 2001).

P1: Knowledge Sharing Behavior is facilitated by attributes such as Communication/Collaboration, Motivation/Willingness, and Cooperation/Respect.

2.2 The Concept of Trust

One of the most important elements that always seem to influence learning in the organization is trust (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Trust is a psychological concept which influences an individual's behavior and intention. It has influence on acquisition and dissemination of knowledge and has significant impact on knowledge sharing activities (Webster & Wong, 2008).

In fact, the presence of trust between the source and recipient is a pre-condition for knowledge sharing between them (Levin et al., 2002). In other words, lack of trust is considered as a barrier to knowledge sharing (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). In addition, in order for trust to grow, employees must be willing to take risks and depend on each other (Mayer et al., 1995).

Moreover, trust involves believing that fellow co-workers are trustworthy and will continue to be trustworthy in uncertain situations (McEvily et al., 2003; Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). When the trust is established, it is expected that the recipient will not take advantage of this situation regardless of incentives offered (Chiles & McMackin, 1996; Mayer et al., 2013). The study of Davenport & Prusak (1998) indicate that financial motivations by themselves are not enough to encourage knowledge sharing among employees; the central influence in a social exchange relationship is trust.

However, the significance and importance of trust have been discussed by both scholars and practitioners, but still there is no any single model that includes all its aspects and dimensions of trust (Gillespie & Mann, 2005; Renzl, 2008). The review of literature indicates that trust comprises of four dimensions such as (a) trust on Each Other; (b) institutional trust; (c) trust in competence; and (d) trust in value (Mooradian et al., 2006; Okyere-Kwakye & Nor, 2011; Oginde, 2013; Lorenz, 2008; Thorgren & Wincent, 2011)

2.2.1 Dimensions of Trust

The interpersonal trust or trust on each other refers to the relationships among individuals (Lorenz 2008). Interpersonal trust defined as mutual belief and assurance between employees in terms of purpose and manner (Politis, 2003). Employees work well with one another when they have trust based on common goals and strong long term relationships (Colquitt et al., 2007).

Moreover, the institutional trust is described as the feeling of respect that employees have for their managers (Robinson, 2013). In order to establish institutional trust, employees must see that the fellow employee or manager actually deserves to be in that position of leadership (Amogbokpa, 2010) Employees are happier with management that possesses expertise, has personally attractive attributes and uses encouragement rather than coercion (du Plessis, 2005; Connelly & Kelloway, 2003).

Another important trust determinant is due to existence of trust to the other party's competencies and capabilities (McNeish & Mann, 2010). In fact, there are limitations to the transfer of knowledge if there is a perception on lack of reliability of the source or recipient. When the source of knowledge cannot seem to be trusted, their advice maybe openly challenged (Politis, 2003). The source of knowledge should have a solid reputation before it is used by other employees in the organization (Szulanski, 2000). However, trust noticeably enhances knowledge transfer, if source of knowledge is seen as trustworthy to the recipient, and as the result, they will pay more attention to collect and capture the knowledge that is transferred towards them (McNeish & Mann, 2010).

Finally, the trust in value derives from the fact that the individuals form a trustworthy relationship since they expect or perceive to have some positive consequence and value to them and also the individual involved in the act (Lorenz, 2008). In fact, this perception has a positive influence on behavior of individuals to participate in activities such as knowledge sharing voluntarily and willingly (Liu et al., 2010). The other aspect of the value refers to the usefulness of the act to both parties in which as the results encourage knowledge sharing among them (Politis, 2003).

P2: The Trust is facilitated by attributes such as Interpersonal Trust, Institutional Trust, Trust in Competence and Trust in Value.

2.3 Trusts and Knowledge Sharing Behavior Association

According to Mayer et al., (2013) and Colquitt, Scott, & LePine (2007), trust plays a pivotal role in attempting to improve employees' performance. Trust enables employees to feel comfortable to share knowledge and learn from others without having the fear (Lorenz, 2008). Relationships based on trust lead to greater amount of knowledge sharing because people are more willing to share knowledge that is useful and are also willing to listen to knowledge from other people (Mooradian et al., 2006; Becerra & Gupta, 2003). However, the perceived usefulness of knowledge received depends on the amount of trust that the parties have on each other's competence (Abrams et al., 2003).

P3: There is positive direct influence of organizational trust on knowledge sharing behavior.

2.4 Multigenerational Demographics

Moreover, the studies on knowledge sharing within organizations show that demographic factors could influence the relationship between knowledge sharing and other factors (Lorenz, 2008; Clark & Eisenstein, 2013). For instance, a study by Organ & Ryan (1995) indicates that employees' differences in gender has an impact on styles of communication among them and as the result, it has effect on knowledge sharing among them. Similarly, the existence of multiple generational workforces is another phenomenon which is common among many organizations (Benckendorff et al., 2010; Gursoy et al., 2008).

However, generation is described as a specific group which its members have been born in the same period, have experienced similar social and historical events during their lifetime and have been divided into three groups of first wave, main group and last wave (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Lancaster & Stillman, 2004). The review of literature identifies three main generational groups such as baby boomers, generation X, and millennials which are also known as generation Y or next generation; (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Lancaster & Stillman, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2008) Interestingly, nowadays it can be easily seen that in most organizations, the workforce consists of all three generations.

Meantime, the studies show that each generational group has its own desires, personalities and preferences (Clark & Eisenstein, 2013; Gursoy et al., 2008). As the result, these differences will cause problems such as misunderstanding, miscommunication and confusion (Lorenz, 2008). Furthermore, the other findings indicate that differences in age among firms' employees have direct relationship with their expectations, preferences and learning styles (Hu & Herrick, 2007).

In fact, each one of these generations has their own kinds of knowledge and experience which are highly beneficial and useful for companies if effectively shared (Raines & Zemke, 2000). However, those staffs that are belonging to the same generation have similar knowledge, beliefs, expositions, and enthusiasm (Raines & Zemke, 2000). However; the creating an environment which promotes frequent interactions among employees with different generational cohort can help to establish trust among them and the result, motivate them to share their knowledge with each other (Chatman, Polzer, & Barsade, 1998).

P4: The relationship between trust and knowledge sharing behavior is moderated by the multigenerational demographic of the organization.

2.5 Ability

Ability usually shows trustee's information, ability, or capability. This measurement suggests that creating trust relationships depend on the trustee being able to act appropriately and meet expectations of the trustor (Mayer & Gavin, 1998).

Many researches have quoted that to trust another person, a trustor must understand that the trustee has the aptitude or capability to achieve the main task (Sitkin & Pablo, 1992; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). Ability is articulated as that group of abilities and characteristics which enables a party to have control within some precise situation (Mayer et al., 1995).

The situation is specifically due to the fact that a manager may be very accomplished and trusted in one area but have little ability in another. For a manager to be trusted, employees must understand that he/she has the skills and ability to make a change for them. If a manager is known as capable to get something done about a particular subject, he or she is possible to be more trusted than a manager who is known as powerless in the situation (Waters & David, 2009).

P5: Perceived ability will positively affect trust

2.6 Benevolence

Ganesan & Hess, (1997) explains benevolence as “the extent to which a party believes that the benevolent party has intentions and motives beneficial to the party.” In the same way, Johnson et al. (1996) describe benevolence as “the degree to which a firm in the relationship believes that its partner has intentions of goodwill and will behave in a fashion beneficial to both.” Colquitt, Scott, & LePine (2007) and Dana (2008) describe benevolence as “the degree to which one party is genuinely interested in the other’s well-being and seeks joint gain.”

The classification of benevolence into three elements comes from separate reasons for benevolence. Benevolence may be based on emotions, intellectual evaluations, or institutions (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007; Zhang & Chelladurai, 2012).

P6: Perceived benevolence will positively affect organizational trust.

2.7 Integrity

Integrity states the degree to which the trustee sticks to principle satisfactory to the trustor. This element leads to trust, in accordance with the constancy of precedent actions, communication trustworthiness, dedication to standards of fairness, and the correspondence of the trustee’s word and deed (Colquitt et al., 2007).

An employee’s awareness of the general manager’s integrity includes the employee’s conviction that the general manager stays in a group of situations that the employee finds satisfactory. Such aspects as constancy, a reputation for sincerity, and fairness all add to the employee’s acuity of general manager integrity. Many researchers have theorized that constructs such as integrity are connected to trust (Dana, 2008; Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 2013). Even though an employee does not prefer a particular managerial decision, the employee may still trust the general manager if the employee believes that the general manager is just, truthful and just.

P7: Integrity will positively affect organizational trust.

2.8 Organizational Justice/ Fairness

Organizational justice pertains to the study of fairness within organizations settings and originates from work in social psychology focused on understanding, fairness issues in social interactions (Blodgett et al., 1997). Fairness perceptions concentrate on four types of situations: the outcomes that employees get from an organization (distributive justice), formal policies or processes used to determine outcome allocations (procedural justice), and the quality of interpersonal treatment they encountered (interactional or interpersonal justice) and information justice (Skarlicki et al., 1999). The study of Recently, Colquitt & Rodell, (2011) shown the similar discussion about justice and highlighted the pointed out the same construct of justice. Colquitt & Rodell, (2011) and Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, (2001) shown that these four dimensions of justice have differing correlates. However, the specific results of these four dimensions have yet to be analyzed in the performance appraisal literature.

With procedural justice relating strongly to global outcomes such as organizational commitment, interactional justice and leader outcomes such as supervisory satisfaction. Both informational and interpersonal justice contributes to the generally used interactional justice. supervisors and organizations can concentrate on giving explanations for performance objectives and standards and employees ratings more than treatment of employees during the procedure.

Distributive justice is the perceived fairness of the outcomes or allocations that a person receives (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011). Procedural justice refers to fairness issues pertaining to the methods, mechanisms, and process used to determine outcomes (Fang & Chiu, 2010).

Information justice refers to the truthfulness and justification used to explain procedures or decisions (Brotheridge, 2003).

P8: Fairness/Justice is facilitated by attributes such as Procedural justice, Distributive justice Interpersonal justice and Informational justice.

2.8.1 Justice to Trust

According to Kernan & Hanges, (2002) and Fang & Chiu (2010), justice is positively related to trust in management. Colquitt et al. (2001) also pointed out in their study related to trust in system-level authority figures that procedural and informational justice are both important predictors of trust. The application of this notion to the virtual community scenario get rid of the confusion feelings that the members may feel if the managers of the organization can explain how decisions are made. This encourages the members’ faith in the

integrity, ability, and benevolence of the managers, and makes them more willing to be involved in knowledge sharing activities (Fang & Chiu, 2010).

P9: Justice (organizational Justice) will positively affect organizational trust.

2.9 Reward Expectations

According to Eisenberger & Rhoades (2001) employees scale the establishment's appreciation towards promotion, pay and employment continuity. This is proven through calculative view of organizational commitment as suggested by Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro (1990) whereby performance can lead to rewards in the form of material. On the other hand, Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) states organization's dependability and supportiveness portrayed through recognition, promotions and pay supports explains the theory of organizational support. Reychav & Sharkie, (2010) explains that employee's believe that excellence in job performance will be rewarded based on the construct of reward expectancy.

Baer, Oldham, & Cummings (2003) also states that employee's perception that rewards is a reciprocation of their contribution to organization thus influencing their trust in organization. Employee's involvement in decision making has direct relation with rewards expectations. This support the statement cognition of supportive work environments based on reward structure encourages the decision making process (Reychav & Sharkie, 2010).

P10: Reward Expectation will positively affect organizational trust.

3. Conceptual Research Framework

Based on the findings from a review of literature, a research framework has been developed with the purpose of examining the relationship among benevolence, Ability, Integrity, Reward expectation, organizational Justice, Organizational trust and knowledge sharing behavior among multigenerational employees. The relationship between these variables are illustrated in Figure 1.

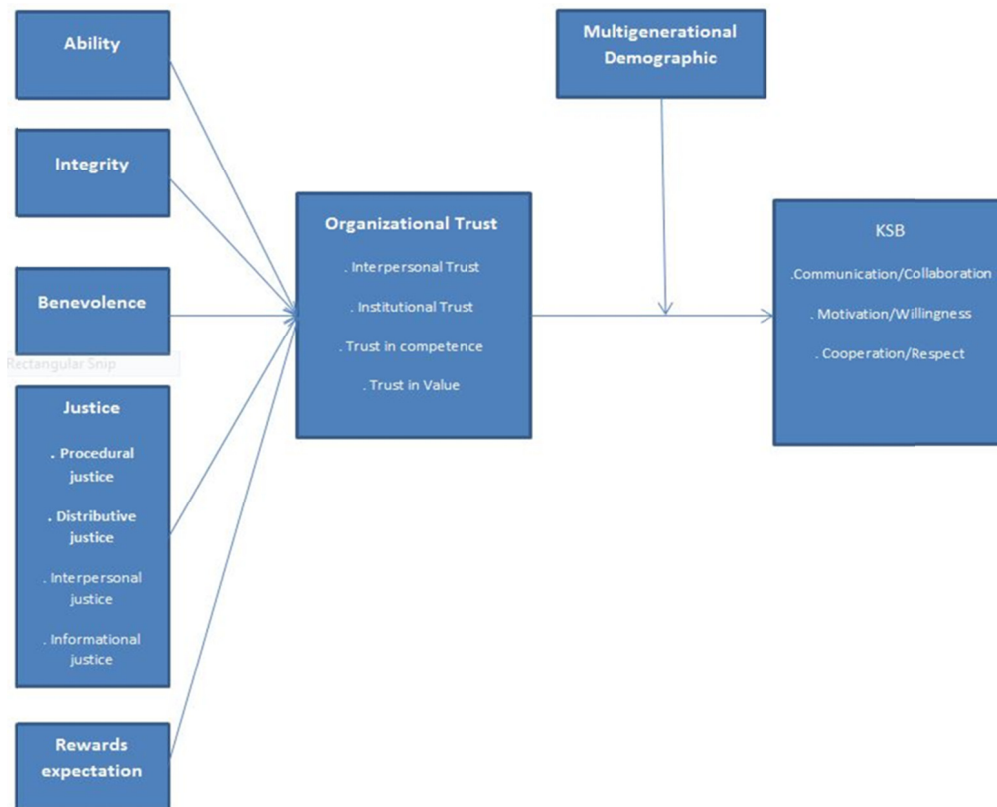


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

4. Discussion

This study extends the research on trust and knowledge sharing behavior among different generation in the workplace by examining different types of trust and finding the antecedents of trust within organizational settings.

As explained in the first section of this study the effective sharing of knowledge within organizations provides many benefits, these benefits could be for both firms and individuals. Though, in reality, a number of companies struggle with knowledge management and sharing knowledge (Bock et al., 2008).

Since the mid-1960s, the social science and management literature (e.g. Argyris (1964) cited in Evans, (1996)) has identified and recognized trust as a very important social factor that positively related to the organizational performance. In the recent literature, trust has been highly viewed as one of the core social factors facilitating knowledge sharing behavior.

The primary problem statement that prompted this paper was that of the need for employers to create an environment where knowledge sharing is nurtured for all generations of workers. Understanding how important it is to capture the impending loss of knowledge from retiring-age employees is a good motivator for management. This study was conducted with the intent to educate employers on what behaviors can help to increase the successfulness of knowledge sharing between generations.

Another important challenge which is described in this study was building the trust in the organization. For construction of the trust in the organization, this paper found all the attendance of trust. Organizational trust is called as a backbone of knowledge sharing behavior. However; we should find out that how can we build the trust in our organization. In this study all the antecedence of trust (Integrity, Benevolence, Ability, justice and Reward expectation) were identified and discussed.

5. Conclusion

The goal and main objective of this study was developing the new conceptual framework to determine the perception of all the trust (with all construct) related to knowledge sharing behavior among different generations. Other objectives for this study were to investigate the concept of trust, its meaning, antecedents, and outcomes as they apply to trust in organizations. This investigated the relationship among organizational trust, knowledge sharing behavior, reward expectation, benevolence, ability, integrity, justice and multigenerational employees. Perception of trust between the generations is much farther reaching than just sharing knowledge with each other. Generational gap affected the knowledge sharing process or moderating the relationship of trust and knowledge sharing behavior. Collaboration with colleagues of different generations to better understand each other and to build trust can promote knowledge sharing in the good way. Working together to build and share knowledge needed collaboration, cooperation, respect between the workers and also the willingness and motivation to help and work with each other. As people share what they know with each other, trust is refined which leads to further willingness and cooperation. Finally, one of the dominant discovery of this paper is that trust within an organization is a recognizable concept based on relationships.

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