The Effect of Organizational Culture on Knowledge sharing: A case study of Civil Service Bureau in Bahrain

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the effect of organizational culture on knowledge sharing (KS). Specifically the study examined the effect of trust, innovation, shared vision and conflict on KS. The study used a case study approach. An online survey was used to collect data. The survey was emailed to all 295 employees of the Civil Service Bureau in Bahrain. In total 102 questionnaires were received giving a response rate of 35%. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The study found that trust has a moderate positive and significant effect on KS (b=0.589***), shared vision has a very weak positive and significant effect on KS (b=0.098*), innovation has a weak positive and significant effect on KS (b=0.229***) and that conflict has a weak negative and significant effect on KS (b=0.199*). The study also found that the educational level had an effect on knowledge sharing.

1 Introduction

Among the many types of knowledge management activities, knowledge sharing (KS) is seen as fundamental because it enables individuals to acquire knowledge, be more innovative and ultimately contribute to enhancing organizational competitiveness (Wang, Wang, & Chang, 2019; Wang and Noe, 2010; Jackson et al., 2006). In order to accomplish this, employees are encouraged to purposefully share their knowledge with fellow employees therefore, allowing them to acquire diverse range of skills and competences (Renzl, 2008). But knowledge sharing requires a positive purposeful interpersonal interaction between employees. An environment built on trust, a shared vision of what needs to be learnt and personal innovation that guarantees that knowledge is generated to be shared. However, in practice, this is not easy to come by. Although most of employees' daily dealings and interactions at work are positive (Nezlek, Wheeler & Reis, 1983; Watson, 2000), research indicates that negative events, such as episodes of interpersonal conflict, hold more potency than positive events with regards to their effects on individual well-being (Rook, 2001; Taylor, 1991). This is why it has been considered necessary to examine what factors influence knowledge sharing, a key component of knowledge management (Osterloh & Frey, 2000). Therefore, many researchers have investigated the human and organizational factors that influence knowledge sharing.

There has been an abundance of literature investigating human factors such as trust, self-efficacy and personal value of knowledge. However, less attention has been given to conflict and even lesser combined trust, innovation and conflict in one study. This study attempts to investigate the effect of trust, innovation, shared vision and conflict on KS.

2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Knowledge Sharing

Davenport (1997) defined knowledge sharing as voluntary and distinguished it from reporting. While reporting involves the exchange of information based on some routines or structured formats, sharing implies a voluntary act by an individual who participates in the knowledge exchange even though there is no compulsion to do so. According to

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Hendriks (1999), knowledge sharing suggests a relationship between at least two parties — one that possesses the knowledge and the other that acquires the knowledge. Individuals in organizations have always created and shared knowledge and therefore knowledge sharing was considered to be an activity that took place automatically.

Knowledge sharing involves the interaction of activities that include dissimilation, feedback and absorption between individuals (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). The sharing of knowledge is recognized as a main and vital component of knowledge management, which requires employees' willingness to exchange and disseminate knowledge, consequently ensuring knowledge becomes available and is made known to other employees (Sohail & Daud, 2009). Enabling efficient knowledge sharing in organizations is not easy. The challenges are often related to motivating people to share knowledge, identifying the key people to share their knowledge, organizing the existing knowledge and making knowledge easily accessible (Logan, 2006).

There are a variety of factors which facilitate and interfere with the knowledge sharing practices of employees. It may be personal, social or organizational factors. The present study focuses on trust, innovation, shared vision and conflict in addition to demographic variables. Other factors that have been identified as influencing knowledge sharing behavior are sensitivity of knowledge (Weiss, 1999), organizational support and motivation (Szulanski, 2000; von Hippel, 1994), reciprocity and open communication (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) and trust (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1994).

2.2 Trust

A culture of trust is very important for effective knowledge sharing. For most of the processes which are related to knowledge trust is important for instance knowledge transparent creation, sharing and utilizing knowledge (Khesal, Samadi, Andira, Musram & Zohoori, 2013; Gilbert et al, 2000).Trust between the receiver and giver of knowledge is a facilitator of knowledge sharing practices in any organization. Blau (1964) contended that trust was crucial for keeping and growing links and relationships for sharing knowledge, and that result to a high quality knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing may be stimulated by trust (Holste and Fields, 2010; Kipkosgei, Son & Kang, 2020). Lack of trust is a significant barrier for KS in organizations (Mohajan, 2019). Lack of faith in others can be a barrier to share knowledge (Lee, 2018). It is assumed that trust can expedite communication as members with high trust toward others could share knowledge and information without delay therefore starting knowledge sharing.

Many researchers found a direct relationship between trust and knowledge sharing (Kim & Lee 2006; Chiu et al. 2006; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). The absence of trust means that little or no knowledge will be shared between organizational members (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000).

Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:
H1: the higher is the trust the more is knowledge sharing

2.3 Shared Vision

Researchers argued that shared vision include many facets of a cooperative relationship. It usually depicts common values and beliefs, mutual goals and understanding in a collaborative relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Parsons, 2002). It is the collective manner the employees perceive the world and understand it. It is made from collective assumptions, perceptions, understanding, goals and mental images (Wang & Rafiq, 2009).

Effective leaders have a vision for their organization, its purpose and its future direction. But their vision can fail if they are unable to transmit their objective in a meaningful manner to the employees so that alignment between management and staff is achieved. A vision has to be shared in order to do what it is meant to do; inspire clarity and focus the work of the organization. The shared vision implicitly shows what is important and what is not. What to collect and give attention and what to ignore. It shows the importance of knowledge and knowledge sharing.

A shared vision is closely linked to organizational culture. Researchers argued that an organizational culture creates a feeling of identity and belonging and commitment to its goals (Ha˚kanson, 1995). As such, a sound organizational culture can in a way help construct a shared vision between organizational members.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) argued that a shared vision embodies the collective goals and aspirations of the members of an organization. Furthermore, the pivotal role of a shared vision in inter-firm/unit sharing and exchanges was brought forward in the organizational cooperation literature. A shared vision is a necessary condition for sharing and exchange to occur (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Shared values and understandings between parties in an exchange relationship facilitate meaningful communication that is essential in both the exchange and combination required for knowledge creation. Yli-Renko et al. (2001), based on the previously mentioned work of Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) argued that shared vision enhances relative absorptive capacity (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998) in knowledge assimilation process in the exchange and

allows firms to engage more into knowledge acquisition and exploitation. Based on previous literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: the more is a shared vision the more is knowledge sharing

2.4 Innovation

Historically, there has always been an assumed relationship between innovation and knowledge creation. That is to say it is believed that innovation entails the generation of new knowledge. Many researchers adopted this perspective. For example, Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) argued that innovation consists of an ongoing pursuit of harnessing new and unique knowledge; Du Plessis (2007) identified innovation with the creation of new knowledge and ideas to facilitate new business outcomes; and Lundvall and Nielsen (2007, p. 214) who stated that ''innovation represents – by definition – something new and therefore adds to existing knowledge''. More importantly an innovation culture is conducive for knowledge sharing as it encourages organizational members to express themselves freely and openly bringing out novel ideas (Lu, Zhou & Leung, 2009). Based on the previous discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: the higher is individual innovation the more is knowledge sharing

2.5 Conflict

There little research on individual or interpersonal conflict and knowledge sharing (Liang et al., 2007). Interpersonal conflicts are defined as disagreement among team members (Robinson& Shaver, 1973), and involve personal issues such as mutual dislike among team members. Pondy (1967) argued that conflict can be understood more appropriately if it is considered a dynamic process that underlies a variety of behaviors and can be analyzed through a sequence of inter-related episodes. Different forms of conflicts among individuals in a group or organization can lead to different ways in which the related individuals share and use knowledge, which may, in turn, lead to different performance-related outcomes (Jehn, 1997). Conflicts among parties are usually disruptive, deviant and unproductive activities (Putnam, 1994). A recent meta-analysis (Pelled et al. 1999) suggests that both task and interpersonal conflicts are consistently linked with worse performance, and can negatively affect performance and satisfaction of an organization.

Although a few recent works have emphasized the significance of considering these two factors to gain an understanding of knowledge sharing issues, they either take conflicts as implicit consequences of trust and/or knowledge sharing (Huang, 2009; Rechberg & Syed, 2013), or take trust as an implicit and unexamined consequence of interpersonal conflicts (Kakar, 2018).

H4: the higher is the conflict the less is knowledge sharing

3 Methodology

3.1 Population and Sample

The study used a case study approach. The population of the study consisted of all employees of the Civil Service Bureau in Bahrain. An online survey was sent by email to all 295 employees and managers. In total 102 questionnaires were received giving a response rate of 35%.

3.2 Measures

Organizational culture was measured by measuring its different dimensions: trust, shared vision, innovation and conflict. Using a five item Likert scale Trust was measured by 6 items developed by Sabbir and Hussain (2014). Shared vision was measured by 5 statements developed by Griese et al., (2012). Innovation was measured by 3 statements developed by McKnight et al., (2002). Conflict was measured by 5 statements asking about certain events that the participants may have faced developed by Ilies, et al. (2011). A within-individual study of interpersonal conflict as a work stressor: Dispositional and situational moderators by Ilies, Johnson, Judge, and Keeney (2010). The dependent variable, knowledge sharing was measured by 6 items developed by Valasek (2009).

3.3 Data Collection

An online questionnaire was developed. It consisted of 19 statements measuring the study variables and the demographic variables. An email was sent to all 295 employees at the Civil Service Bureau in Bahrain. In total 102 questionnaires were received giving a response rate of 35%.

The reliability of the variables was measured by Alpha Cronback. Table 1 shows the Alpha Cronback of all variables. Except for conflict all variables exhibited high reliability with values exceeding the accepted 0.5.

Table 1: Alpha Cronbachs' value.

Variable	Alpha Cronbach
Trust	0.6
Shared vision	0.9
Innovation	0.8
Conflict	0.4
Knowledge Sharing	0.8

4 Data Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis.

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis results

Variable	Regression coefficients B	Standardized coefficients	Calculated t value	
Constant	1.070	1.070	2.206	
Trust	0.589	0.589	5.489	
Conflict	-0.199	-0.199	-2.416	
Innovation	0.229	0.229	3.380	
Shared vision	0.098	0.098	1.758	
Multiple (R) correlation coefficient	0.650			
Determination coefficient (R2)	0.422			
Calculated F	17.545			
Significance	0.000			

The study found that trust has a moderate positive and significant effect on KS (b=0.589***), innovation has a weak positive and significant effect on KS (b=0.229***), shared vision has a very weak positive and significant effect on KS (b=0.098*) and that conflict has a weak negative and significant effect on KS (b=0.199*). T test was used to determine if there was significant differences in knowledge sharing according to gender. The results showed no significant differences according to gender. ANOVA was conducted to test for differences in knowledge sharing according to education, experience and job level. The results showed that only education had a significant effect on knowledge sharing.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

This study aimed at investigating the effect of organizational culture on knowledge sharing (KS). The study found evidence that the higher is trust the higher is KS which is consistent with many studies such as Kim and Lee (2006), Chiu et al. (2006), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), Lee (2018) and Butler and Murphy (2007). The study also found support that the existence of a shared vision results in higher KS. This is in accordance with the literature and studies such as Yli-Renko et al. (2001), Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) and Lane and Lubatkin (1998). The study also found support that the higher is individual innovation the higher is KS. This is consistent with the literature especially the studies of Subramaniam and Youndt (2005); Du Plessis (2007) Lundvall and Nielsen (2007). The study found evidence that the higher is conflict the less is KS. This is consistent with the studies such as (Jehn, 1997), Putnam (1994) and Pelled et al. (1999). The results are in accordance also with the organizational culture that exists at the Civil Service Bureau in Bahrain as there is a culture if trust and innovation among employees. Being a government organization helps a lot as it reduces conflict among employees.

Governmental organizations in Bahrain seem to have less competition among employees and there is a great emphasis on tolerance, brotherhood and kindness. This is also helped by leadership with translates into a shared vision that also builds on trust and innovation. There exists many schemes for innovation that rewards employees in the government sector generally and at the Civil Service Bureau in Bahrain specifically.

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