Shared goals, Social Trust and Knowledge Sharing in Peshawar University: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to understand the importance of knowledge-sharing factors such as shared goals and social trust on knowledge sharing in University of Peshawar. Data from 244 randomly selected respondents from the target population have been collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested for its validity and reliability. In order to test the hypothesis of the study, multiple regression analysis has been employed. Findings indicate that shared goals and social trust both are positive and significant predictors of knowledge sharing. In the model, shared goals happen to be the most influential factor within the overall model. This research addresses the gap on knowledge sharing in general and in Universities which appears very sparse. As a social research, the study has its limitations. The research findings have both practical as well theoretical implications. Recommendations for further research have also been provided.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing; shared goals; social trust; social capital; Peshawar University.

Introduction

Researchers agree with the fact that effective and efficient utilization of organizational resources is only possible through knowledge management (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Zboralski, 2009). Knowledge management plays vital role in providing directions to properly utilizing knowledge resources for better functioning of an organization. This focus on knowledge has caused the shift from dependency on natural resources to intellectual assets (Omotayo, 2015). However, this theoretical recognition must be complemented by the actual application. This paradigm shift has exposed organizations to a knowledge challenge of how to create, disseminate and use knowledge (Vines, Jones, & McCarthy, 2015). Coping with this challenge has now become the question of

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survival for any organization. In other words, organizations' dependency on knowledge has got intensified.

"An organization's ability to effectively leverage its knowledge is highly dependent on its people, who actually create, share, and use the knowledge" (Ipe, 2003, p. 341). To strengthen this ability of an organization, it needs to develop a set of behaviors (Chow & Chan, 2008). However, before strengthening this capability, organization needs to encourage active interaction among the employees, employing various techniques to convert individual knowledge into organizational knowledge (Ardichvili, Maurer, Li, Wentling, & Stuedemann, 2006). Only technology will not serve the purpose, it is more about relationships among the employees that promote learning and information exchange (McInerney & Mohr, 2007). Employees' motivation is critical in making them part of this activity because employees consider knowledge their property and have been found generally reluctant to share it (Du Plessis, 2007; Schmetz, 2002).

Keeping in view the importance of knowledge sharing for organizations, researchers have explored various factors in relation to knowledge e.g. social network (Guo & Chen, 2010), social trust (Cheng-Hua, Yuan-Duen, Wei, & Li-Ting, 2007), shared goals (Chow & Chan, 2008), individual's perception and awareness of the situation (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Khan, Miah, & Manzoor, 2014) regarding KS sharing. Among all these, the authors believe that shared goals and social trust are comparatively more ubiquitous in our culture as compared to the rest, therefore, this paper attempts to empirically investigate the perception of employees from Peshawar University to validate otherwise the past results in other settings and cultures.

Literature Review

Knowledge and knowledge management (KM)

The term knowledge is not new to the world, but its relative importance has started gaining central role, because people have started, recently, noticing that among many other factors this factor is contributing to strengthen the backbone of any organization. Ultimately, it leads towards the success of organizations. Keeping that in mind, many authors, researchers and philosophers have explained it from various aspects. For example, knowledge is true belief which is justifiable (Nonaka, Krogh, & Voelpel, 2006). Knowledge has also been described as the understanding of human, objects, concepts, theories and also the way things are handled (Antal, 2000).

"Knowledge management may simply be defined as doing what is needed to get the most out of knowledge resources" (Irma & Rajiv, 2010, p. 39). It is

considered as a process of creation, assimilation, dissemination and application of organizational knowledge to explore new opportunities that helps in the enhancement of organizational performance (Yang, 2011). Knowledge management, in the recent most scenarios, has become the main constituent of management. It is commonly believed that knowledge management was recognized as a field to serve the business world as a tool of business in the early 1990s when it was promoted by the 4 Cs (Computing availability; Consulting; Conference; and Commerce) concept. In the words of Lambe (2011), it was "fueled by a confluence of computing availability, propagation through consulting firms, and conference promotion" (p. 179).

Knowledge sharing

Extant literature is replete with the fact that knowledge sharing is the most important ingredient that plays vital role in the development of an organization (Lee, 2001; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Shin, 2004). Researchers also witness KS as an important and key factor of KM processes in organizations (Das & Van-de-Ven, 2000; Lee, 2001; Yassin, Salim, & Sahari, 2013). It is believed that knowledge held by an employee in an organization must be transferred to other workers for its proper utilization and effectiveness

The literature on KM has been using various terms for KS. The most commonly used term for KS is knowledge transfer (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004; Massa & Testa, 2009; Yahya & Goh, 2002). Notwithstanding, there is a difference between the two. Researchers argue that knowledge transfer refers to the application of current knowledge from one person to another. This describes that it takes place in one direction which gives an assumption that the main source of knowledge is the owner. Whereas, KS is considered a broader term than knowledge transfer. KS deals with the interactions, absorptions and invention of new knowledge which is believed to be in two directions and occurs between two or more individuals (Boyd, Ragsdell, & Oppenheim, 2007).

Social trust and knowledge sharing

To understand the complicated process of knowledge sharing social trust has its own distinctive position. Trust by definition is "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, with the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust or, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Liao, 2006, p. 229). This abstraction has been found having positive and significant relationship with tacit knowledge sharing (Lin, 2007). For Hsu et al.(2007), trust is the collective name to "emotional bonds between individuals", and is the predictor of knowledge sharing behavior, and has an indirect relationship with KS through self-efficacy.

Similarly, Cheng-Hua, Yuan-Duen, Wei, & Li-Ting (2007) found that trust has a significant positive correlations with knowledge sharing. These views have support in the research by Chowdhury and Sanjib (2005). According to them, both "affect-based trust and cognition-based trust have significant positive correlation with knowledge sharing.

While researching the role of IT and online communication, many researchers suggest that greater level of trust is built through teamwork, and online communication affects task conflict, which as a result enhances the level of KS in organization (Ismail & Yusof, 2010). Similarly, Hung and Chuang (2009) exerts that trust within organization facilitates knowledge sharing behavior among employees. Others expressing their ideas about trust as a knowledge sharing factor state that trust plays a vital role in the establishment of KS behavior among employees which is positively and significantly related to KS (Chow and Chan 2008). In simple words, there is wide range of consensus in recognizing the importance of trust as a key and crucial factor in sharing knowledge in an organization (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Kramer, 1999; Nelson & Cooprider, 1996; O'dell & Grayson, 1998; Wathne, Roos, & Krogh, 1996; Zand, 1972).

H1.   The higher the organizational members' social trust among each other with respect to knowledge sharing, the organization will experience more knowledge sharing.

Shared goals and knowledge sharing

Researchers and consultants hold that knowledge sharing is a somewhat reciprocal activity. This reciprocation becomes coherent if employees have common vision and goals which will help in gluing them in a successful relationship. Shared goals are defined as the "goals that articulate what the teams stand for and their shared vision" (Global, 2017). If employees work in disarray, one can hardly think of opportunities, where their individual tacit knowledge could find a channel for sharing with one another. It could be easily understood by an example that individuals with incomplete information usually provide incorrect feedback based upon their own assumptions while filling the blanks. Moreover, a team is not considered a team until it moves in the same direction and a team of individuals needs a common purpose to serve the need of the organizations. The existence of a coherent team appears to be instrumental in actuating KS. This coherence, in turn, can be achieved if the team members have some shared goals which would enable them to move towards to achieve the end (Larsen, 2005). And that is why, there is a general consensus that management must establish a clear mission and goal to enhance the contribution of the employees to contribute in sharing knowledge happily (Yu & Chu, 2007) .

To make it more understandable, Chow and Chan (2008) explain that shared goals directly and indirectly affect the knowledge sharing behavior of the individuals. Their empirical findings revealed a positive relationship between shared goals and attitude towards knowledge sharing and subjective norms for sharing knowledge. These findings have been validated by recent research by Bautista and Bayang (2015). These researchers believe that shared goals facilitate knowledge sharing in an organization, which helps in the establishment of trust culture, cooperation and participation in an organization. Findings of Bautista and Bayang (2015) disclose that SG are significantly related to knowledge sharing and supports subjective norms and intention to KS.

H2. The wider the shared goals among organizational members, the greater the knowledge sharing experience in an organization.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Social Capital

The concept of social capital has a thorough bearing on organization (J.S. Coleman, 1988; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Okoli & Oh, 2007). By definition it is "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). It is considered capital because it strongly influences the interpersonal knowledge sharing that occurs (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006). Besides its positive influences, researchers (Willem & Scarbrough, 2006) have studied its potential negative effect of power and organizational politics and warn managers to be mindful of its role in knowledge sharing. To understand it as a wholesome construct, researchers (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) have deciphered it into three distinct dimensions - structural, relational and cognitive. While providing detail of these dimensions, Chow and Chan (2008) opine that the structural dimension defines organizational network relations, communication system and hierarch; the second reflects the trust level that employees enjoy during communications; and the last one "refers to resources increasing understanding between parties" (p. 459). These authors have empirically investigated two different social factors to show the two dimensions of social capital with ''trust'' as ''social trust'' and shared goals (p. 459). Stakeholders in the organization are strategically required to have a thorough knowledge of the interdependence of these dimensions of and their composite influence on knowledge sharing in organization.

From the knowledge sharing point of view, the role of social capital has been discussed by researchers e.g. Van den Hooff, B., & Huysman, M. (2009) by distinguishing two approaches, including: the engineering approach; and the

emergent approach. According to them in the former, knowledge is manageable which means management is the determining factor in the process of knowledge sharing; while in the latter, it is the social capital that manages the process of knowledge sharing. They further elaborate that they cannot be compartmentalized. They hypothesized that each engineering factor positively affects all the three dimensions of social capital. From their research they conclude that both emergent and engineering approaches have their respective role in knowledge sharing.

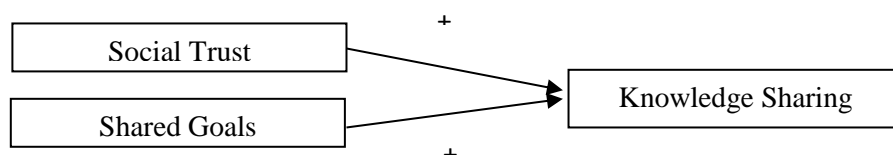Based on the above discussion the following conceptual model is proposed:

Figure 2   Conceptual Model of the Study

Methodology

The current research study is a survey study based on an adapted questionnaire from Chow and Chan (2008) with simple customization. Total population, as per Peshawar University Prospectus (2015-16)[2], is 502, the total faculty members including lecturers, assistant professors and full professors of the target population (as per University site). Simple random sampling technique has been employed with a sample size of 244 respondents. To assess the measure model data was collected through questionnaire which has personally been administered, keeping in view all the research ethics, like confidentiality, voluntary participation, etc., in mind. Besides, validity and reliability of the instrument have been checked through expert's opinions, correlation matrix, and pilot testing. Cronbach's alpha for reliability (Social Trust = 0.74, Shared Goals = 0.76, & Knowledge Sharing = 0.87) is being used. Particularly for this research Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20th edition was used initially for descriptive analysis. Finally, regression analyses were made by using the OLS method with the help of SPSS.

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[2] Peshawar University Prospectus - 2015-16.

Results

Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics

Though the sample for current study was calculated as 250 but a total of 317 questionnaires were distributed to the 20 departments of University of Peshawar for better output. In total, 244 questionnaires were collected back after getting filled. The response rate remained 84%. It is believed that descriptive statistics for nominal or ordinal data is significant only for providing an overview and summary statistics such as frequencies and percentages (Gaur & Gaur, 2006). Therefore, detailed description of the respondents is provided in various frequency tables in the subsequent section. Demographic variables used in the study includes: University Name, age, gender, designation, current and total experience.

Frequency tables for the demographic profile of the respondents

Age

Table 1 provides the detail descriptive analysis about the age of the respondents. The table clearly shows that most of the respondents are of the middle age (n= 67) and seniors (n= 83) comprising a valid percentage of 34 and 27 respectively, followed by young age (n= 65) in terms of categories used with a percentage value of 26.6, while the ratio of last category (n= 29) is about 11.9 percent.

Table 1 Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Valid Percent
25-35	65	26.6
36-45	67	27.5
46-55	83	34.0
56 & above	29	11.9
Total	**244**	**100.0**

Gender

Table 2 provides the gender wise detail of the respondents. The table indicates that greater number of females (n= 130) has responded to the survey, comprising a valid percentage of 53.4, whereas, the percentage of male respondents is 46.7 (n=117).

Table 2 Gender wise responses

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Female	130	53.3
Male	114	46.7
Total	**244**	**100.0**

Designation

Table 3 indicates the designation wise detail of the respondents. The table shows most of the respondents are Assistant Professors (n= 107), comprising a valid percentage of 43.9, followed by Lecturers (n=80) with a percentage of 32.8, and then by Professors (n=57) with a valid value of 23%.

Table 3 Employment Details

Designation	Frequency	Valid Percent
Lecturer	80	32.8
AP	107	43.9
Prof	57	23.4
Total	**244**	**100.0**

Experience

Table 4 indicates the total experience wise detail of the respondents. The table shows most of the respondents are in the category of 1-5 (n=19.7), 11-15 (n= 20) respectively, followed by highly experienced people (n= 43) 17 %, while the ratio of last category represents only 7 percent responses (n= 17).

Table 4 Experience of the respondents

Experience	Frequency	Valid Percent
1-5 yrs	48	19.7
6-10 yrs	43	17.6
11-15 yrs	49	20.1
16-20 yrs	44	18.0
21-25 yrs	43	17.6
25 & above	17	7.0
Total	**244**	**100.0**

Regression analysis

The statistics in the form of model summary provided in table 6 explain that adjusted R square which is 0.68 for overall model which is accepted as a good model (Nau, 2017). But other researchers argue that Adjusted R square value may also be less than 50% in studies of human behavior, and these can also be conducted as good values, as long as predictors are significant (Editor, 2014).

Data have been checked for normality, multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity prior running the final equation, where all three assumptions are satisfied. The multiple regression model with all two predictors produced adjusted $R^2 = 0.31$, F (56), $p < .000$. As can be seen in table 5 that social trust and shared goals have significant positive regression weights, confirming that employee's knowledge of the situation, and social network as important factors to support the process of knowledge sharing in organizations.

Table 5 Regression model and hypotheses testing

Independent variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
(Constant)	.866	.261		3.314	.001
SG	.476	.053	.491	9.046	.000
ST	.221	.060	.199	3.662	.000
a. Dependent Variable: KS					

Discussion

The effect of Social Trust on Knowledge Sharing

The current study hypothesized that social trust is a positive predictor of knowledge sharing. The empirical results of the study supported this hypothesis (path coefficient of 0.19, the t-value of 3, and p-value .000), which showed that trust had a positive significant influence on knowledge sharing. Thereby, it lent support to several studies (Aycan et al., 2000; Chowdhury, 2005; J.S. Coleman, 2005; Ismail & Yusof, 2010; Wing S. Chow & Chan, 2008;. There could be many reasons. One most promenent reason is trust by itself a very poisitive human behaviour that engenders positive behaviour among those with whom one interacts. Second, possible reason may be that faculty members are convinced that the shared knowledge would be appropraitely used by the other co-workers. Third, in organizational interactions, trust offers a way to accept knowledge in the nonexistence of ways to verify its veracity. That is why Khesal, Samadi, Musram, and Zohoori (2013) believe that when there is lack of trust in an organization, members of that organization are often scared of losing their position in the organization by passing on the knowledge to the other members. And it results in a non-sharing attitude. Therefore, the role of trust in knowledge sharing is beyond doubt.

However, there is a need of creating and encouraging an environment wherein social trust nourishes and where individuals could easily understand and be sure that the rest of the members and the organization are interested to use their knowledge to benefit them. This would only be possible by constructing a sense

of competence and benevolence-based trust between the source and knowledge seekers. Although trust can only be obtained by peoples' interaction and their firsthand negotiation, still managers and supervisors' role is substantial in creating the circumstances through which trust is established and fostered (Levin, Cross, Abrams, & Lesser, 2002). Hence, the organizations need to establish trust in order to promote knowledge sharing.

The effect of Shared Goals on Knowledge Sharing

The current study hypothesized that shared goals are positive predictors of knowledge sharing. The empirical results of the study supported this hypothesis (the path coefficient of 0.49, the t-value of 9, and p-value .000), which validated the view that shared goals strongly affect knowledge sharing in the target population. It means that if organizational goals are shared among employees, they feel more inclined towards passing knowledge to other members and organizations experience more knowledge sharing. This is also because they believe that "the force that holds people together and lets them share what they know" (Chow & Chan, 2008, p. 460). These findings are in line with previous studies on the effect of shared goals on knowledge sharing (Chow & Chan, 2008; Kim, 2018).

The general environment of any business requires that there should prevail a positive attitude among the employees. And this attitude nourishes if the business sets definite goals that are required to be achieved and that they be shared with all. If both employees and management feel separated from these goals, it becomes difficult for an organization to achieve overall objectives; therefore, shared goals play vital role for an organization to move ahead and sustain and grow a business over the long haul by expediting the process of knowledge sharing (Kooser). Goal sharing has been termed as the product of shared understanding which greatly affects knowledge sharing (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Sharing of goals is advocated, because this behavior promotes both integration and combined responsibility because organizations define and enact shared goals along with its mission and values from the context of exchanging knowledge and taking collective actions (James S. Coleman, 1990). It is clear from the discussion that it becomes easier for an organization to integrate all the components of the organization because shared vision, mission and goals bring collective responsibility on employees.

It can therefore be concluded, from the above discussion- that there exists a positive link between goal sharing and knowledge sharing. Therefore, if organizations decided to promote shared understanding, it is inevitable to share organizational goals, which would increase the knowledge sharing in organizations.

Conclusion

In this study efforts were made to explore the effects of certain factors impacting knowledge sharing among employees in an academic organization. Specifically, the study's focus was on the examined faculty members, in a large public sector university of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main interest of the scholar was to analyze the effect of shared goals, and social trust on the knowledge sharing behavior of the employees. A conceptual model was empirically tested. The results of the study model specified that both the independent indicators have significant bearing on the dependent indicator. In other words, if organizations develop and practice shared goals and builds social trust among employees, it will not only help to better knowledge sharing environment but will also help to convert individual knowledge to organizational knowledge. Therefore, it is understood from the results that this study contributes practically for the policy makers of education sectors, special Govt bodies working on knowledge transfer programs (KTPs) for formulating more realistic policies in order to promote knowledge sharing in organizations. In the end, the study could not be generalized to the greater extent, as it is limited to only University of Peshawar due to certain limitations; although, it may be recommended for future studies to take this study as a base for exploration in other infrastructures such as banking sectors or even education sector at broader level. Also, this study could check the effect of only two variables from quantitative perspective; other researchers may adopt qualitative perspective and use more variables and should consider this study as avenues for further research into the field.

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