

Knowledge sharing Behavior among the Academics in the Thai Higher Education Institutes – An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive world, knowledge is considered as the most vital component for organization including higher education institute's continuous success. Knowledge is acknowledged as the individual's wisdom, intellects and are only recognizable through their way of work, procedures, customs, norms and is hard to imitate by others. Knowledge sharing not only decreases manufacturing or service costs, it also leads to the organization's performance because knowledge sharing helps to eliminate errors and improves the ability to be innovative. Generally, knowledge workers are often reluctant to share their knowledge with others thinking that their power will be reduced in the organization. The purpose of this study is to provide a clear understanding of academic's knowledge sharing behavior in the higher education institutes. This study attempts to explore the motivational factors such of academics that contribute in knowledge sharing behavior in the educational institute. This study also considered extrinsic reward and employee commitment to understand the academics knowledge sharing behavior. Theory of reasoned action was used in this study to understand to human behavior in knowledge sharing. Public and private universities in Bangkok will be considered for data collection. Non-probability convenience sampling technique will be adopted to get the maximum participation among the academics. The result will provide a useful insight about how educational institute influence the academics' knowledge sharing attitudes, intention and behavior. The outcome of this research will lead to the development of well-informed and intelligent human resources in Thailand to improve the knowledge economy.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing behavior, TRA, Higher Education Institute, Thailand, Academics

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the past few years the utilization of knowledge has gained a great deal of attention among the scholars, while knowledge is the most crucial asset for any organization, (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). In the environment of business, knowledge is perceived as the competitive advantage for continual success of the organization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). To be specific, knowledge is connected to the knowledge workers. The knowledge workers have higher qualification and skills, and also contribute in taking significant strategies and

decisions for the organizational success. Knowledge management is thus no more a fallacy, but has been recognized as the crucial feature to an efficient business environment for organizations including Higher Education Institutes (HEI). For a growing organization, knowledge sharing among the employees or the professionals is indispensable. Knowledge is identified as people's intellect and only recognizable through their way of doing the work or task, and cannot be imitated by others (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Davenport and Prusak (1998) described in their studies that human beings are generally reluctant to share information as they believe that the power and authority in the organization can decline. In spite of that, efficient organizations inspire employee's knowledge sharing to minimize errors in order to gain competitive advantage in the market (Gruenfeld et al., 2000).

In the Higher Education Institute, knowledge sharing alludes to the exchange of academic's both current and new knowledge through research and teaching between experts and students to add more competitive advantages for the institutions. Several studies have mentioned that commonly two-third of the knowledge a person gets via communications and meetings with others, and the rest derives from documents (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). As stated by Davenport and Prusak (1998), knowledge sharing includes three key activities that are dissemination of information, feedback, and absorption among individuals. From this viewpoint, academics in HEIs are inspired to collaborate and work together to share their expertise in creating new ideas and develop their professional skills in order to achieve the objectives of organizations (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000).

Not only are faculty members in HEIs encouraged to generate new ideas, but also, they share their current experience, among others. Knowledge sharing is the most vital aspect of knowledge management, and the academics must have a positive attitudes, mindset and willingness in exchanging and disseminating knowledge with others (Sadiq and Daud, 2009). According to the National Research Council of Thailand's (NRCT) policy, Thailand wants to focus and develop on the knowledge-based economy to increase the competitiveness of the country (Breu & Hemingway, 2004). In order to gain competitiveness with a knowledge-based economy, it is important to promote knowledge-sharing behavior among academics to boost institutional efficiency. In the past, numerous studies have found the influencing factors and its effects on knowledge sharing in the organizations, but there are not many studies that focus on academics' knowledge sharing intention and behavior in Thailand (Majid & Lim, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2006; Bock et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2009). Therefore, this current study aims to focus on factors that influence the knowledge sharing behavior among the academics representing the teaching professionals in Thailand's HEIs.

Significance of the Study

As stated by Drucker (1993. p. 193), the sharing of knowledge among professionals helps achieving the competitive position of all organizations, including HEIs., Academics in the HEIs, not only exchange expertise, but also become interested in generating new knowledge for the knowledge-based economy to achieve competitiveness. (Breu & Hemingway, 2004). Thus, it is essential for the HEIs academics to be involved and inspired in knowledge creation and knowledge sharing to enhance the competencies. For that reason, the intention and behavior of knowledge sharing between academia are essential. Hopefully, this study will facilitate knowledge management process in Thailand's higher education area. The result of this study will contribute to Thailand to develop well-informed and intellectual human capitals to boost the knowledge economy.

The Objectives of the Study

The study aims to focus on the following objectives:

- a. Examine the success of knowledge sharing behavior among academics of higher education institutions in Thailand.
- b. Examine the factors that influence knowledge sharing intentions and knowledge sharing behavior of academia of HEIs.

Research Question:

Based on the facts and issues from the statements of the problem this study has one research question.

What are the motivators that influence the Thai academicians in knowledge sharing behavior?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge and Knowledge Management

Knowledge is not a straightforward concept, rather it is complex with multi-layered meaning. According to Davenport and Prusak (1998), knowledge is a “fluid mix of formal structure, which exists within people”. Nonaka (1994) stated in his study, that knowledge is created by individuals, not by organization. He further mentioned that organization facilitates the individuals to create knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Miller and Shamsie (1996) mentioned in their studies that knowledge is regarded as the most valuable asset, for the continual organizational development. On the other hand, Cronin (2001) acknowledged in his study that for the creation of knowledge, HEIs is the perfect place. It is predictable that academics will share their knowledge spontaneously in the university context. Polanyi (1966) stated that “We can know more than we can tell”. Several scholars mentioned in their studies that knowledge can be either tacit or explicit (Polanyi, 1958, 1966; Nonaka, 1994). In another study, Smith (2001) stated that, both tacit and explicit knowledges are possessed by every individual working in the organization. However, tacit knowledge is practical and hard to share through words, rather it is deeply rooted (Nonaka, 1994). Some previous studies mentioned that to share tacit knowledge there is a need of face-to-face communications between employees who work together in the organization (Koskinen, Pihlanto & Vanharanta, 2003; Fernie et al., 2003). As Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explained in their studies that organizations must be able to connect and capture tacit knowledge from individuals. On the other hand, it is much easier to transfer explicit knowledge between employees as it can be easily found in books, manuals, library collections, files, archives or database (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Elizabeth, 2001). Ipe (2013) stated that for any individual it is easier to share explicit knowledge than tacit knowledge. Some previous studies mentioned that to increase competitive advantage, organizations require to have more tacit KS than explicit knowledge (Thompson, 1967; Edmondson, 2002). Bartol and Srivastava (2002) revealed in their study that generally academics share knowledge through either publishing books, research articles, or during the seminar, workshop or conferences. In this study, both are considered as important for academics in the HEIs.

Whether it is the field of business or among the academic course, knowledge management’s popularity has begun around the mid-90s (Grant, 2007). As stated by Dubon (1998), knowledge management supports a coherent approach to knowledge recognition, assessment,

and sharing. The process includes collecting, organizing and examining the knowledge of individuals and/or groups in the organization (Omotayo, 2015). Davenport and Prusak (1998) defined knowledge management as a method of collecting, storing, distributing and using the knowledge. Gibbert and Krause (2002) mentioned in their studies that individuals either obtain or generate knowledge, and it is their own willingness to share knowledge with others within the organization.

Social Network

Grandori and Soda (1995) defined social network as the social relationship between persons with no formal agreements. In the social network, social interaction between knowledge workers gives a forum in cultivating old and new ideas. When employees in organizations have good association with each other they prefer to share their knowledge and expertise. In the HEIs perspective, academics are connected to other scholars which create the opportunity and encourage them in sharing knowledge (Fauzi et al., 2019). Wang and Noe (2010) described that when academics encounter other individuals with the same interests or similar fields, knowledge sharing is increased. As a result, social networking between scholars helps in generating new knowledge in the institutions (Fauzi et al., 2019). Typically, people are only persuaded to share their thoughts and ideas with the known person. In accordance with this Davenport (2005) mentioned in his study that experts normally share their knowledge when the social network is known. Thus, a large number of peers from internal and external can develop a network of knowledge sharing which will be benefited for the institutions, students, and society (Chow & Chan, 2008). From the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Academics of Thai HEIs with higher social network has a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing

Commitment

Commitment is one of the foremost features for knowledge creation. In accordance to that Polanyi (1966) said, the creation of human knowledge comes from commitment. Coleman (1990) described in his study that commitment emerges from the recurrent interactions for future actions. In general, individuals have a greater propensity to contribute sharing of knowledge in institutions by daily cooperation with others. Nonaka (1994) identified three factors that encourage the commitment of people in the workplace; intention, autonomy, and fluctuation. Intention was outlined as the attitude of individuals to make a sense of the environment; autonomy was defined as the freedom of work that allows them to produce new information in the organization, and fluctuation was identified as the chaos and disturbance encountered by individuals in the environment. Academics with greater commitment towards the institution boost the attitude and intention towards sharing of knowledge with other scholars. Some previous studies mentioned that commitment has a positive association with knowledge sharing attitude (Chen et al., 2012; Hooff & Weenen, 2004, Abili et al., 2011). From the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Academics of Thai HEIs having higher commitment has a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing

Extrinsic Reward

Numerous scholars claimed that individuals are encouraged in knowledge sharing when they are awarded rewards, recognition, and benefits (Constant et al., 1994; Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001). On the contrary, it was Bock and Kim (2002) debated that there is a negative association between extrinsic reward and knowledge sharing behavior. They also claimed that rewards cause competitiveness between scholars which decreases the intention of knowledge sharing in the organization. However, whether it is recognition or benefits, there is higher possibility that rewards encourage academic individuals in knowledge sharing behavior. Some recent study revealed that rewards play a significant role in knowledge sharing among the academic staff in the university environment (Purwanti et al., 2010). To inspire academics, financial or non-financial rewards are very important in promoting knowledge sharing activity (Susanty & Wood, 2011). The following hypothesis is proposed from the above discussion:

H3: Extrinsic rewards have a positive association with knowledge sharing behavior among academics of Thai HEIs

Theory of Reasoned Action

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) first introduced the theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). This theory is extensively used to predict human behavior in the organization (Lin, 2007; Ryu et al., 2003). The following figure is the graphic representation of the theory.

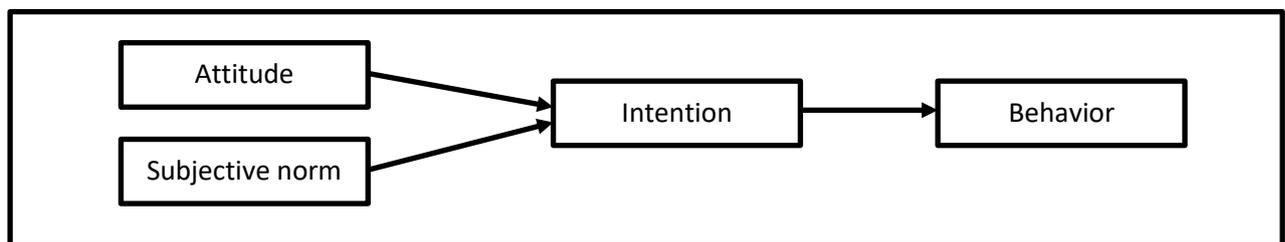


Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action Model Source: Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)

TRA posits that the behavior of individual is the outcome of intention which acts as antecedents of attitude and subjective norms. Intention is defined as the belief that the final outcome will influence the individual in performing some specific task. It is perceived that the optimistic attitude of a person towards actions is considered to have positive effects and vice versa. (Iqbal et al., 2011). Ajzen (1987) defined attitude as the character of the self, others and/or the situation to respond positively or negatively, whereas the social norm is stated as the judgment of individual in other's environment. According to the theory, the actual behavior of individual is greatly shaped by attitude, subjective norm and intention. Numerous scholars mentioned that this theory is widely used to explain behavioral intention and actual behavior of individuals in the organization (Bock et al., 2005; Kim and Lee, 2006, Tan & Ramayah, 2014). TRA has been broadly used in numerous disciplines, and also it is the most appropriate theory to measure the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of HEIs academics.

Attitude

Some previous studies noted that attitude is the most crucial factor to clarify knowledge sharing behavior (Kuo & Young, 2008; Iqbal et al., 2011). According to Bock et al., (2005), knowledge sharing is the personal attitude and intention of individual to share knowledge with others. In academic work, workshops and courses, truthful and open-minded scholars are inclined to share their expertise with other scholars. (Tan & Ramayah, 2014). Academics are motivated to share knowledge by more than just their intentions and perceptions; social norms and behaviors often play a role in knowledge sharing between scholars. (Chen et al., 2012). Academic attitudes thus play an important role in the conduct of knowledge sharing, which is supported by several studies. (Chow & Chan, 2008; Bock et al., 2005; Bock & Kim, 2002; Constant et al., 1994; Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Attitude has a positive association with knowledge sharing intention among academics of Thai HEIs

Subjective Norms

According to Ajzen (1991), the word “subjective norm” is closely linked to social pressure for a person to act in a certain way at work. Several studies verified the strong connection between subjective norms, intention and knowledge sharing behavior by the individuals (Ryu et al., 2003; Lin & Lee, 2004; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh & Morris, 2000; Taylor, 2006; Srite & Karahanna, 2006; Bock et al., 2005). Subjective norms defined as the external social influences on individual’s behavior (Fang et al., 2017). According to TRA, the subjective norm is characterized as the various forms of individual behavior that they do under stress in satisfying the necessities of social influence (Fang et al., 2017). Thus subjective norm measures and evaluates the willingness of the individual to imitate the immediate social influence to accomplish certain behavior. Lin (2013) mentioned that individual’s knowledge sharing behavior is positively influenced by the attitude, subjective norms, and intention of the person. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: The higher the social influence the higher the intention to share knowledge among academics in Thai HEIs.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been comprehensively discussed for the organization’s higher competitive advantage. According to Robinson et al., (2004) the term employee engagement has been extensively used by the researchers. Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement It occurs when employees articulate and employ themselves mentally, emotionally and cognitively in order to fulfill their role in the job. On the other hand, Rothbard (2001) mentioned engagement as the presence of a psychological aspect. Employees are engaged when they are attentive and their performance is higher towards the organization. Engaged individuals would be highly motivated to share their knowledge with others in the workplace (Ramly, 2018). According to Peters (2007), engaged employees have greater enthusiasm in performing and staying with the organization to achieve the goal and competitive advantage in the market. Another study found that engaged employees are more connected to each other to share knowledge and belong to the institution (Juan et al., 2016). In the context of HEIs, academics engagement towards the organization would lead to knowledge sharing behavior

with each other. Academics' knowledge sharing intention and behavior would be higher when they are fully engaged in the institution's goal and objective (Goh & Sandhu, 2013). From the above discussion the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: The higher the employee engagement the higher the intention to share knowledge among academics in Thai HEIs

Knowledge Sharing Intention

According to TRA theory, behavioral intention is directly linked with actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (1991) further described that intention is related to motivation, willingness, and effort in performing a certain behavior. Chang & Chuang (2011) mentioned in their studies that intention to share knowledge has a direct influence on knowledge sharing behavior which is also supported by other scholars (Ryu et al., 2003; Jeon et al., 2011). It was also noticed that academics in the HEIs also have a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing behavior. This is also supported by numerous studies (Jeon et al., 2011; Bock et al., 2005; Wu et al., 2012).

Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Ajzen (1991) described in TRA, actual behavior is the consequence and result of the behavioral intention (what to do or what not to do). Individual's enthusiasm to perform certain intention will result in the outcome. For example, people believe that studying for months before the examination will help them to pass with better grades. Some previous researchers stated that knowledge resides normally within the humans and at the same time, it is the tendency of human to hoard knowledge within (Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Hence, for the person to share knowledge and expertise in the organization, there needs to be some influencing factors. In the HEIs context, knowledge sharing behavior is vital for academics. In the past, there were studies focusing on the determinant of knowledge sharing behavior in hospitals (Ryu et al., 2003; Lerro et al., 2012) pharmaceuticals (Lilleoere & Hansen, 2011), financial institutions (Tan et al., 2010) and tourism (Zehrer, 2011). Academics knowledge sharing behavior helps to exchange and create existing and new knowledge when they intend to share knowledge with each other. Therefore, following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Knowledge sharing intention has a positive relation with knowledge sharing behavior among academics in Thai HEIs.

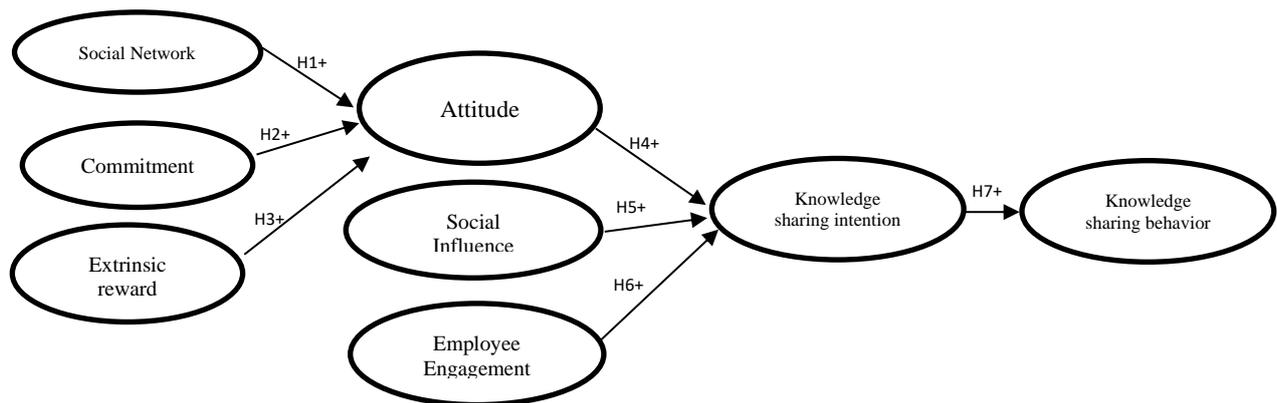


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Model

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study will look at the basic factors that affect academics' knowledge sharing actions in Thai higher education institutions. To operationalize the variable related to knowledge sharing behavior by Thai academics, an online survey will be used to test the hypotheses. Often researchers use an online survey using Google Form to measure the conduct of knowledge sharing. In this study, the researcher aims to develop an in-depth understanding of knowledge sharing behavior in Thai HEIs. The empirical study will be adopted to comprehend the association between social network, extrinsic reward, commitment, attitude, subjective norms, employee engagement, knowledge sharing intention and knowledge sharing behavior among the Thai academics in HEIs. The questionnaires for this study will be obtained from the theoretical understanding of the enriched literature review. The instruments for this study will be comprised of the following: independent variables such as social network (Kim & Lee, 2006), commitment (Hoof & Weenan, 2004), extrinsic rewards (Bock et al., 2005), subjective norms (Bock et al., 2005), attitudes (Bock et al., 2005), employee engagement, knowledge sharing intention (Bock et al., 2005) and the dependent variable such as knowledge sharing behavior (Akhavan et al., 2013) and demographic information like gender, age, educational background, year of experience, position, and qualification. The data will be used to examine to draw interference and recommend the possible options to increase knowledge sharing behavior. This study will explain in quantitative forms to the degree of relationship between a dependent (knowledge sharing behavior) and independent variable (social network, commitment, extrinsic rewards, subjective norms, attitudes, employee engagement, knowledge sharing intention. As the researcher is also a lecturer in the private university in Thailand that shaped the inspiration to conduct the study. Further study is suggested on the issue with a broader purview to recognize pertinent issues in order to obtain in-depth outcomes and draw insightful interference.

Sampling Method and Data Analysis

The survey for this study will be conducted at the private and public universities located in Bangkok, Thailand. Academics who can speak English, involved in joint research or worked

as co-author and working more than one year in the HEIs in Bangkok will be considered as a sampling frame. A pilot study will be conducted to understand whether the items are appropriate to measure the variables or not. Purposive non-probability snowball sampling method will be used for this study. Cross-sectional data from the online survey using Google Form will be used for this study.

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) v25 will be used to analyze the data. The responses were inserted and saved in the (.sav) format for SPSS calculation. Pearson's bivariate correlation will be carried out to find out the relation between the independent and dependent variables. Multiple regression analysis will be carried out to understand whether the association fits the model. Adding some control variable, the result will be analyzed to draw the interference for testing the proposed hypothesis.

Measurement

The scale for this study will be adopted from the previous literature. A 4-item scale by Kim and Lee (2006) will be used to measure social network. Commitment will be measured using a 6-item scale adopted by Hoof and Weenen (2004), which was already used in some previous studies (Porter et al., 1974; Mowday et al., 1979). Extrinsic rewards will be measured using 3-item scale, attitude towards knowledge sharing will be measured using a 3-item scale, subjective norm will be measured using 3-item scale, and knowledge sharing intention will be measured using 3-item scale respectively developed by Bock et al. (2005). Employee engagement will be measured using 17-item scale developed by Salanova et al. (2001). The dependent variable knowledge sharing behavior will be measured using a 5-item scale adopted by Akhavan et al. (2013). All the items in the study will be measured using 5-point Likert-scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (1 to 5). In the research Likert scale is widely used to measure views and behaviors. Demographic questionnaires will cover age, gender, and educational background, year of experience, position, and qualification.

Concluding Remarks

The proposed study aims to measure the relationship between knowledge sharing intention and knowledge sharing behavior among Thai academia in HEIs. The researcher also wants to understand the influencing factors like a social network, extrinsic rewards or employee engagement on knowledge sharing behavior. The study focuses on Thai academia from the private and public university on knowledge sharing behavior. The present research will only focus on the academics who are working in the universities located in Bangkok only, which is the limitation of this study. In present days there are many international lecturers are working in both public and private universities in Thailand. However, international faculties are also not included in the study. Therefore, it is not possible to understand their knowledge sharing intention and knowledge sharing behavior with Thai academia and vice versa. Nonetheless, this study will definitely help to give a clear picture of Thai academia's influencing and motivating factors towards knowledge sharing intention and knowledge sharing behavior.

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