

Reflections on the Knowledge Sharing Practices Among Medical Professionals: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Topics related to knowledge management and knowledge sharing have received extensive attention in the recent literature of management and information science. Much of the discussion has focused on how these processes take place - and frequently fail to take place - in formal business, corporate and organizational settings. Knowledge sharing, however, occurs along the entire spectrum of human activity. Often, information and knowledge are shared in ways that appear unregulated and even outright subversive. A literature review was conducted to reveal about information use and knowledge sharing methods that are applicable to the study of patient and may aid in treatment. Information has been identified as a critical factor in improving health outcomes, self management and patient satisfaction. New ways of understanding how practitioners build knowledge for medical decision making and self care are needed. Patient education occurs beyond the boundaries of the healthcare systems so practitioners may wish to broaden their connections with diverse organizations that can enhance medical and health related knowledge. Practitioners are increasingly interested in the contribution that effective management of knowledge across organizational and professional boundaries can make to improved public services. It identifies a set of methods, structures and ethics of "informal" and unauthorized transfer of information, and suggests that these can offer valuable lessons for the further development of the study of knowledge sharing methods, practices and behaviors in all types of settings.

Key words: Knowledge sharing, communities of practice, types of knowledge, practitioners.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The rising interest in considering knowledge as critical assets of an organization has led to increasing interest in knowledge management systems (KMSe) in the health care sector with systematic means of managing knowledge more effectively. However, to achieve the potential benefit of KMSe, knowledge must be shared. Knowledge sharing allows the healthcare organizations to make better use of expertise and skills of their healthcare professionals and enables healthcare professionals to implement their best practical and to create new ideas so that high quality health care services can be delivered.

There are many ways to perform knowledge sharing, People can share knowledge in the form of documents or through discussions which involve conversation and interactions. To better leverage the existing knowledge, knowledge sharing also involves the combination of various levels of expertise so that new organizations knowledge can be created.

For the purpose of this study the following definitions of knowledge sharing are adopted:

“ Activities of transforming of disseminating knowledge from one person, group or organization to another”.

“ The process by which information from different sources is shared and there by leads to new information and understanding.”

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The literature review examines recent research studies. This acts as a basic proposed study. It also explains the need for the proposed work to appraise the shortcomings and for informational gaps in knowledge sharing practices among practitioners. This analysis may go beyond scrutinizing the availability or conclusion of past studies and their data, to examining the accuracy of secondary sources, the credibility of these sources and the appropriateness of earlier studies (cooper et.al.)

2.1 Nature of Knowledge Sharing

2.1.1 Concept of Knowledge

It is widely accepted that knowledge is related to data and information, but is a distinct concept from either of them. The three terms are not interchangeable (Davenport and Prusak). The difference among the three terms is a matter of degree, and knowledge is justified as a personal belief that increases an individual’s capacity to take action (Alavi and Leidner 107). According to the study (Alavi and Leidner 107), there is a natural progression from data to information to knowledge. In general, data are signals, whereas information comprises and describes data. When an additional value is added, data become information that is determined by the receiver of the data. Knowledge is created from information. It is more valuable because it is closer to action as compared with data and information (Davenport and Prusak). There are a number of knowledge types that are suggested, for example, tacit and explicit knowledge (Polyani), formal knowledge (Fleck and Tierney) and domain knowledge (Monk, Nardi et al.). Among these, tacit and explicit knowledge is the most common classification. Characteristics of explicit and tacit

knowledge are listed below (Nonaka and Takeuchi). Explicit knowledge is typically structured and retrievable. In contrast, tacit knowledge is partly or largely inexpressible, which may include the rich and complex expertise in individuals heads. The current knowledge-sharing approaches tend to focus more on explicit than on tacit knowledge (Huysman and Wit).

Tacit knowledge	Explicit knowledge
Not teachable	Teachable
Not articulated	Articulable
Not observable in use	Observable in use
Rich	Schematic
Complex	Simple
Undocumented	Documented

Dimensions of Knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi)

2.1.2 Perspectives on knowledge

Different perspectives on knowledge exist among scholars and practitioners (Wasko and Faraj 155). Frequently, knowledge has been perceived as an object, defined as “justified true belief”. In this perspective knowledge is considered to be ‘an integral, self-sufficient substance, theoretically independent of the situations in which it is learned and used’ the minds of people. Following the description of Alavi and Leidner, this perspective on knowledge actually refers to information. A second perspective on knowledge stresses that knowledge could only reside in the mind of people and can be defined as “that which is known”, i.e. knowledge being embedded in individuals (Polanyi). Only people can ‘know’ and convert ‘knowing’ into action, and it is the act of thinking that can transform information into knowledge and create new knowledge (McDermott 103). Although the first two perspectives on knowledge still guide many practitioners and academics, a third perspective is gaining ground. This perspective defines knowledge as “the social practice of knowing”, addressing the social character of knowledge (Blackler 1021). Knowledge is considered to be embedded in a community rather than just in one individual. It suggests knowledge to supercede any one individual and to be highly context dependent (Brown and Dugui, 40; Lave and Wenger; Orr; Wenger). ‘Rather than talking of knowledge, with its connotations of abstraction, progress, permanency and mentalism, it is more helpful to talk about the process of knowing’ (Blackler 1035). Consequently, the three perspectives of Wasko (Wasko and Faraj 155) can be relabelled as ‘potential knowing’, ‘personal knowing’ and ‘social knowing’. Machlup identifies thirteen different elements of knowing, including: being acquainted with, being familiar with, being aware of, remembering, recollecting, recognizing, distinguishing, understanding, interpreting, being able to explain, being able to demonstrate, being able to talk about, and being able to perform. Other authors have come up with other types of perspectives on knowledge, addressing different epistemological and ontological characteristics of knowledge. For example, Hedlund and Nonaka ;14 argue that knowledge can be viewed from three perspectives:

1) knowledge as a stock (focus on storing), 2) knowledge as a flow (focus on transferring), and 3) knowledge as interactions (focus on transformation). Alavi and Leidner distinguish five other perspectives on knowledge: 1) knowledge as the state of knowing and understanding, 2) knowledge as an object to be stored and manipulated, 3) knowledge as a process of applying

expertise, 4) knowledge as a condition of access to information and 5) knowledge as the potential to influence action. Grant(109) addresses the following characteristics as pertinent to the utilization of knowledge within the firm to create value: transferability, capacity for aggregation, appropriability. In line with defining knowledge as ‘justified belief that increases an entity’s capacity for effective action’ (Huber 88; Nonaka, 14), in this research knowledge is defined as: “collective understanding plus the ability to transform this understanding into actions (skills), which yields performance being dependent of the situation in which it is learned and used”

2.1.3 Concept of Knowledge Sharing

Sharing is a process whereby a resource is given by one party and received by another. For sharing to occur, there must be an exchange. A resource must be passed between a source (provider) and recipient (Sharratt and Usoro 187). The term knowledge-sharing implies the giving and receiving of information within a context understood by both the provider and the recipient. As knowledge is directly related to understanding and is gained through the interpretation of information (Alavi and Leidner), knowledge-sharing is more than passing information from one person to the other. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the knowledge received will be identical to what is delivered by the provider, as the process of interpretation is subjective and is framed by the recipient’s knowledge and identity (Miller 140) different from information sharing, knowledge-sharing fundamentally requires sense making and the generation of knowledge in the recipient. In other words, it involves knowledge creation. Based on the discussions above, it has been defined in this research that: knowledge-sharing is a dynamic process of transmission of knowledge resource (information) from a provider to a recipient in a given context. In most knowledge sharing situations, reciprocal knowledge transmissions occur either naturally or as requested. Characteristics of the knowledge provider or the context influence the amount of knowledge that can be shared from the provider to the recipient.

2.2 Theories for Knowledge Sharing

Beginning with Roger’s (Rogers) investigation of early and late adopters of technological innovations, and more recently with Szulanski’s (Szulanski 27) study of sharing of best practices, many researchers have used communications theory (Shannon and Weaver) to examine knowledge sharing. More recently, organizational learning theories have become a focus in this field, as successful knowledge transfers are increasingly seen as an ongoing process of learning interactions, rather than just a series of communications (Szulanski 27).

2.3 Knowledge sharing:

Sharratt and Usoro(187) stated the “ sharing is a process where by a resource is given by one party and received by another” in addition to knowledge sharing “ it is the process by which individuals collectively and iteratively refine a thought an idea or a suggestion in the light of experience”(chua 117)

Knowledge sharing can be created in many forms such as “....a story describing a similar experience where by a method or technique was developed or used to solve a problem. If unable

to provide a solution directly knowledge may be shared irrelation to contacting some one who might know and be willing and able to help” (Sharatt and Usoro 187)

It also must be supported by several social factors: trust, care, emotional commitment and quality of the relationship, trust is the most important factor in knowledge sharing. If there is no trust, it is impossible for staff to share collaborate and communicate the greater level of trust amongst people, the more the openness and effectiveness of the communication channel.

Furthermore , O’dell and Grayson and Vonkrogh(154) in Chua(117) emphasized the important of caring as one . one of the social factors that influence knowledge sharing.” When there is an absence of a strong personal tie that warrants listening to or helping each other knowledge sharing is hampered. Individual also must have emotional commitment in order to volunteer him/her for sharing the knowledge without emotional commitment they may not want to share their knowledge in order to keep improving their power.

The last social factor is the quality of the relationship in the large organization members may not be aware of someone who would be interested in the knowledge they have or has the knowledge they require. This situation happens because of the lack of relationship between members of the organization.

2.3.1 The importance of knowledge sharing:

Gurteen found four importance values of knowledge sharing :

1. Knowledge is an intangible product which includes ideas, processes an information. These intangible products are taking a growing share of global trade from the traditional , tangible goods of manufacturing economy.
2. Knowledge is important for creating a new knowledge in order to achieve competitive advantage.
3. Knowledge is important because of the increasing turnover of staff , people do not keep the same job for life any more . When someone leaves an organization their knowledge walks out of the door with them therefore sharing has the power to carry on the knowledge.
4. Many organizations have problems of “we don’t know what we know “ expertise learnt an applied in one part of the organization is not leveraged in another.

Accelerating change in technology business and social 50% of what we knew 5 years ago is probably obsolete today.

Sharing knowledge allows both parties not only retain information but also amplify an expand it through the exchange process however sharing of knowledge with in organization provides the opportunity to discuss know –what and know- how practices to direct the organization towards future development and growth .The act of it transfers knowledge from one person to another or among many people adding value into organizational activities (Mitchell).

2.3.1 The challenge of knowledge sharing

It is generally agreed upon that knowledge sharing is a crucial process within organizational settings, whether these are project teams, formal work groups or communities of practice. Organizational settings usually exist to achieve a collective outcome, for example delivering physical or intellectual products and/or services. They are created or emerge as none of the actors involved can produce the collective outcome individually. Due to the division of labour and accompanying fragmentation, specialization, and distribution of knowledge, it becomes a requisite to integrate a diversity of complementary knowledge in order to achieve the collective outcomes (Grant 109). Knowledge sharing becomes a necessary means for achieving the collective outcome as a part of the work requirements.

Many practitioners and academics assume, that since knowledge sharing is crucial for achieving the collective outcome, people will share knowledge as part of their work requirements. However, many companies and institutions have experienced that knowledge sharing does not always happen in practice, regardless whether a person-to person or a person-to-document strategy is followed (Hansen, et al.). A variety of conditions have been identified in literature, for the lack or presence of knowledge sharing. It is assumed that when any of these conditions do not exist, knowledge sharing is unlikely to take place, or at least not in an efficient or effective way. These conditions include characteristics of knowledge such as its tacitness (Boisot;szulanski 27), characteristics of the sender such as the workload of the sender (Huber 88), characteristics of the receiver such as one's absorptive capacity (Cohen and Levinthal, 128; Lane and Lubatkin, 461), characteristics of their relationship such as the level of trust (Andrew and Delahaye, 797) and characteristics of the organizational context such as the communication infrastructure (Moenaert, et al., 360) and the media richness of the information and communication technologies (Daft and Lengel 284).

The importance of above impediments to knowledge sharing is acknowledged in this research. However, this researcher addresses the motivational dimension of knowledge sharing, including the relationships between people within which knowledge is being shared. We assert that people's motivations for sharing knowledge are of crucial importance for understanding if knowledge is or is not being shared. After all, even when people are convinced about the necessity of sharing knowledge, know with whom they should share knowledge, and are also cognitively able to share knowledge as they share a similar language and have appropriate technologies at their disposal, knowledge sharing may still not be shared, unless the actors have an underlying motivation for sharing. The starting point of this research is that knowledge sharing is a social phenomenon and social behavior is fundamentally relational in nature. 'Individual behavior assumes social meaning only in the context of human relations. The basic unit of analysis is therefore not individual behavior, but behavior-in-a-relational context' (Fiske 689). It is assumed that the relational dimension of knowledge sharing is directly related to motivation, since a relationship is implied by the reciprocal nature of motivation.

2.3.2 Studying knowledge sharing

Studying knowledge sharing in a meaningful way involves both theoretical and methodological challenges. First, it is difficult to define what the meaning of knowledge sharing is. Both the

concepts of knowledge and of sharing are hard to capture. Second it is difficult to empirically investigate knowledge sharing, since a substantial part of the process is cognitive and therefore abstract in nature. Usually, no outward or visible observable signs exist showing that knowledge sharing is happening. Consequently, it is hard to determine if knowledge is being shared and when. For example, is knowledge being shared during a conversation, at the moment when 'one sees the light', somewhat later, or when one actually behaves in line with the knowledge being shared? It is also difficult to determine what knowledge is exactly being shared and how, since people are commonly unaware of what they already know and what they share. This underlines the need for methodological guidelines that enable empirical analysis of knowledge sharing processes.

2.4 Appraisal of Literature Reviewed

The literature reviewed so far revealed that all organizations whether small or big, profit oriented or non-profit oriented have Knowledge sharing practice. Hence any organization that knows how to develop in an effective way will most likely have the advantage of improving its efficiency and the quality of work life among its employees, Which often lead to effectiveness. Knowledge sharing there fore gives meaning and significance to employee's actions in an organization as it powerfully influences staffknowledge improvement. As a result, academics are just beginning to learn about its depth and impact in relation to other organizational variables such as effectiveness.

Studies also showed that the importance of knowledge as an asset is now gaining ground among organizations. Knowledge has to be shared to reach its potential as an asset. Knowledge sharing practices however, require a culture that will motivate members of an organization to strive for knowledge, likewise an environment that is conducive for its operation. Researchers have observed that effective knowledge sharing can only occur when there is the right connection between two parties; knowledge disseminator and information receiver. The utilization of information communication technologies tools seems to be very important in implementing knowledge sharing programs, although knowledge sharing is not a "technology thing" or a "computer thing" it is more of a management issue that protects intellectual assets from getting decayed. Nevertheless information and communication (ICT) can act as an important facilitator or enabler for knowledge sharing in an organization. So the practitioners try and tailor it towards enhancing knowledge sharing among community to promote active involvement in Knowledge sharing process.

3. CONCLUSION

Today task independency that practitioners have to perform, requires a flow of information and a high level of knowledge sharing. This would imply appropriate approaches to transfer tacit knowledge such as communities of practice at a more organizational level or use of adequate technology to support the codification, storage, organization, and retrieval of knowledge.

Our study has explored some of the issues related to knowledge sharing practice . Even if the organization has implemented some knowledge management strategies, our investigation shows

that knowledge management practice is still not an obvious organizational reality. Therefore, management needs to understand better the factors that facilitate knowledge sharing activities.

Our research study indicates those sociotechnical environmental indicators such as shared knowledge, its quality/relevance, transfer speed, sender and receiver perspectives (absorptive capacity), culture, trust, motivation, incentive and environment play an important role in improving the knowledge sharing process.

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