KNOWLEDGE SHARING PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF ACADEMIC STAFF AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN SARAWAK

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KNOWLEDGE SHARING PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF ACADEMIC STAFF AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN SARAWAK

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Abstract

Knowledge is vital to human life. Knowledge can be easily acquired through formal or informal learning. Sharing knowledge is one of the most important components in knowledge management. This study aims to investigate whether knowledge sharing is practiced by the employees, particularly academic staff at the community college in Sarawak. The study examined six informants whose demographic factors include age, gender, educational background and years of service to the community colleges. Based on the results of the study, all informants agreed that the practice of knowledge sharing is a matter that is common in organizations where it is beneficial not only to individuals but also to the management. However, there are several kinds of knowledge and information that employees are not willing to share, and this is a barrier to knowledge sharing practices in the organization. It is recommended that future studies should increase the number of samples and include the support staff, whether from the public or private sectors to compare the findings.
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, definition of terms, significance of the study, limitations and scope of the study, research schedule and conclusion.
1.1 Background of the Study

Becoming a world class employee is a challenge for a human if they do not have the knowledge. According to De Long and Fahey (2000), knowledge is a product of human reflection and experience by depending on the context; knowledge is a resource that is always embodied in individuals or a collective or embedded in routine processes. Knowledge becomes vital specifically in the organization to face era of economic globalization. In order to fulfil organization needs, employee has to involve in knowledge management so that he or she will be valuable asset to the organization. From Gurteen (1999) perspectives, knowledge management is a business philosophy which emerged from set of principles, processes, organizational structures, and technology applications that help people share and leverage their knowledge to meet their business goals.

Knowledge sharing is a part of knowledge management that emphasis in sharing the acquired knowledge with other people. According to Neo (2002) cited in Chaudhry (2005), the cultural factors have significant impact on individual’s decision to share knowledge. The importance of knowledge sharing specifically in an organization is very crucial since people are constantly sought for new knowledge. Friedman, Lipshitz and Overmeer (2001) stated that the concept of knowledge sharing is as a part of organizational learning which employees develop shared values and knowledge based on their past experience and others.
1.2 Statement of the Problem

There are various studies done by previous researchers on knowledge sharing among professional employees but very few studies have been done specifically for academic staff of Malaysian public higher education institutions. According to Jain, Sandhu and Sidhu (2007), "a competitive advantage can be gained if this knowledge is shared with those who need it and may benefit from it". While most people are unlikely to share knowledge without noticed, some of knowledge are very useful to organization purposes in achieving objectives and goals. From Gupta (2007) perspectives, to share knowledge should not be misused when a person has given consent for the knowledge sharing to other people in order to diminish the barriers.

Since knowledge sharing is a vital approach to a successful organization, the researcher should look into the barriers that might hinder knowledge sharing. There must be certain area that caused the refusal of knowledge sharing among employees in organization and this will be an interesting issue to be discussed. Bures (2003) has identified some of the perceptions of employee towards knowledge sharing as a way to lose reward if they share knowledge with others. Thus, most of the barriers of knowledge management including knowledge sharing is generally internal to the organization (Jain, Sandhu and Sidhu, 2007). The study also will investigate the relation of motivation and individual performance in knowledge sharing specifically for employee in public sector.
In this research, the study focused in developing knowledge sharing culture in community college by referring previous study from other researchers. In this case, Kuching Community College has been selected for the purpose of the research. This organization is divided into two departments which is academic staff and support staff. However, the study only focusing on academic staff as they meet the research purposes. As a public higher education institution, the importance of the role is to provide the latest information and expertise to meet national needs in the field.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore knowledge sharing in an academic institution. In order to achieve better outcomes, there are specific objectives that will be emphasized.

The specific objectives are:

1) To identify how individuals acquire knowledge in the organization.
2) To investigate how organizations promote knowledge sharing.
3) To explore organizational factors that contribute towards the knowledge sharing in the organization.
4) To explore barriers that inhibits knowledge sharing.
5) To determine the types of knowledge that people are willing to share.
6) To determine the types of knowledge that people are not willing to share.
7) To explore benefits/impacts of knowledge sharing to the organization.
8) To investigate the benefits of knowledge sharing to an individual.

1.4 Research Questions

1) How do individuals acquire knowledge in the organization?
2) How does an organization promote knowledge sharing among their employees?
3) What are the organizational factors that contribute towards knowledge sharing in the organization?
4) What are the barriers that inhibit knowledge sharing in the organization?
5) What types of knowledge are people willing to share?
6) What types of knowledge are people not willing to share?
7) What are the benefits/impacts of knowledge sharing to the organization?
8) What are the benefits of knowledge sharing to an individual?
1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1 To the Employees

This study is significant in promoting a good perception of knowledge sharing in the organization. Otherwise, this study will also be beneficial to the employees in managing the knowledge sharing setting which is particularly in different concept related to the use of effective human resources management. By understanding the employees' needs and benefits of knowledge sharing quality, it will assure of a competitive advantage among them.

1.5.2 To Future Researcher

This study provides recommendation on how relevance the individual perception of knowledge sharing will improve the organization performance in the future. Besides that, this study also acts as a guideline to any party who is interested in this research work whereby it can be used as reference.

1.5.3 To the Human Resource Practitioners

This study will be helpful to the human resource practitioners in order to develop knowledge sharing culture among employees by using training and informing them in the area of human resources management, objectives and strategies. It will also serve as a future reference for researchers on the subject
of human resources and corporate companies. And importantly, this research will educate every entity of the organization on how this practice can be operated better in the future in developing relevant policy.

1.5.4 Contribution Towards Methodology

In this area of study, methodology including instruments that will be used can be replicated for future studies. This study also can be useful as reference for future researcher.

1.5.5 Contribution Towards Knowledge in the Field

New findings from this study can help to contribute the existence of knowledge on knowledge sharing practices.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study is only limited to Kuching Community College employees in Sarawak. This study is also emphasized on academic staff since they are expected to share knowledge in their daily works.
1.7 Definition of Terms

Definition of terms is divided into two types which is conceptual and operational definitions. Conceptual definition is supported by certain literature reading from previous studies that related to current study, while operational definition is definition that will be used throughout the research study.

1.7.1 Knowledge

In the context of conceptual definition, knowledge is divided into two types which is tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge had been generated into human cognitive before being distributed throughout the society as well as the organization according to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1994) as cited in McLean (2004). Human knowledge shifts between the tacit and the explicit through a process of social interaction between individuals that also produces new knowledge and expands its use (Choo, 2003).

Thus, an operational definition of knowledge conveys the integration of information that formed through experiences into thinking that guides towards daily activities.
1.7.2 Knowledge Sharing


"...a story describing a similar experience whereby a method or technique was developed or used to solve a problem. If unable to provide a solution directly, knowledge may be shared in relation to contacting someone who might know and be willing and able to help”

Operational definition of knowledge sharing used in this study refers to the way of knowledge which is assumed through consciousness in shaping the behavior and thought that can develop knowledge sharing culture.

1.7.3 Motivation

Conceptual definition of motivation is “a process of stimulating people to action to accomplish desired goals”, (Li, 2003).

Operational definition of motivation is a relationship between knowledge sharing and individual that might be affected the motivation in job of performance.
1.8 Summary

Chapter one has summarized on the background of the research study on related topic with indication of the problem statement. Then, it continues with research objectives, research questions, significance of the study until limitations that constraint in the research study.
Chapter 2

Literature review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will explore the literature that is relevant to understanding the knowledge sharing. It has covered the overview of knowledge, knowledge management, knowledge sharing, job description, individual performance, lifelong learning and cognitive learning theory. It also discussed on implementation of knowledge sharing and developing knowledge sharing in an organization.
2.1 Knowledge

Term of knowledge has wider definition according to individual perception. Knowledge can be acquired by using tacit and explicit approach. Tacit knowledge is derived from human origin knowledge specifically in social and interactive nature of learning (Lam, 2008). Due to the nature of human that only can store knowledge by using short term and long term memory, tacit knowledge that exists in people’s mind are difficult to transfer (Barth, 2002) cited in Jain, Sandhu and Sidhu (2007). Explicit knowledge, on the other hand is evidence based interpretation (Wyatt, 2001), codified using a people-to-documents approach which is extracted from the person developed it and reuse it for various purposes (Hansen, Nohria, and Tierney, 1996). There are also various theories from previous researcher that referring to the knowledge which can be seen on the table below (adopted from Stenmark, 2001;2002, Hildreth and Kimble, 2002).