A study on analyzing knowledge sharing within an organization: Testing an alternative theoretical model of employee attitude towards knowledge sharing

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ABSTRACT

This research aim to examine the factors affceting to employee attitude towards knowledge sharing in a Multination Company in Sri Lanka. Social Exchange Theory and Social Capital Theory has been used to examine various determinants of employee attitude towards sharing knowledge within an organization. Survey result from 61 employees in Sri Lanka has suggested that the employee trust plays an important role in semployee attitude towards sharing the knowledge and other factors have no signifiacnec effect on knowledge sharing attitude. Future studies could address the limitations of our research endeavor by broadening the sample size, assessing the opportunity for adopting AI in other HR functions, and including more countries in the sampling and analysis.

Keywords – *Employee attitude towards sharing Knowledge, Social Exchange, Social Capital*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's era of knowledge organizations have come to understand that knowledge is the factor for gaining advantage driving successful innovations and enhancing overall performance. Knowledge holds importance as the resource within an organization greatly influencing its development. Essentially this knowledge comprises both the expertise and information possessed by employees as the documents stored by the organization.

Knowledge sharing within an organization has a major impact that affects the employees as well as the organization in a positive manner. According to Alavi & Leidner (2001, cited in Chumg et al, 2015) it has been identified that the process of

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knowledge Sharing has had a major improvement in skill of the on the abilities & the employees, it has also resulted in an improvement in innovations. According to Cummings 2004 cited in Rutten et al., 2016) It has been found that the process of knowledge sharing has positively impacted factors such as productivity and performance.

Most knowledge management systems concentrated on finding and recording both explicit and implicit knowledge about the business, focusing on information that was widely available via corporate platforms, such as document management systems, corporate portals, intranets, and knowledge repositories. (Lee, 2015). Employee knowledge can be a significant means of obtaining and preserving a competitive advantage since it is founded on judgment and experience. It is also important to note that a company benefits when its employees share their expertise with other organization members rather than keeping it to themselves (Panahi et al., 2013). The reason knowledge is thought to be one of the sources of organizational competitiveness is covered in much research. There are different theoretical lenses used in those studies which has mixed findings. The aim of this study is to analyze the factors which are prominent in shaping employee knowledge sharing attitude using a comprehensive theoretical model in a context of an Multinational Company (MNC) employees in Sri Lanka.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Exchange Theory

The Social exchange theory is where people engage in certain types of behavior to gain rewards and reduce the costs (Blau, 1964; Atkinson, 2020). In this case, humans tend to adopt new types of behavior and keep repeating previous behaviors to increase their rewards and minimize costs. If the reward is not given by the other party people tend to give up the favor given to the other party and if the other party gives the reward as favor this could create extra cycles of this procedure (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This means social exchange theory is a type of behavior caused by human relations based on subjective costs which make people analyze what they gain by a particular behavior and what is the cost of having such a behavior. According to this if a particular behavior has given more rewards in some situations in the past the individual tends to behave the same way in similar situations. (Lovaglia, 1995).

However, a meta-analysis of organizational justice research that was conducted for 25 years, on the other hand, reveals that social exchange theory factors such as organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, and leader-member exchange are crucial to the relationships between justice, task performance, and citizenship behavior. (Alghamdi, 2021).

But when people share their respective knowledge and expertise with each other and expect, reciprocally, to gain more knowledge from others they may do it because of the happiness coming by helping other people or they could do it to increase their reputation as professionals etc.

(Razmarita et al., 2016: Lucas, 2005) So since knowledge is power people may tend to gather more knowledge and then share it with others instead of sharing new aspects that they have learnt so far. (Rahman et al, 2017).

According to the Social Exchange Theory where cost and benefits been discussed this research has identified three variables; perceived reputation enhancement and perceived enjoyment in helping others as benefits of Knowledge sharing and perceived loss of knowledge power as cost based on the literature.

2.1.1 Perceived reputation enhancement

It has been discovered that people require establishing their standing as specialists within a business. One method is to share the professional knowledge that they acquire with their coworkers (Palo and Charles, 2015). Individuals who share relevant knowledge earn the respect of their coworkers and improve their own icon within the organization (Chang and Chuang, 2011). It is considered that having a personal image and a well-known reputation helps people advance in their careers.

While offering advice is frequently associated with kindness, the 'egocentric' approach contends that giving advice allows us to improve our reputation by making others think that they are informed, trustworthy, and indispensable. This raises the intriguing possibility that, guidance is frequently conveyed in the context of benign assistance, it can also act as a more selfish objectives such as raising our value in a particular group, which results in the reduction of the danger of social rejection. Wasko and Faraj (2005) discovered that in a longitudinal study on factors driving knowledge contribution in an electronic network of practice belonging to the National Legal Association in the United States, the perception of boosting one's professional reputation strongly influences an employee's decision to give knowledge. However, as per Bock et al. (2006) their investigation of factors impacting employees' contribution to electronic knowledge repositories, reputation enhancement had no significant effect on employees' contribution to the electronic knowledge repositories. Therefore, there are mixed findings on how perceived reputation enhancement of sharing knowledge impact employee knowledge sharing behavior.

2.1.2 Perceived enjoyment in helping others

An individual can get a sense of pleasure by assisting others. (Freligh et al, 2002). Individuals frequently assist others without regard for the fact that they will receive something in return. According to them, individuals who provide tangible knowledge do so to demonstrate their pro-social attitudes. Wasko and Faraj (2005), argued that sharing knowledge with other people is a natural motive in people, which they appreciate.

Recent research has also proven the favourable association between the delight of assisting others and the contribution of knowledge. For example, Chang and Chuang (2011) discovered that happiness in assisting others had a considerable impact on knowledge contributors' use of electronic

repositories, as well as the usefulness of the contribution.

Among the knowledge sharing attitude motivator components, reported satisfaction in helping others showed the greatest effect which is consistent with previous studies. (Rahman et al, 2017).

2.1.2 Perceived loss of Knowledge Power

In perceived loss of knowledge power, employees conceal knowledge from the members of the organization in three main ways (Demirkasimoglu, 2015). They are either being ignorant (acting ignorant regarding the knowledge asked from them), evasive hiding (giving incorrect information or making a misleading promise to share knowledge in the future), and rationalized hiding (giving an explanation for why the requested knowledge was not provided or blaming others).

Employees act ignorant or use reasoning to conceal information when the knowledge requested is basic, and they may use the delayed technique when the knowledge required is difficult. Acting ignorant and evasive hiding, on the other hand, do require deception, as opposed to justifiable hiding, which does not always involve lying (Demirkasimoglu, 2015).

According to the hypothesis, individuals attempt to protect valuable resources in order to avoid loss. When employees fear they will lose key resources due to various threats, they will go to great lengths to protect them. The critical resource under discussion here is knowledge, which is considered as a form of power and as a personal advantage over competitors. If this is the problem, employees may be cautious to provide their expertise to others at work (Anderson et al., 2014) in order to keep the benefits of the knowledge they have, such as protection from being replaced. (Argote, 2011). According to studies, (Chowdhury, 2023) perceived loss of knowledge power increases reasoned concealment while decreasing knowledge-sharing attitudes.

2.2 Social Capital Theory

The concept of social capital can be defined as "the total of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships thar are possessed by an individual person or a social unit" (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). This shows that individuals benefit from social communities and networks. Social capital theory consists of three main parts which are structural, cognitive and relational (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

- **Structural social capital (Social Network)**– this aims on getting an idea of the overall this focuses on characteristics of the configuration of connection among workers. This looks at the formal and informal connections between the members, The relationships between them, and the arrangements and interconnectedness between members and other networks. In this study the structural social capital is measured by social interaction ties based on previous studies.
- **Relational social capital (trust**)-this is focused on assets that leverage the social actor’s behavior. This focuses on the assets connected to the individuals.

This looks at specific relationships of individuals and tangible and intangible benefits received by the individual through the relationships and connections of the individual such as trust, shared norms, reciprocity, information exchange, and support. (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). In this study the variable trust has been used to analyse the impact of relational social capital towards the knowledge sharing.

- **Cognitive Social Capital (Shared Goals)** - In an organization it is especially important that all the employees work for the same last end goal. Importantly, the tendency to share goals and intentions with others might support the establishment of social bonds: the efficacy of the interaction itself and the emotional reactions to it may also influence the process of coding others as in group or out group members (Villani et al, 2022). When all the employees participate in achieving the goal it positively impacts on their psychological health which leads them to maintain a good connection with each other. (Yip et al., 2007). In an organization the greater the shared goals the greater the knowledge sharing will be.

2.3. Attitude Towards Knowledge Sharing

The positive tendency of people towards knowledge sharing is thought to be impacted by their attitudes. (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). An individual's willingness to participate in knowledge sharing activities reflects their attitudes, therefore the attitude towards knowledge-sharing becomes a very crucial factor in sharing knowledge of an individual. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the attitude towards knowledge sharing is one of the main determinants of intention. By identifying the attitude of an individual towards a particular factor, the individual's overall behavior can be identified (Zainab Kodai and Saeed, 2023).

An attitude towards a behavior can be referred to as the extent of their ability to assess the positivity and negativity of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude has become one of the most crucial factors in an organization's behavioral intention, studies have found that the attitude of people towards moral behavior has a direct impact on their moral behavior intention. In large companies, the attitude towards knowledge sharing was said to have a major impact on knowledge-sharing intention within the employees (Bock et al, 2006).

A particular individual's attitude towards a certain behavior type shows the individual's actual behavior and the intention to perform the particular behavior. Individuals will begin to act differently when their attitudes towards a certain behavior type change.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employs the deductive research approach and data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed after examining existing literature on knowledge sharing where Social Exchange theory and Social Capital theory was used as theoretical models. The employees have been selected from a Multinational Company operating in Sri Lanka which is one of the largest

companies producing and distributing a wide range of carbonate and non-carbonated beverages in India and Sri Lanka. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select the employees after a discussion with the management who are managerial employees since the knowledge shared is critical in their performances in daily activities. Data was collected through visiting the premises and distributing physical questionnaires which is a structured questionnaire with 32 items on a five-point Likert scale (where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree). 60 employees were given the questionnaire and completed in November 2023.

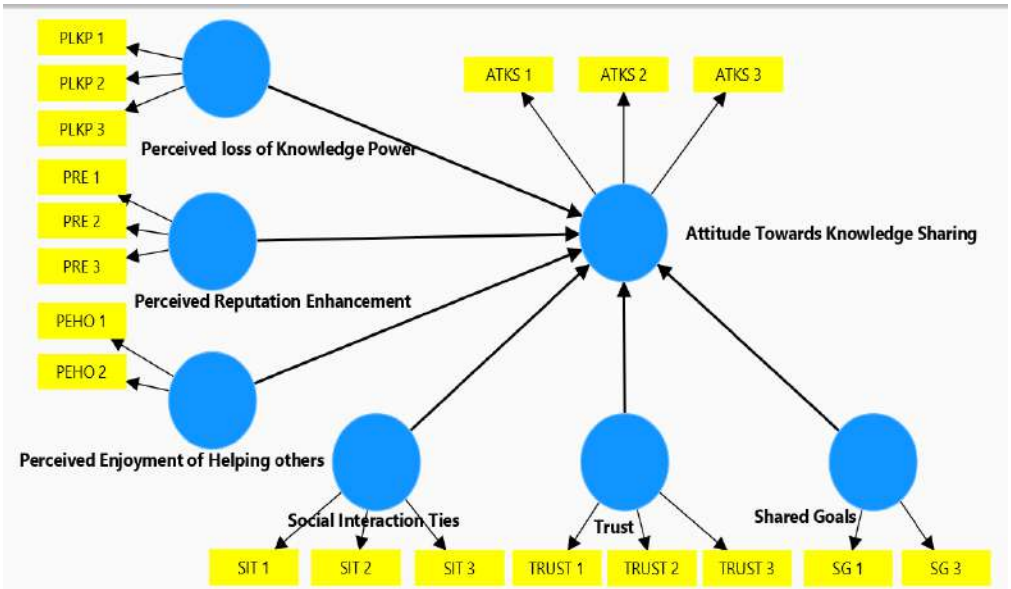


Figure 1: Theoretical Model

The following model in figure 1 was developed by researchers based on available theories and tested two theoretical perspectives (Social Exchange and Social Capital) to test the different factors affecting employees' attitude towards knowledge sharing. The completed questionnaires were analyzed using Smart PLS for structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis using partial least squares (PLS). Smart PLS was used to evaluate not only the six hypotheses but the relationships between the variables as well due to the limited sample size.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Measurement Model

Validity and reliability are two metrics used to assess this research's quality. In terms of the model's dependability, assessed the

internal consistency reliability and the reliability of the model's indicators using the composite reliability (CR)/Cronbach's alpha (CA) values and outer loadings values, respectively (Table 1). The outer loadings values of all indicators exceeded Hulland's (1999) lower limit of 0.700, ranging from 0.891 to 0.986 in value. Furthermore, CR and CA values exceeded lower limit of 0.700 (Bagozzi and Yi, 2011).

The aforementioned results indicated high internal consistency, confirming outer model's reliability.

Table1: Measurement model's reliability and convergent validation

Variables	Indicator	Outer Loading	CR	CA	AVE
PLKP	PLKP1	0.932	0.927	0.919	0.860
	PLKP2	0.910			
	PLKP3	0.940			
PRE	PRE1	0.893	0.744	0.625	0.538
	PRE2	0.490			
PEHO	PEHO1	0.910	0.701	0.636	0.727
	PEHO2	0.791			
SIT	SIT1	0.873	0.839	0.830	0.746
	SIT2	0.898			
	SIT3	0.817			
TR	TR1	0.763	0.759	0.730	0.646
	TR2	0.779			
	TR3	0.866			
SG	SG1	0.915	0.464	0.358	0.594
	SG3	0.592			
ATS	ATS1	0.706	0.513	0.515	0.507
	ATS2	0.724			
	ATS3	0.705			

In terms of the model's dependability, assessed the internal consistency reliability and the reliability of the model's indicators using the composite reliability (CR)/Cronbach's alpha (CA) values and outer loadings values, respectively (Table 1). The outer loadings values of Attitude towards Knowledge Sharing (ATS), Trust (TR), Social Interaction Ties (SIT), Perceived Enjoyment of Helping others (PEHO), Perceived Loss of Knowledge Power (PLKP) indicators exceeded Hulland's (1999) lower limit of 0.700, ranging from 0.705 to 0.940 in value. However Shared Goals (SG) and Perceived Reputational Enhancement (PRE) has outer loadings of less than 0.700. According to Ringle eta al., (2023), Indicators with very low loadings (below 0.40) should, however, always be eliminated from the measurement model and generally, indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.708 should be considered for removal only when deleting the indicator leads to an increase in the internal consistency reliability or convergent validity. Therefore, the model retained these indictors which are between 0.4 and 0.7 and checked for AVE value. CR and CA values exceeded the lower limit of 0.700 except in SG had very low CR and CA values. However, again its Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value indicates the construct explains 50 percent or more of the indicators' variance that make up the construct (Hair, 2018). Therefore, those indicators with lower indicator loadings retained in the model as the convergence

validity as indicated by the AVE is acceptable at 0.5 level. Thus, the results indicated internal consistency, confirming outer model's reliability.

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981 cited in Hair et al., 2021), a measure of the discriminant validity of the model can be obtained by computing the square root of AVE for each construct and comparing its value to that of the other variables. Each variable's square root of AVE was found to be bigger than the other variables' correlation values and it concludes that the proposed model produces accurate results that correspond to real life, confirming the outer model's validity.

4.2. Structural Model

The structural model reflects the paths hypothesized in the research framework. The structural model is assessed based on the R square value and the significance of paths. The goodness of the model is determined by the strength of each structural path determined by R square value of the independent variables. The value of R square should be equal to or over 0.1 (Falk & Miller, 1992) hence predictive capability is established. According to the final analysis of the above structural model is 0.392 which is above 0.1 threshold. As per the hypothesis testing/path coefficients (Table 2) the only one hypothesis is accepted which was the impact of trust on attitude towards knowledge sharing. ($\beta = 0.45$, $p = 0.000$)

Table 2: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	Beta coefficient	T statistics	P values	Supported
H1	PEHO -> ATS	0.151	1.012	0.156	No
H2	PRE -> ATS	0.13	0.873	0.191	No
H3	PLKP-> ATS	-0.012	0.452	0.326	No
H4	SG -> ATS	0.138	1.052	0.146	No
H5	STI-> ATS	0.101	0.647	0.259	No
H6	TR -> ATS	0.45	4.115	0.000	Yes
H7	PEHO -> ATS	0.151	1.012	0.156	No

4. CONCLUSION

This study is an extended experimental investigation on the testing on employee attitude towards knowledge sharing within an organization using two theoretical perspectives namely, Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Social Capital Theory (SCT). As the Social Exchange theory does not capture fully the attitude towards knowledge sharing as suggested by the literature the Structural, Relational and the cognitive social capital constructs have been introduced to better explain the attitude towards knowledge sharing. The model explain 39% of the attitude towards knowledge sharing and it has been identified that the employee trust plays and important role in attitude. Bapuji and Crossan (2005)

suggested that the more trust there is within the people, the more they are willing to participate in collaborative interactions. The ability to establish an environment for knowledge sharing within an organization mainly depends on the importance of interpersonal trust within the organization (Nonaka 1994). As the other variable shows an insignificant impact towards shaping employee knowledge sharing attitude, future research may focus on other factors as suggested by theories such as technology adoption.

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