

EXPLORING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Researchers in knowledge management show that transferring tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge will be more likely to happen when social capital and relationships between individuals are built in to organizations. Moreover, social media is a tool to connect people and give them the freedom to exchange ideas, experience and information. This research reviews the knowledge management and social media literature to examine the validity of using social media applications informally to transfer knowledge in the business environment in Saudi Arabia. Advantages and obstacles of using social media applications to transfer the knowledge will be explored and reviewed. In addition, recommendations for business leaders will be provided to encourage knowledge transfer within organizations.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Transfer Knowledge, Tacit Knowledge, Explicit Knowledge, and Social Media.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, knowledge management increasingly becomes an essential character of a successful organization. Moreover, transferring tacit knowledge such as experience, skills, beliefs or know-how between individuals and retaining knowledge in organization memory which can be available for everyone has been of interest to organizations (Taylor, 2007). However, research shows that many challenges could prevent transferring tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge in organizations. Time, distance, language, diversity, lack of incentives, trust and fears of losing control are among those challenges. (Augier and Vendelo, 1999; Bennett and Gabriel, 1999; Holthouse, 1998; Coakes, 2003).

To overcome the challenges of transferring tacit knowledge, researchers have discussed the importance of IT, social interactions, building relations, trust and social capital (Teimouri, Emami & Hamidipour, 2011; Lee & Yu, 2011; Holste&Fields, 2010). In order to successfully transfer tacit knowledge using IT, the technologies need to provide free-form, real-time, and interactive communication and collaboration platforms (Mitri, 2003; Marwick, 2001).

Several studies argued that social media may provide a new venue to facilitate transferring and sharing tacit knowledge (Jones, 2001; Bughin et al., 2009; Roblek, et al., 2013; Steininger et al., 2010; Panahi et al., 2012). However, there is still a lack of determining and understanding the shortcomings and potentials of using social media for transferring tacit knowledge.

Moreover, in Saudi Arabia, as of the fourth quarter in 2014, statistics showed that 29 percent of the total population were active social media users. WhatsApp was the most popular social network with a 22 percent penetration rate (Statista, 2015). This increase in demand for using social media among Saudis

demonstrates the possibility of an open opportunity for leaders to facilitate transferring tacit knowledge in organizations using social media applications.

Using the literature, this paper critically analyses the role of social media in transferring tacit knowledge in the business environment. The following objectives are used to guide the study:

- 1- To examine the role of social media in transferring tacit knowledge among individuals in organizations.
- 2- To investigate factors affecting transferring tacit knowledge using social media.
- 3- To investigate challenges of using social media to transfer the tacit knowledge.
- 4- To give recommendations for business leaders in Saudi Arabia to encourage the knowledge transfer via social media in organizations.

2. KEY CONCEPTS IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge is a mix of experiences, values and insights that can help people integrate and evaluate new information (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). The concept "Knowledge Management" has been discussed and defined by many researchers from different perspectives. Alavi and Leidner (2001) indicate that knowledge management is the communication, integration and application of knowledge throughout the organization. The American Productivity & Quality Council defines knowledge management as a systematic approach that integrates people, processes, technology, and content to enable information. Knowledge can be created and flow to the right people, at the right time, so that their work and decisions add value to the mission of the organization (Larrabure, 2007).

Knowledge is classified into several categories. Nonaka's is the most common classification in which knowledge is divided into explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Tacit knowledge is personal knowledge embedded in individual experience and involves intangible factors such as person belief, perspective and values (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Tacit knowledge is hard to codify and is extremely subjective in its nature. Individuals can obtain tacit knowledge through direct experience, reflection and internalization shared through highly interactive conversation and storytelling (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) proposed that tacit knowledge also includes cognitive skills such as beliefs, intuition and mental models as well as technical skills, such as know-how.

Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is objective and can be easily put into a tangible form usable by others. Indeed, explicit knowledge can be codified easily and retained. Also, it can be shared formally in the form of manuals, procedures and specifications. Explicit knowledge can be found in databases, videos and manuals for distribution (Zack, 1999). In general, explicit knowledge is more precisely and formally articulated than tacit knowledge.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) proposed a theory to explain the phenomenon of organizational knowledge creation. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), knowledge creation is a continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge where knowledge is initially created by individuals and that the knowledge created by individuals becomes organizational knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi examined the nature of this dialogue in a model of four patterns of interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. The modes of knowledge conversion include socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. Socialization is a mode of knowledge conversion from tacit to tacit through shared experience in day-to-day social interaction. Combination refers to knowledge conversion between two explicit forms. In this mode, explicit knowledge is collected from inside or outside the organization and combined to form new explicit knowledge. Externalization refers to knowledge conversion from tacit to explicit knowledge through interaction between an individual and other groups in the organization. Lastly, internalization refers to knowledge conversion from explicit to tacit where individuals convert the explicit knowledge to personally applicable tacit knowledge.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Obviously, social media has grown massively and become an important tool for interaction where items can be distributed across societies and discussed by people around the world. Social media is defined as a collection of online tools that enables individuals to collaborate and share information online (Lai & Turban, 2008). Also, Safko (2010) defined social media as activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions using conversational media. Social media is being driven by Web 2.0 tools. It has been argued it encourages participation of users in creating and organizing knowledge instead of the traditional store-and-retrieve methods (Tredinnick, 2006).

Different characteristics and capabilities for social media have been discussed in literature that are related to facilitating tacit knowledge transfer. Panahi et al. categorized the characteristics of social media into four features: user-generated content, peer to peer communication, multimedia oriented, and user friendly (2012). Also, it has been argued that the combination of those characteristics have made social media a good channel for knowledge sharing activities (Panahi et al., 2012). Moreover, social media helps people get connected, communicate with each other, build relationships, develop trust, and to share their knowledge. It supports knowledge creation, distribution, and visibility of knowledge more effectively compared to traditional knowledge management systems (Gordeyeva, 2010).

The possible role social media has in improving knowledge transfer within organizations has been explored in many studies. Jarrahi and Sawyer (2013) showed that public social web tools, such as Twitter, blogs and LinkedIn, are effective platforms for sharing informal knowledge and innovative ideas within and across organisations through facilitating and locating experts and expertise, socialising, reaching out, and horizon broadening. Also, the recent development of social web tools and communities as well as the development of new high-bandwidth connections, allows for more real-time interactions. It has been argued that most shortcomings of tacit knowledge sharing are likely to disappear (Lopez-Nicolas & Soto-Acosta, 2010). Moreover, the social web appears to support the sharing of tacit knowledge by triggering sociality and informal communication among experts, by giving opportunities to harness individuals' collective intelligence, providing a collaborative as well as a brainstorming space for new knowledge creation, by making personal knowledge visible, and by reducing the time and effort needed to share knowledge (Panahi et al., 2013).

Studies also discussed and defined factors that affect transferring tacit knowledge in social media. Kettles (2012) classified the factors into three categories: organizational factors, human factors and platform factors. This work suggests that human factors, social networking platform technology and community factors, as well as environments internal to organizations are each necessary for understanding the causes of knowledge contributions.

Hakami et al. (2014) reviewed the literature to find out factors affecting knowledge share in social media and identified three categories: technology, individual-personal, and organization-environmental factors. The literature review showed that most factors affecting knowledge sharing in social media are related to nine aspects that are directly related to the individual. These factors are: enjoyment when helping others; reciprocity; trust; outcome expectation; self-efficacy; identification; subjective norms; altruism and reputation; and the sharing of experience. On the other hand, organizational and environmental categories involved aspects of organization and management support; collective cognitive responsibility; shared language; shared vision; and extrinsic motivation. Finally, technology factors include social ties and information privacy where this category was perceived to have the lowest impact on knowledge sharing in social media.

4. CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Literature also revealed many challenges for using social media in transferring knowledge that if addressed properly can be easily overcome. Some research focused on culture as a barrier to knowledge transfer via social media. It has been shown that individuals belonging to different cultures often have differing attitudes toward knowledge management processes such as knowledge sharing (Jiacheng et al., 2010). Some cultural barriers that global organizations face to transfer knowledge such as individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance was discussed and findings show that social media can help by using its rich interface and technology to overcome some these barriers (Ray, 2014). Also, Hislop (2003) highlights the embodied nature of tacit knowledge. The more it becomes embedded, the more difficult it becomes to share successfully.

Other research showed that factors such as trust, organizational support, perceived benefits or rewards as well as the status quo of doing things greatly influences the amount of knowledge sharing when using Web 2.0 technology (Paroutis & Saleh, 2009). It has been argued that individual level traits impact the knowledge share processes within the organization and often relate to constraints such as lack of trust, time, fear of appraisal and so on (Ardichvili, Page & Wentling 2003). Also, the level of individual experience in using social media has been discussed as a challenge to knowledge transfer. In an exploratory article on the use of blogs for sharing information, the authors identified how users with different levels of expertise in the use of social computing technology could be used as building blocks for knowledge sharing (IP & Wagner, 2008).

The Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling (2003) study of motivation and barriers to employee participation in virtual knowledge-sharing communities of practice indicated that when employees view knowledge as a public good belonging to the whole organization, knowledge flows easily. However, even when individuals give the highest priority to the interests of the organization and of their community, they tend to shy away from

contributing knowledge for a variety of reasons. Specifically, employees hesitate to contribute out of fear of criticism, or of misleading the community members (not being sure that their contributions are important, completely accurate, or relevant to a specific discussion). Gordeyeva illustrated other potential issues related to job evaluations, contribution risk, job alignment and other factors influencing contribution (2010).

Other research focused on the influence of organizational structure on tacit knowledge sharing via social media. Riedl and Betz conclude in their study that hierarchical organizational structures could hinder Enterprise 2.0 projects (2012). Also, rigid hierarchy does not traditionally support or encourage tacit knowledge sharing as well as other organizational forms (Suppiah & Sandhu, 2011).

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS

Globalization and advancement in technology make it necessary for leaders to have global mindsets and skills to lead diverse environments. Moreover, leaders are responsible for reducing the barriers between individuals and the available information by creating an organizational culture that supports social interaction among individuals to help in the creation, utilization, and accumulation of tacit knowledge. Management and organizational support were marked as having the most noteworthy influence on knowledge sharing in social media (Hakami et al., 2014). For that, the leaders of organizations who place great emphasis on value to knowledge sharing should not ignore the use of social media.

To address the challenges of knowledge transfer using social media leaders must provide support in different aspects. Leaders should establish a clearly defined knowledge management strategy that outlines not only the strategy for implementing the tools, but addresses training, branding, and possibly rewarding for collaborating through the use of these tools.

Specifically, leaders should create a suitable work environment and positive organization culture that values and encourages knowledge sharing. There is a need for developing a culture of trust where individuals can share and communicate freely. Also, offering rewards and incentives can be considered to advance knowledge transfer. According to Riemer and Richter, "The true nature and potential of such technologies does only manifest when people make sense of and incorporate them in their day-to-day work routines" (2010, p. 9). Regardless of the tool or set of tools chosen, they must be integrated into the organization's workflows and routines.

Another aspect leaders must focus on is the availability and design of the social media to be used in sharing knowledge. Social media can be integrated into the platform of the organization, which will make it easily available for everyone. Selected social media tools can be chosen based on individual preferences to be used as the main medium for transferring knowledge.

In addition, skills and differences between individuals should be taken into consideration when choosing social media tools. Technical training for inexperienced users can be designed and given in order to make the social media tools useful for many.

6. CONCLUSION

Social media has a very strong influence on the development of communication and socialization in any organization which can be used in the advancement of transferring tacit knowledge. Reviewing the knowledge transfer and social media literature revealed that most of shortcomings of tacit knowledge transfer process are likely to disappear when using social media tools. Also, different factors affect the process of transferring tacit knowledge via social media have been identified and categorized in the literature. There are obviously some challenges and obstacles to overcome when choosing to use social media to transfer knowledge that leaders must pay attention to. It is the leader's responsibility to spread the culture of using social media as a means for transferring tacit knowledge in order to maintain knowledge capital and have significant competitive advantages.

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