

Organizational Commitment & Psychological Contract in Knowledge Sharing Behaviour

Bindu Gupta, Arushi Agarwal, Piyush Samaria, Punit Sarda, Rishab Bucha

How to foster knowledge sharing among employees so that companies can leverage their richest resource? The present paper examined the effect of organizational commitment and psychological contract on employees' knowledge sharing behaviour. The study conjectured that organizational commitment and psychological contract fulfilment would be positively related to knowledge sharing behaviour. Further, if employees perceive psychological contract breach, they will be less involved in knowledge sharing behaviour. A survey was conducted in different organizations from various industries such as IT, automobiles, FMCG etc. The findings of the study indicated that relational psychological contract positively influenced knowledge sharing behaviour. Organizational commitment, transactional psychological contract and psychological contract breach did not have significant influence on knowledge sharing behaviour.

Bindu Gupta (E-mail: bgupta@imt.edu), Arushi Agarwal, Piyush Samaria, Punit Sarda & Rishab Bucha are from Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad

Introduction

Knowledge had become the most important kit for competition and survival under the business climate in 21st century (Ling 2003). While traditional economies used to rely on tangible assets such as land and capital, today's economy has evolved to treat knowledge as the primary production factor on which competitive advantage rests (Beijerse 1999). According to Peter Drucker (1993) "the only or at least the most important source of wealth in contemporary post-capitalist society is knowledge and information rather than capital or labour". Once created, knowledge cannot be imitated or substituted, which makes it a key strategic asset resource to all businesses (Cabrera & Cabrera 2002). The growing use of knowledge in businesses contributed to the emergence of the theory of knowledge man-

agement (Aranda & Fernandez 2002), which is currently one of the hottest topics in information technology and management literature. Sharing of existing knowledge contributes to the performance of organisations (Epple et.al. 1996). Knowledge sharing practices and initiatives often form a key component of knowledge management programs, in terms of organisational and individual learning (e.g., Alavi & Leidner 2001, Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, Nonaka 1994, Sveiby 1997). The organisational value of individual knowledge increases when it is shared (Styhre 2002).

Storey and Quintas (2001:359) suggest that for knowledge management initiatives to be successful or effective requires that “employees are willing to share their knowledge and expertise”. This assertion is supported by a significant number of empirical studies into knowledge sharing (Empson 2001, Flood et al 2001, Kim & Mauborgne 1998, Morris 2001, Robertson & O’Malley 2000). Studies have demonstrated that employees often resist sharing their knowledge (Ciborra & Patriota 1998) and knowledge does not flow easily even when an organisation makes a concerted effort to facilitate knowledge exchange (Szulanski 1996). Therefore, determining which factors promote and which impede the knowledge sharing behaviour of individuals within groups and organisations constitutes an important area for research. The present research was aimed to examine the impact of organizational commitment, psychological contract, and psychological contract breach on knowledge sharing behaviour.

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge can be defined as a combination of experience, values, contextual information and expert insight that help evaluate and incorporate new experience and information (Gammelgaard & Ritter 2000). Knowledge exists in documents and repositories, as well it becomes embedded in people’s minds overtime and it is demonstrated through their actions and behaviours. The process of knowledge management involves several activities. The most commonly discussed activity is knowledge transfer (Ford 2001). Knowledge sharing is critical to a firm’s success (Davenport & Prusak 1998) as it leads to faster knowledge deployment to portions of the organization that can greatly benefit from it (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland 2004). Traditional knowledge management emphasis was placed on technology or the ability to build systems that efficiently process and leverage knowledge. However, such technological infrastructure, while essential to knowledge capture and exchange, is only effective to the extent it is utilized in a continuous manner (O’Neill & Adya 2007).

In order to make knowledge sharing happen within and among organizations, several researchers have focused on the study of different mechanisms and initiatives which could act as facilitators such as information and communication technologies (Dalkir 2005), whereas in other cases, personal interaction between individuals is the key (i.e. “people-focused” knowledge management) (Wiig 2004). But later it was realized that the effectiveness of the system is affected more by its us-

ers which led to the new model of knowledge management which involves people and actions. It aims at creating an environment where employees are willing to share knowledge rather than hoarding it. Knowledge transfer requires that an individual or a group cooperate with others to share knowledge and achieve mutual benefits (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland 2004, Al-Alawi 2005). By interacting and sharing tacit and explicit knowledge with others, the individual enhances the capacity to define a situation or problem and apply his or her knowledge so as to act and specifically solve the problem (Nonaka et al. 2006). Trustworthiness and mutual understanding constitute the basis for higher approachability and improved communication, and therefore for more intensive knowledge sharing (Andrews & Delahaye 2000, Coleman 1988, Empson 2001, McEvily et al. 2003, Newell & Swan 2000). Renzl's (2008) study indicated that fear of losing one's unique value and knowledge documentation have a mediating effect on the relationship between trust in management and *knowledge sharing*. Further, greater commitment to organizational goals is seen as stimulating the sharing of knowledge that helps in achieving these goals (Leana & Van Buren 1999). Engign and Hebert (2010) reported that a potential knowledge source's assessment of a knowledge seeker's reputation affects whether or not information is offered.

Greater commitment to organizational goals is seen as stimulating the sharing of knowledge.

Organizational Commitment & Knowledge Sharing

Mowday et al (1979: 226) define organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in a particular organization". Kelloway and Barling (2000) report a number of empirical studies that confirm that affective commitment is a predictor of performance, and is based on a reciprocal relationship wherein the individual offers his or her talents to the organization in exchange for the rewards of organizational membership. There have been direct and indirect evidences indicating that relationship between employee and organization influences the knowledge sharing behaviour of employees (for instance: Hislop 2002, Kelloway & Barling 2000, Scarbrough 1999, Smith & McKeen 2002). Jarvenpaa and Staples (2001:156) stated that "greater commitment may engender beliefs that the organization has rights to the information and knowledge one has created or acquired". Smith and McKeen (2002) stated that commitment to the organization is an important part of a knowledge sharing culture. Organizational *commitment* mediated the relationship between psychological ownership and *knowledge-sharing* behaviour (Han, Chiang & Chang, 2010). Golden and Raghuram (2010) reported that the impact of *commitment* on knowledge sharing is contingent upon the use of electronic tools. Based on such literature, we propose:

H1: Organizational commitment will positively influence knowledge sharing behaviour.

Psychological Contract and Knowledge Sharing

The “psychological contract” concept deals with the pattern of unwritten and implied beliefs held by the employee and organization about what each should offer, and what each is obligated to provide, in the exchange relations that operate between them. This concept has attracted much research interest since the 1990s. Rousseau’s (1989) seminal research triggered much of the contemporary empirical work on the employment psychological contract. According to Rousseau (1989:124), a psychological contract forms when “an individual perceives that contributions he or she makes obligate the organization to reciprocity (or vice versa)”, and it is the belief in this obligation of reciprocity, although unilateral, that constitutes the contract. While the psychological contract is normally perceived as unwritten, it has “the power of self-fulfilling prophecies: they can create the future” (Rousseau 1995: 9). The formation of psychological contracts is a two-way process, i.e. a psychological contract refers to the assumptions or expectations that both employers and employees have about their responsibilities to one another that go beyond the formal employment contract (Rousseau & Schalk 2000).

Two major types of psychological contracts have been evaluated: relational and transactional (e.g. Rousseau 1990, 1995, Herriot, Manning & Kidd 1997, Anderson & Schalk 1998, Millward & Hopkins 1998, Millward & Brewerton 1999). Transactional contracts typically involve a short-

term exchange of specific contributions and benefits that are usually highly monetary or economic in focus (Hui et al. 2004) with little close involvement of the parties. Employees are more concerned with compensation and personal benefit than with being good organizational citizens. If turnover does not occur, overall performance is reduced to exhibiting only those behaviours consistent with the contributions one is paid to make (Rousseau 2004). Relational psychological contract has primarily emotional terms, long-term commitments by both parties, and non-explicit performance terms. Relational contracts characterize beliefs about obligations based on exchanges of socio-emotional factors (e.g. loyalty and support). A relational-type relationship can engender feelings of affective involvement or attachment in the employee, and can commit the employer to providing more than purely remunerative support to the individual with investments like training, personal and career development, and provision of job security. Workers with relational contracts are very upset when the psychological contract is violated, and they are more inclined to seek remedies that maintain their relationship with the employer. Only when a situation cannot be remedied will they reduce their contributions or consider leaving altogether (Rousseau 2004).

Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993) claim that these contract types differ with respect to focus, time-frame, stability, scope and tangibility. Relational contracts tend to describe perceived obligations that are emotional and intrinsic in nature, whilst transactional contracts describe

obligations that are economic and extrinsic. Relational contracts are seen to have an open-ended, indefinite duration whilst the time frame for transactional contracts is more specific and short-term.

Another concept that's closely related to psychological contract is perceived breach of contract, which refers to the cognition that one's organization has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions (Morrison & Robinson 1997). Even though this incongruence in a psychological contract is a subjective experience, with any perceived non-fulfilment, employees may change their beliefs about what they subsequently owe their employer (Robinson et al. 1994, Rousseau 1989). Breach has been linked to a number of downward adjustments in important employees' attitudes and behaviours, for example in trust, satisfaction, commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour and in-role performance (Zhao *et al.* 2007 for a meta-analysis). Robinson and Rousseau (1994) argue that contract violation is a serious issue that occurs more often than not. In their study of MBA alumni, they found that the perception of violation was negatively related to an employee's trust in their employer, satisfaction with their job and organisation, intent to remain with the employer, and positively associated with actual turnover. Other studies has reported

The perception of violation was negatively related to an employee's trust in their employer.

that it leads to increased turnover (Maertz & Griffeth 2004), reduced organizational citizenship behaviours and in-role behaviours (Hui *et al.* 2004; Turnley *et al.* 2003), and increased deviant behaviours (Kickul 2001) following the experience of breach. The present study hypothesized:

H2: Psychological contract fulfilment will positively influence knowledge sharing behaviour.

H3: Psychological contract breach will negatively influence knowledge sharing behaviour.

Relationship between the specific psychological contract (transactional/relational) was an exploratory issue for the study.

Sample & Procedure

To test the proposed research model, the study adopted the survey method for data collection. Data were gathered by means of questionnaires that were sent through electronic mail. Overall 300 questionnaires were mailed, and 135 usable questionnaires were received, with a response rate of 45 percent. The respondents came from different organizations from diverse industries, such as information technology (49.62%), manufacturing (31.85%), and others (18.51 %) including finance, computers, engineering and telecom etc. The participants were technical (47.41%) and non-technical employees (52.59%). The average age of executives was 25.18 years (SD = 2.89) and average experience 5.04 years (SD = 3.25). With respect to the

level of qualifications, 73.3 percent were graduates from various streams, (i.e., commerce, science, computers, arts, management, electrical, textile etc); and 26.7% were post-graduates from management, science etc. Male respondents accounted for 70.4 percent of the population and 29.6 percent were the females.

Measures

Knowledge sharing behaviour was measured using seven items. These items were developed on the basis of work of Lee (2001) and discussion with working professionals. Employees were asked to respond how frequently they share their knowledge with others in the organization on a 5-point scale (1- very rarely, 5 very frequently). The coefficient alpha for the scale was .75.

Organization commitment was measured with nine items. These items were developed on the basis of work of Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). Employees responded on a 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed with each statement with reference to how well he/she connects with the organization (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree). The coefficient alpha for the aggregate measure of organization identification was .88.

Psychological contract scale was measured using the instrument developed by Millward and Hopkins (1998). The scale assesses the relational-transactional dimensions of the psychological contract, and produces a sub-scale score for each of these constructs. It consists of a total

of 17 items related to relational psychological contract (7 items) and transactional psychological contract (10 items). Respondents indicated their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree). The sub scale has high reliability coefficient (alpha) of .85 for transactional psychological contract and .66 for relational psychological contract.

Psychological contract breach questionnaire consists of five items developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). Respondents indicated their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree; 5 – Strongly agree). The coefficient alpha for the aggregate measure of the psychological contract breach was .75.

The last part included the questions related to respondents' demographic profile such as age, gender, total experience (in years), qualifications, and nature of work etc.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Later the descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability coefficients were computed for each measure. Hypotheses were tested using regression analysis.

Results

The means and standard deviations for all variables are presented in Table 1. The correlations among study variables are reported in Table 2. The results of regression analysis for organizational commitment, psychological contract

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organization commitment	3.45	0.69
Relational Psychological contract	3.42	0.74
Transactional Psychological Contract	2.93	0.53
Psychological contract breach	2.69	0.64
Knowledge Sharing Behavior	3.57	0.73

Table 2 Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	OC	RPC	TPC	PC B	KS
Organizational commitment(OC)					
Relational Psychological contract (RPC)	.625**				
Transactional Psychological contract (TPC)	0.106	.196*			
Psychological Contract breach (PCB)	-.536**	-.503**	0.024		
Knowledge Sharing (KS)	.194*	.291**	0.14	-0.126	

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

and psychological contract breach and knowledge sharing behaviour significantly support the overall model with F value of 3.31 ($p < .013$) (Table 3). R square (.09) indicates that the variance in knowledge sharing behaviour is substantially explained by relational psychological contract ($\hat{\alpha} = .265$, $p < .02$) while transactional psychological contract, organizational commitment and psychologi-

cal contract breach were not significantly related to knowledge sharing behaviour (Table 3).

The variance in knowledge sharing behaviour is substantially explained by relational psychological contract.

Table 3 Results of Regression Analysis for knowledge sharing behaviour as Dependent Variable and Organizational commitment, Psychological contract and Psychological contract breach as Independent Variables

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.151	0.675		3.187	0.002
Organizational commitment	0.031	0.121	0.029	0.26	0.796
Relational Psychological contract	0.265	0.112	0.267	2.361	0.02*
Transactional Psychological contract	0.116	0.119	0.084	0.979	0.33
Psychological Contract breach	0.024	0.118	0.021	0.207	0.836

Note: * = $p < 0.01$

Discussion & Conclusion

Knowledge sharing encompasses a broad range of behaviours that are complex and multi-faceted. Research has found that knowledge sharing is shaped by many factors, including the culture of the organization, the nature of the technology, and the individual's values and attitudes towards sharing (Oliver 2008, Widén-Wulff & Ginman 2004, Hall 2003). The present study examined the relationship between employee and employer as predictor to influence knowledge sharing. The relationships were examined in terms of employees' commitment towards organization and perceived psychological contract fulfilment and psychological contract breach on knowledge sharing. The findings of the study supported the hypothesis related to psychological contract fulfilment and knowledge sharing in favour of relational psychological contract and knowledge sharing. The findings indicate that transactional psychological contract that is usually highly monetary or economic in focus with little close involvement of the parties, is unrelated to knowledge sharing. These findings are congruent with the findings of studies which state that reward does not influence or negatively knowledge sharing behaviour (e.g., Bock & Kim 2002, Bock et.al. 2005, Gupta et.al. 2009). The study also indicated that organizational commitment, although signifi-

cantly correlated with knowledge sharing, is not a significant predictor for it. Overall, the findings of the study suggest that in order to enhance knowledge sharing organizations need to build up the environment where employees perceive that it would not involve any cost to them if they share their knowhow with others. This happens when employees share relational psychological contract which includes perceived obligations that are emotional and intrinsic in nature for indefinite durations (Rousseau & McLean 1993). The findings of the study also indicate that psychological breach is unrelated with knowledge sharing behaviour. These findings are incongruent with the findings of other studies where breach has been linked to a number of downward adjustments in important employees' attitudes and behaviours, e.g., in trust, satisfaction, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviour and in-role performance (Zhao et al. 2007 for a meta-analysis). Further studies are needed to examine the type of psychological contract breach on knowledge sharing behaviour. Research suggests that the reaction to breach may vary depending on the nature of the psychological contract (Robinson et al. 1994). Breaches of relational obligations are likely to have much stronger effects than breaches of transactional obligations (Robinson et al. 1994). Breach in a relational contract may change the nature of the social relationship (MacNeil 1985), leading to erosion of trust and relational obligations on the part of both the employer and employee. It is conjectured here that relational psychological contract breach will negatively influence knowledge sharing behaviour.

Psychological breach is unrelated with knowledge sharing behaviour.

The findings indicate that transactional psychological contract that is usually highly monetary or economic in focus with little close involvement of the parties, is unrelated to knowledge sharing.

The practical implications of the findings are that if organization wants the employees' involvement in knowledge sharing behaviour they need to build up relational psychological contract. Rousseau (2004) states that organizations must deliberately formulate psychological contract that establish trust between the parties and promote employee obligations to share knowledge and motivate workers towards the type of knowledge sharing contributions that are essential to their mutual success. The most successful organizations are able to attract and retain top talent by entering into psychological contracts with their employees that "motivate them to generate and share knowledge in return for nurturing and nourishing their professional skills" (Thite 2004: 29).

The most successful organizations are able to attract and retain top talent by entering into psychological contracts with their employees.

There are some limitations in our research that should be mentioned. The sample size was not large enough. Therefore the study needs to be replicated using a larger sample of employees. This research has only collected cross-sectional

data, and it is not appropriate to infer strong causal relationships between variables. Collecting longitudinal data may be a better approach for future research. Another limitation is the use of self-reported measures when employees provided data on both independent and dependent variables. It is possible that the relationships among the independent and dependent variables were inflated due to common method variance. Future study needs to include objective measures of knowledge sharing for explicit knowledge and feedback from peers, subordinates, superiors for implicit knowledge, in order to have better understanding for knowledge sharing behaviour. This study examined the impact of commitment and psychological contract on knowledge sharing; further studies can be conducted examining the moderating effect of personality variables like pro-social behaviour, need for affiliation etc. on the relationship between these variables.

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