The Effect of Knowledge Sharing Behavior of Supervisor on Employees’ Fear of Losing Value Regarding Knowledge Sharing: The Mediating Role of Organizational Support

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

Knowledge sharing is an important issue in organizations because the knowledge of employee is expected to become the knowledge of organization. Employee may leave the organization but the knowledge is to be embedded in organizational structure. Supervisors are seen as key actors in this process. It is suggested that supervisor represents the whole organization and therefore her/his role is being examined (Nonaka, 1994; Nigel et.al. 1999; Dfouni and Croteau, 2003; Connelly and Kelloway 2003). We base our study on this notion and social exchange theory and we suggest that knowledge sharing behavior of supervisor will make employees feel higher levels of organizational support and this in return will enhance the knowledge sharing behavior of the employee.

Eisenberger et.al. (2001) describes perceived organizational support as “...general beliefs of employees concerning how much the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being.” According to Nonoka (1991,1994) knowledge sharing is the process of revealing tacit information. Holtshouse (1998) states that turning individual’s knowledge into group knowledge can also be defined as knowledge sharing. Renzl (2008) states that an employee’s fear of becoming worthless can effect the knowledge sharing behavior and revealing tacit information which can ben useful for organization. Research results reveal that knowledge sharing can enhance firm’s performance (Dfouni and Croteau 2003). Here Connelly and Kelloway (2003) in their paper entitled “Predictors Of Employees’ Perceptions of Knowledge Sharing Cultures” show that support of supervisor regarding knowledge sharing effects the knowledge sharing behavior in whole organization.

Several studies aim to reveal the principals of knowledge sharing and revealing the tacit knowledge. Here we suggest that supervisor will act as a role model and
encourage employees to share their knowledge with others. It is very common that knowledge is considered as power. Therefore it is likely that people will not share information with the fear of losing value. When a supervisor is eager to share information this will give some clue to employee about organization’s culture and it is likely that this employee will infer this behavior as a safe and supportive manner of organization toward employees.

**Method**

In order to test the effect of “knowledge sharing behavior of supervisor” on “fear of losing value regarding knowledge sharing” and the mediating role of organizational support we conducted a survey on 200 participants. Our survey tool was consist of four main parts that measured demographic characteristics and our three variables. Organizational support was measured through Eisenberger et.al.’s (1986) scale (8 items). Knowledge sharing of supervisor was measured with Gee-Woo et.al.’s (2005) scale (7 items) and finally fear of losing value regarding knowledge sharing is measured with Renzl’s (2008) scale (4 items).

**Findings**

% 41.9 of participants are female and %58.1 are male. %44.7 is married and %55.3 is single. %3.2 graduated from elementary school, %11.1 from high school, %60.4 have college degree, %20.3 have master degree and %5.1 Ph.D. Their positions in the firms is as follows; %25.8 low level, %55.3 middle level and %18.9 are from high levels of firm. %10.6 are from public and %89.4 from private sector. Their work experience is found to be between 1 and 41 years. Their tenure is between 1-28 years.

To be able to see the relationships between variables we conducted correlation analysis. Results show that there is a positive correlation between supervisor’s knowledge sharing and organizational support. Negative correlations was found between supervisor’s knowledge sharing and fear of losing value. Also organizational support and fear of losing value revealed a negative correlation. These results can be interpreted such as when information sharing behavior of supervisor rises so does the perceived organizational support and conversely decreases the fear of losing value. Besides when perceived organizational support rises, fear of losing value decreases.

We tested our model and the mediating role of variable according to Baron and Kenny (1986) with SPSS program and also ran a Sobel test. We ran four regression analysis in order to test the mediating role of organizational support. First we conducted regression analysis for knowledge sharing of supervisor and fear of losing value (p: 0.02; Adj.R squ.: .018; β: -.150). Than we ran regression analysis for knowledge sharing of supervisor and perceived organizational support (p: .000; Adj.R squ.: .404; β: .638). Third regression analysis was to see the effect of both knowledge sharing of supervisor and organizational support on fear of losing value. Results revealed that when both variables were included the effect of knowledge sharing of supervisor’s effect disappeared (p: .390) meaning organizational support is a mediating variable between two. Our results of analysis revealed that organizational support perfectly mediates the relationship between knowledge sharing of supervisor and fear of losing value regarding information sharing.

Our results support our model and the key role of supervisor and organizational support is once again revealed. Our findings reveal that employees tend to generalize
their relationship and experiences with supervisor to whole organization and they mirror this to others. This result is in line with findings of Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), Sluss (2008) and Baranik (2009) and Doğan and Kılıç (2009) who conclude supervisor is a reflection of the whole organization for employee. Also the importance of organizational support is once again revealed in terms of social exchange theory. Once person receives a favor that person is prone to pay back. This result is also in accordance with Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) and Watson and Hewet (2006) research findings.

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**Conclusion and Discussion**

Our study adds to literature that for employees to share information first a role model is needed. It is very likely that this role model can be the immediate manager of employee. Once this role model exhibits a behavior it is very likely that employees will also be keen on doing the same thing. Speed of doing favor is too high and it is contagious. Lately positive organizational behavior is becoming so popular and the effects of variables such as positive leadership is being examined. This study also finds support for social exchange theory that when our firm is kind to us we would like to pay this back. Our study supports the idea that if a firm wants to keep its employees and also wants their knowledge to become organization’s knowledge, it has to maintain proper conditions first, namely making employees feel they are supported and their contributions are important. Once an employee feels this support the hostile emotions are gone away, he or she is ready to pay back to organization. This way supervisor and organization’s manner toward employees may predict and guide employees to desired outcomes such as sharing information.

One thing that prevents employees from sharing information is fear of losing value. It is a common feeling that when we think something can only be done by us, we are indispensable. This assumption is the main barrier to knowledge sharing and the only solution is to make employees feel comfortable that even their knowledge becomes organization’s knowledge, they are still valuable and their efforts still matters. It won’t be easy to convince employees especially in the economic conditions where there are many candidates and rivals wishing to be at their positions. However a role model can act as an evidence of firm’s goodwill and employees will start to mirror their supervisor's behavior. In this study we did not consider the culture regarding knowledge sharing. Culture, norms and policies are also mentioned to be important predictors of knowledge sharing behavior. Future studies may consider culture and climate in order to test their effect and results on knowledge sharing behavior of employees.