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An integrative view and empirical examination of the relationships among knowledge management enablers, processes, and organizational performance in Australian enterprises

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An Integrative View and Empirical Examination of the Relationships Among Knowledge Management Enablers, Processes, and Organizational Performance in Australian Enterprises

PhD Thesis

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University of Wollongong
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Abstract

This study briefly describes the main concepts of knowledge management enablers with a focus on transformational leadership constructs, knowledge processes with a focus on knowledge creation process (SECI of Nonaka and Takeuchi (199) model), organisational creativity, and organisational performance.

There is a limited understanding of what determines effective knowledge management, and there is currently very limited tested framework that unifies all of the relevant above-mentioned concepts in a relatively easy to understand and practical way. As such, one of the principal goals of this study is to develop an integrated framework, which can explain and guide the successful and effective management of knowledge in organisations. Such a framework should benefit the academic research in knowledge management as well as help managers in their efforts to best locate an organisational resource and focus its knowledge management efforts for optimum organisational performance.

There are three main aims, which motivate the study. The first aim is to combine knowledge management enablers and knowledge creation processes from both a social perspective and a technological perspective in relation to organisational performance, and test the relationships empirically to provide strategic positions to organisations and provide them with indicators, which should help them to manage their knowledge effectively. Managers face a dilemma in selecting the most effective knowledge management enablers and knowledge management processes to solve organisational problems.

In recent times, much has been written and many theories have been offered regarding the phenomenon of knowledge management and its implementation. However, little empirical
research has been conducted to support these theories (Leech and Sutton, 2002), as the majority of studies reported in the literature come from single cases to small sample sizes where the generality of the results is significantly reduced (Gold, 2001). Current empirical research has explored the relationships between these factors in isolation. Rigorous development of a model of the salient issues is warranted, especially if it leads to a means of measurement of relevant constructs. Thus, the second aim of this study is to test the research integrative framework empirically. An exploratory study is undertaken to build the survey (instrument) of the constructs followed by a confirmatory analysis.

The third aim of this study is to conduct a qualitative study (Q Method) on the main part of the study model, that is, transformational leadership constructs, in an attempt to investigate rigorously their contributions to the knowledge management effectiveness and their role in providing organisations with strategic positions.

There are several theoretical and practical contributions for this study.

This study makes significant contributions across multiple areas of knowledge management research. These contributions relate to (1) the development of a conceptual model that explains and predicts the effects of knowledge management enablers on knowledge creation process, which in turn affects organisational performance through organisational creativity; (2) the empirical support for the proposed hypotheses drawn from the literature review and based on the study integrative framework; (3) the development of a new instrument; (4) the research focuses on certain knowledge management enablers as the most important factors affecting the knowledge creation process; (5) the importance of the study, as most of the participants are Australian SMEs; (6) this study combines an exploratory approach followed by an empirical with
confirmatory analysis in a rigorous and thorough methodology for knowledge management.

The research results help managers establish strategic positions to manage knowledge effectively. Australian organisations may benefit from building a knowledge conductive culture, that is, a culture supportive of knowledge management which highly values knowledge and encourages its creation, sharing and application.

Knowledge creation is associated with cultural factors (trust, collaboration and learning) included in this study. For example, group members are most creative when their members collaborate; members stop holding back when they have mutual trust (Huemer et al. 1998). Moreover, organisational learning is imperative and managers should continuously pay careful attention to it and make sure it is effective. Therefore, shaping cultural factors is crucial for a firm’s ability to manage its knowledge effectively (Chase, 1997; Davenport et al., 1998; Gold et al., 2001; Long, 1997).

Organisations should have an environment that encourages forming t-shaped skills and should provide a systematic management of these skills.

Role model leaders who practice transformational leadership in organisations can create an atmosphere of trust where knowledge and opinions can be shared openly without fear of punishment, risk taking is praised and courteous challenges to the status quo are welcomed, and there are opportunities to rethink assumptions and learn collectively from reflection (Baker and Camarata (1998).

Strategy, goals and concepts associated with knowledge creation and transfer must be clear to every one in the organisation. Skyrme and Amidon (1997) assert that a compelling vision and conceptual architecture build a common language and define key
domains for knowledge. Such domains create knowledge structures, often based on the individual pattern of use of concepts (Davenport and Prusak 1998, p. 159).

IT is critical for codifying explicit knowledge since it provides fast feedback for explicit knowledge (Krogh et al., 2001; Weiser and Morrison, 1998). This study indicates that without a solid foundation of trust, the communication of even explicit knowledge is difficult (Scott, 2000). This implies that simply improving the IT infrastructure does not provide a competitive advantage for knowledge combination. Consequently, managers should pay careful attention to the potential impact of IT on knowledge combination with the consideration of trust in a firm.

According to Maula (2000, p. 57):

> It is vital for management to recognise that organisational creativity is a subtle issue that depends on the firm’s tacit capabilities and characteristics. It also depends on an atmosphere that tolerates and favours intuition and inspiration, on the functioning of the relevant knowledge processes, on the availability of information and communication tools to help share knowledge in less-structured form, and to transform it into highly-structured form if necessary

Organisations could benefit tremendously from the balance between imposing discipline of efficiency and delegating authority to encourage flexibility.

Finally, this study has identified opportunities for further study that may significantly progress the continually evolving understanding of knowledge management, which can help formulate robust strategies that involve trade-offs between knowledge management enablers.
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