

AUTONOMOUS JOB DESIGN AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION

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Abstract

There has been a rising concern with regards to an inadequate level of knowledge sharing among the faculty members of higher education institutions (HEIs) situated in the various parts of the world. Scholars argue that improving academic research and quality of education at these institutions greatly depends on the level of knowledge sharing practices among their faculty members. Thus, it is important to explore the factors that may stimulate knowledge sharing among the academics. Accordingly, this paper attempts to develop a conceptual framework articulating that autonomous job design may boost up academics' knowledge sharing behavior (KSB) with the mediating effect of public service motivation (PSM). It is expected that further empirical studies will justify the framework and provide better insights into promoting academics' KSB at HEIs.

Keywords: Autonomous Job Design, Knowledge Management (KM), Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB), Public Service Motivation (PSM)

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is recognized as the most important strategic resource that can help organizations achieve and sustain long-term competitive advantage (Agarwal & Marouf, 2014; Chen et al., 2016; Nieves & Haller, 2014). The contemporary literature strongly suggests that effective knowledge management in organizations results in desired employee outcomes, organizational outcomes, and competitive advantage (Andreeva & Kianto, 2016; Giampaoli, Ciambotti, & Bontis, 2017; Ha, Lo, & Wang, 2016; Kianto, Vanhala, & Heilmann, 2016; Lee, Foo, Leong, & Ooi, 2016; Masa'deh, Shannak, Maqableh, & Tarhini, 2017). However, among all the components of knowledge management, knowledge sharing is acknowledged as the most vital one (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Edwards, 2017; Trivellas, Akrivouli, Tsifora, & Tsoutsas, 2015; Wang, Sharma, & Cao, 2016). Knowledge sharing enables exchange and application of scattered information, practices, uncommon understandings, insights, and experiences in the organization (Wang et al., 2016). Effective knowledge sharing expedites learning, creativity, innovation, knowledge creation, problem solving, decision making, and, ultimately, performance at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Akhavan, Ghojavand, & Abdali, 2012; Akhavan & Mahdi Hosseini, 2016; Arduin, Grundstein, & Rosenthal-Sabroux, 2013; Carmeli, Gelbard, & Reiter-Palmon, 2013; Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016; Henttonen et al., 2016; Jiang, Flores, Leelawong, & Manz, 2016; Kim & Park, 2017; Oyemomi, Liu, Neaga, & Alkhurajji, 2016; Zhang et al., 2017). Moreover, knowledge sharing transforms individual knowledge into a precious organizational asset (Islam, Ikeda, & Islam, 2013). Due to the fact, knowledge sharing has gained much attention in the field of education and business management (Wang, Lin, Li, & Lin, 2014).

However, unexpectedly, research in general has emphasized studying knowledge sharing in business organizations, while overlooking academic institutions (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Fullwood, Rowley, & Delbridge, 2013; Santosh & Panda, 2016). In fact, knowledge sharing is in no way less important for academic institutions, particularly higher education institutions (HEIs) which are considered the hub of generating, utilizing, and distributing knowledge (Cheng, Ho, & Lau, 2009; Howell & Annansingh, 2013; Mat, Alias, & Muslim, 2016; Nassuora & Hasan, 2010). Improving knowledge sharing behavior, especially among the university faculty members, is crucial for HEIs for accelerating their collective research work, learning, innovation, knowledge creation, academic excellence, and institutional performance (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2015; Bulan & Sensuse, 2012; Howell & Annansingh, 2013; Masa'deh et al., 2017; Tan, 2016). However, literature shows that inadequate level of knowledge sharing among the faculty members in HEIs is a prevalent phenomenon (Ali, Gohneim, & Roubaie, 2014; Chalak, Ziaei, & Nafei, 2014; Ramayah, Yeap, & Ignatius, 2013). Instead of knowledge sharing, faculty members tend to actively engage in knowledge hoarding

(i.e. accumulation of knowledge) as well as knowledge hiding (i.e., concealment of knowledge when requested by another person) from their colleagues (Hernaus, Vokić, Aleksić, Černe, & Škerlavaj, 2015; Muqadas et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2013; Runhaar & Sanders, 2016; Santosh & Panda, 2016; Shahzadi, Hameed, & Kashif, 2015). In particular, faculty members are less inclined to share knowledge voluntarily with their colleagues due to numerous reasons, such as insufficient incentives, lack of supportive organizational culture and environment, culture of individualism and self-serving, lack of time, absence of trust, personal attitude, etcetera (Fullwood et al., 2013; Norulkamar & Hatamleh, 2014; Santosh & Panda, 2016; Tan, 2016). Therefore, scholars have started to focus on exploring the mechanisms of expediting knowledge sharing behavior among the academics of HEIs (Fullwood et al., 2013; Shahzadi et al., 2015; Tahir, Musah, Abdullah, Musta'amal, & Abdullah, 2016; Tan, 2016).

However, prior studies on KSB tend to ignore the important role of autonomous motivation in promoting individuals' KSB, with rare exceptions (Cockrell & Stone, 2010, Gagne, 2009, Wang, 2016). Moreover, limited studies focus on KSB among academics at higher academic institutions in comparison with business organizations (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Fullwood et al., 2013; Santosh & Panda, 2016). To fill up the gap, this paper proposes an autonomous form of motivation (i.e., public service motivation) as an individual-level mechanism through which autonomous job design is supposed to induce knowledge sharing among university faculty members. Public service motivation (PSM) is a general altruistic motivation that encourages employees to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the community (Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & Bottomley, 2015; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999) and is increasingly recognized as an autonomous motivation (Chen, Hsieh, & Chen, 2014b; Schott & Pronk, 2014; Tangaraja, Mohd Rasdi, Ismail, & Samah, 2015). Relying on extensive review of literature, the paper tends to conceptualize the relationship among the variables, using self-determination theory. Finally, a conceptual research model has been proposed.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This paper extensively reviews relevant journals, conference papers, and book chapters mainly published by Elsevier, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis, Sage, Springer, Emerald, and IGI-Global.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Knowledge, as postulated by the knowledge-based view, is the most important strategic resource among all the probable resources an organization may possess (Agarwal & Marouf,

2014; Chen et al., 2016; Nieves & Haller, 2014). Due to the importance of knowledge in the organizations, the concept 'knowledge management' emerges in the mid-1980s and gains much interest in managerial and academic fields since 1990s (Oliva, 2014; Schmitz, Rebelo, Gracia, & Tomás, 2014). Knowledge management (KM) refers to "the process of capturing, sharing, developing, and using the knowledge efficiently" (Navimipour & Charband, 2016, p. 730). However, knowledge sharing, among all the activities of KM, is acknowledged as the vital one (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Edwards, 2017; Wang et al., 2016). Knowledge sharing among the organizational members expedites the creation and application of knowledge in the organization (Youssef, Saheem, & Youssef, 2017) and thereby accelerates its innovativeness, core capability, and competitive advantage (Chiang, Han, & Chuang, 2011). Consequently, knowledge sharing behavior (KSB) among the organizational members has turned into a key priority in organizations due to its significant impact on their competitiveness (Li, Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2017; Youssef et al., 2017) and scholars are paying particular attention on how to promote KSB in the organizations (Aklamanu, Degbey, & Tarba, 2016; Kettinger, Li, Davis, & Kettinger, 2015; Pervaiz, Imran, Arshad, Haq, & Khan, 2016; Tan, 2016).

Knowledge sharing facilitates and promotes the exchange of information, experiences, and skills among the employees of an organization (Hussein et al., 2016). Knowledge sharing can take place at the individual, group, departmental, or organizational level (Yi, 2009). However, knowledge sharing usually originates from the individual level (Yeo & Gold, 2014). In addition, scholars generally view KSB as either unidirectional (i.e., disseminating knowledge) or bidirectional (i.e., disseminating and collecting knowledge) (Hussein et al., 2016). Moreover, organizational knowledge comprises of explicit knowledge (e.g., information) and tacit knowledge (e.g., experiences and insights embedded in individuals) (Loebbecke, van Fenema, & Powell, 2016; Mat et al., 2016). The paper focuses on sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge at individual level within the organization and considers it as unidirectional. Accordingly, KSB is defined as the individual behavior of disseminating one's job-related knowledge voluntarily, either tacit or explicit, to other members in the organization (Wang & Noe, 2010; Yi, 2009).

Autonomous Job Design

One of the fundamental activities of HRM is designing jobs (Foss, Minbaeva, Pedersen, & Reinholt, 2009). Job design is defined as "the way tasks are combined to form complete jobs" (Robbins & Coulter, 2012, p. 438). An important aspect of designing job is determining the level of job autonomy. Job autonomy refers to the extent to which the job permits considerable independence and discretion to the employee in deciding the procedures and schedules for

performing the tasks (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). That means it is concerned with the extent to which the job allows the employee the opportunity and freedom in deciding when and how to perform specific tasks (Foss et al., 2009; Foss, Pedersen, Reinholt Fosgaard, & Stea, 2015). According to Buch, Dysvik, Kuvaas, and Nerstad (2015), perceived job autonomy is concerned with the degree to which employees perceive that their jobs provide discretion and freedom to make decisions, timetable their work, and select the methods employed to accomplish the tasks. In fact, autonomous job design is a strong determinant of positive employee outcomes (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Dhar, 2016; Foss et al., 2015; Park, 2016a; Zhang, Jex, Peng, & Wang, 2016).

Public Service Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is a rising research concept originated in the discipline of public administration (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015; Vogel, Homberg, & Gericke, 2016). Though early research on PSM is completely confined to the field of public administration, PSM is now recognized as a multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral (i.e. public, private, and non-profit) universal concept (Pedersen, Stritch, & Taggart, 2017; Vogel et al., 2016). Accordingly, several scholars define PSM in broader sense that suits across the sectors (Wright, Christensen, & Pandey, 2013). For example, Rainey and Steinbauer (1999, p. 23), PSM is “a general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation, or humankind”. Brewer and Selden (1998, p. 417) defines PSM as “the motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service” considering the fact that PSM is an individual-centered concept, not a sector-centered concept. Perry and Hondeghem (2008, p. vii) define PSM as “an individual’s orientation to delivering service to people with the purpose of doing good for others and society,” and also argue that this definition fits for the individuals from across the sectors. Focusing on the organizational context, Mostafa et al. (2015) define PSM as “a prosocial value that encourages employees to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the community”. For the current study, PSM refers to a general altruistic motivation that drives an individual employee to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to his/her community.

Autonomous Job Design and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Job designing (i.e., deciding a job's key contents) is usually seen as an effective mechanism for promoting KSB at individual level within organizations (Foss et al., 2009; Foss et al., 2015; Pee & Chua, 2016; Pee & Lee, 2015; Rehman, Mahmood, Salleh, & Amin, 2014). In particular, autonomy-promoting job design is crucial for stimulating employees to engage in conscious and voluntary knowledge sharing (Xue, Bradley, & Liang, 2011). The importance of autonomous job

design for stimulating knowledge sharing behavior is two-fold. First, autonomous job design enhances opportunity for employees to perform activities that are not obligatory to a job, such as sharing knowledge (Pee & Chua, 2016). Second, job autonomy, as postulated by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), is a basic psychological need, satisfaction of which stimulates employees' autonomous motivation toward self-determined behavior like KSB (Foss et al., 2015; Stenius, Haukkala, Hankonen, & Ravaja, 2016).

Drawing on the self-determination theory (SDT), Foss et al. (2015) argue that a job with higher level of autonomy reinforces employees' feeling of being self-determined which in turn strengthens autonomously motivated behaviors, e.g., knowledge sharing. Moreover, employees with greater levels of job autonomy usually perceive their workplace in a more positive manner which may stimulate employees to exhibit desired behaviors (Garg & Dhar, 2017). Reviewing literature, Gagné (2009) assumes that autonomous job design directly facilitates knowledge sharing and indirectly promotes knowledge-sharing behavior through its influence on work motivation. Arif et al. (2017) argue that high job autonomy assists employees to share their decisions, accept responsibility, and strengthen relationships with colleagues which are supportive to knowledge sharing. Relying on literature, Tangaraja et al. (2015) argue that autonomy patronizes employees' intrinsic motivation towards engaging in the behaviors of their choices like KSB.

In fact, several studies discover that autonomous job design is positively associated with KSB (Buch et al., 2015; Cavalliere & Lombardi, 2013; Foss et al., 2009; Foss et al., 2015; Ozlati, 2015; Pee & Lee, 2015). For example, Foss et al. (2015) reveal that autonomous job design significantly promote knowledge sharing among the employees of knowledge-intensive organizations headquartered in Denmark. In an earlier study in Denmark, Foss et al. (2009) reveal that job autonomy promotes KSB through the improving employees' intrinsic motivation. Ozlati (2015) confirms that job autonomy is a good predictor of KSB of R&D professionals in USA. In a study of employees from service sector in Norway, Buch et al. (2015) discover that job autonomy is positively associated with KSB. Moreover, the study shows that job autonomy along with greater supervisory support strengthens the relationship between perceived training intensity and KSB. In another study on managerial and professional employees, Pee and Lee (2015) explore that job autonomy significantly promotes intrinsic motivation toward knowledge sharing through stimulating affective commitment. Cavalliere and Lombardi (2013) also discover that job autonomy significantly affects KSB of knowledge workers from international firms.

In fact, literature strongly supports the favorable link between autonomous job design and KSB. So, the paper assumes the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Perceived autonomous job design is positively related with knowledge sharing behavior.

Autonomous Job Design and Public Service Motivation

According to SDT, autonomous job design induces intrinsic motivation (i.e., PSM) by providing the employees with more opportunities for experiencing personal satisfaction and fulfillment from the work itself (Park & Rainey, 2008). According to Taylor (2012), employees with high PSM place strong emphasis on job autonomy and interesting job assignment. The author clarifies that employees who have strong motive to bring a positive change in the others' lives may have strong need for autonomy and interesting & meaningful job assignment. In addition, more autonomy and control over work usually boosts up an individual's sense of self-determination as well as intrinsic motivation (Song, Kwon, Cha, & Min, 2017) and thus may increase PSM. In contrast, lack of autonomy is one of the noteworthy predictors of low levels of PSM (Quratulain & Khan, 2015).

In fact, few studies discover a positive association between autonomous job design and PSM (Camilleri, 2007; Giaque, Anderfuhren–Biget, & Varone, 2015; Mostafa et al., 2015; Park & Rainey, 2008; Ritz, Brewer, & Neumann, 2016; Schott & Pronk, 2014). For example, Mostafa et al. (2015) confirm that autonomous work design significantly promotes PSM of health and higher-education professionals in the context of Egypt. Moreover, Camilleri (2007) explores that task autonomy has a positive impact on promoting PSM. Similarly, Giaque et al. (2015) conclude that job autonomy can serve as a positive antecedent of PSM of public sector employees working in Switzerland. They also argue that high job autonomy facilitates the fulfillment of the employees' personal expectations, greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn may support their PSM.

Park and Rainey (2008) explore that employees' PSM significantly grows from their autonomy in the workplace. While examining local, state, and federal public-sector employees in USA, Caillier (2015) concludes that granting employees more job autonomy may result in improving PSM of employees. After reviewing a literature of 323 publications, Ritz et al. (2016) conclude that there exists a positive association between job autonomy and PSM. In a study of registered nurses serving in private, non-profit, and public hospitals in Germany, Schott and Pronk (2014) explore that a significantly positive relationship exists between fulfillment of the need for autonomy and PSM. However, Kim (2016) discovers an insignificant relationship between job autonomy and PSM in the context of South Korea. Since literature mainly suggests

a positive association between autonomous job design and PSM, the paper assumes following proposition:

Proposition 2: Perceived autonomous job design is positively related with public service motivation.

Public Service Motivation and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Indeed, PSM is an important tool for fuelling positive employee behaviors (Andersen & Serritzlew, 2012; Esteve, Urbig, van Witteloostuijn, & Boyne, 2016; Shim & Faerman, 2015). In particular, employees with greater PSM prefer the work behaviors that have a positive impact on others and they do so to fulfill their PSM values of helping others (Bellé, 2013). Generally, enjoyment in helping others positively relates to employees' attitudes and intentions toward knowledge sharing (Lin, 2007; Olatokun & Nwafor, 2012; Tan & Ramayah, 2014). Moreover, individuals with greater PSM concentrate on the prosocial and altruistic behaviors (Bullock, Stritch, & Rainey, 2015; Esteve et al., 2016; Tangaraja et al., 2015). In fact, knowledge sharing is a voluntary work which actually resembles prosocial and altruistic behaviors (Chen & Hsieh, 2015; Gagné, 2009). Therefore, people with high level of PSM are supposed to actively engage in KSB.

Moreover, scholars argue that KSB can be considered as an organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Fang & Chiu, 2010; Mogotsi, 2009; Yu & Chu, 2007). Indeed, PSM is regarded as a strong facilitator of OCB (Boyd, Nowell, Yang, & Hano, 2017; Campbell & Im, 2016; Cun, 2012; Mostafa & Leon-Cazares, 2016; Pandey, Wright, & Moynihan, 2008; Shim & Faerman, 2015). So, it appears that PSM is likely to be an important predictor of KSB like as OCB. Furthermore, relying on SDT, scholars argue that autonomous motivation is a strong facilitator of KSB (Nesheim & Smith, 2015; Reinholt, Pedersen, & Foss, 2011; Wang & Hou, 2015). In fact, PSM is recognized as an autonomous motivation (Chen, Hsieh, & Chen, 2014a; Schott & Pronk, 2014; Tangaraja et al., 2015). Therefore, it is expected that PSM will significantly contribute to KSB.

Surprisingly, very few studies have tested the effect of PSM on KSB (Chen & Hsieh, 2015; Tuan, 2016). The findings of these studies show that PSM is a strong predictor of KSB. Tuan (2016) argues that PSM as an altruistic motivation produces a 'transcendent force' in an individual's mindset that helps him/her overcome the obstruction of self-interest in order to perform for the interests of others and share knowledge for a sacred reason. Moreover, a study conducted on academics from economics and business schools in Croatia by Hernaus et al. (2015) shows that prosocially motivated (which indicates high level of PSM) academics are less inclined to hide knowledge. In addition, Tangaraja et al. (2015) conclude with a proposal that

PSM as an intrinsic motivation may significantly drives KSB via affective organizational commitment. The authors argue that the more an individual is intrinsically motivated in relation to enjoyment of helping others, the more the individual will engage in the discretionary behaviors such as knowledge sharing. Therefore, the current study assumes that PSM may serve as a significant driver of KSB and the proposition is-

Proposition 3: Public service motivation is positively related with knowledge sharing behavior.

Public Service Motivation as a Mediator

PSM is believed to be influenced by numerous organizational factors such as job characteristics, organizational culture, job involvement, affective commitment, leadership, and numerous HRM practices (Caillier, 2014, 2015; Camilleri, 2007; Kim, Henderson, & Eom, 2015; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Mustapa & Mahmood, 2016; Park & Rainey, 2008; Schott & Pronk, 2014; Schwarz, Newman, Cooper, & Eva, 2016; Wright, Moynihan, & Pandey, 2012). On the contrary, PSM antecedes many employee outcomes—notably, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intention, deviant behaviors, in-role behavior, extra-role behavior, and job performance (Mostafa & Leon-Cazares, 2016; Mustapa & Mahmood, 2016; Palma, 2016; Roh, Moon, Yang, & Jung, 2016; Schwarz et al., 2016; Shim, Park, & Eom, 2015; van Loon, Kjeldsen, Andersen, Vandenabeele, & Leisink, 2016; Van Loon, Vandenabeele, & Leisink, 2017; Vogel et al., 2016). Moreover, several scholars investigate the mediating role of PSM (Bellé, 2013; Caillier, 2016; Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2013; Gould-Williams et al., 2014; Kassim & Mokhber, 2015; Mostafa, 2013; Mostafa et al., 2015; Mustapa & Mahmood, 2016; Schwarz et al., 2016). Therefore, it is inferred that PSM may serve as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between autonomous job design and KSB.

PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The following research framework has been proposed based on the literature that portrays that autonomous job design has a direct positive influence on KSB. Moreover, autonomous job design has an indirect positive influence on KSB through PSM.

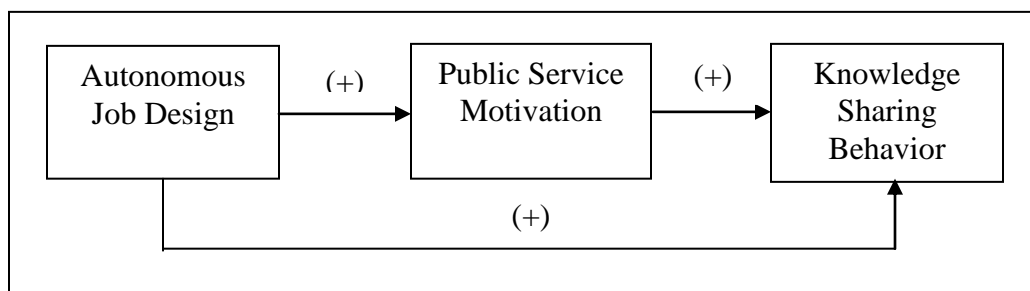


Figure 1. Proposed Research Framework

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Since success of a HEI mostly depends on the knowledge of its academics, considering their role in teaching, research, and scholarly work, it is indispensable to cultivate and expedite KSB among them (Skaik & Othman, 2016). Therefore, HEI ought to undertake vigorous initiatives for transforming the knowledge hoarding culture into a knowledge sharing culture. In this regards, autonomy promoting job design seems to be an effective organizational factor for gearing up knowledge sharing practices among the academics. Unlike other dimensions of job design considering the job characteristics model (JCM), job autonomy is provided by the organization or managers instead of the job itself (Park, 2016b). However, KSB is inspired and practiced primarily at the individual level (Bock & Kim, 2001). Individuals experiencing greater autonomous motivation tend to feel free to express themselves in the form of KSB (Arazy, Gellatly, Brainin, & Nov, 2016). Considering the fact, autonomous job design and PSM (i.e., an autonomous type of motivation) can interplay for promoting academics' KSB. Accordingly, the paper presents a conceptual research framework validation of which in future empirical studies shall be valuable.

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