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The human factor in knowledge management for development: using theories from social psychology to investigate the predictors of knowledge behaviour in development organisations

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This article consists of an analytical overview of theories from Social Psychology with respect to knowledge behavior in development agencies. This provides a theoretical background for the presentation of the results of a cross-cultural study towards the frequencies and predictors of six types of knowledge behavior. In this research 445 people from 89 nationalities participated. The results of the analysis and the study point towards the same outcomes. Attitude, organizational culture, self-efficacy, controllability and motivation are significant predictors of knowledge behavior. It concludes that leadership and human resource management have significant tasks in addressing and nurturing the human factor in knowledge management strategies and implementation in order for those strategies to succeed.

Introduction

The relevance of the human factor in knowledge management for development

Since the pivotal report *Knowledge for Development* of the World Bank (1998), most other development agencies have taken steps in adopting some sort of knowledge management strategy, although approaches have varied quite widely, as has the terminology used, and the levels of investment made (Barnard 2003). The promise and potential of these initiatives, as is the case with the 'Knowledge for Development' movement, has yet to be fully realised. Clearly, the knowledge and learning approach can and does provide useful tools and approaches, which, if properly, consistently and thoughtfully applied, can help address some of the symptoms of the institutional malaise faced by modern development organisations (Ramalingam 2005).

What has tended to happen in development is that organisations have generally leaned towards linear and technocentric interpretations of knowledge management (KM), in line with the descriptive early traditions of KM and organisational development or 'institution building' (Hovland 2003).

Yet, careful attention is needed to the processes by which values and purpose are defined and articulated so as to create an enabling environment for KM to succeed. Without these processes, organisational learning and KM merely become toolkits and methodologies in a vacuum (Pasteur *et al.* 2006). There is also a need to better understand how knowledge and learning may practically address and deal with issues of personality, culture, language, religion, and so on (Ramalingam 2005).

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As Davenport and Prusak (2000, p. 142) put it:

> Effective knowledge management cannot take place without extensive behavioural, cultural and organizational change [. . .] Technology alone won't make a person with expertise share with others. Technology alone won't get an employee who is uninterested in seeking knowledge to hop onto a keyboard and searching or browsing.

Knowledge management is first and foremost a people issue. Does the culture of your organisation support ongoing learning and knowledge sharing? Are people motivated and rewarded for creating, sharing and using knowledge? Is there a culture of openness and mutual respect and support? Or is your organisation very hierarchical where 'knowledge is power' and so people are reluctant to share? Are people under constant pressure to act with no time for knowledge-seeking or reflection? Do they feel inspired to innovate and learn from mistakes, or is there a strong 'blame and shame' culture? These questions are essential to ask and to solve. Previous studies pointed out that we must further understand the reasons why people engage in knowledge sharing behaviour. This study tries to provide some first answers.

This article tries to work out the human factors that promote or impede effective behaviour of people within different knowledge processes. You will find a diverse overview of relevant psychological theories that are translated to the specific world of knowledge management in development settings. Besides these theories, this article publishes some main outcomes of a cross-cultural study towards knowledge management in development conducted by weknowmore.org. At the end of each paragraph it also gives some basic recommendations how to make the human factor flourish in your organisations. However this study was mainly intended to set the stage, future thinking, combining and research is needed to truly work it all out.

What is knowledge and how can you manage it?

There exist hundreds of different definitions for knowledge and knowledge management. One way of defining knowledge is by distinguishing it from information and data. A commonly held view among researchers is that data consists of raw numbers and facts. Information is a combination of data combined and analysed from a certain perspective. Knowledge can be seen as 'authenticated information' – information that is useful for you specifically and that what you want to achieve. Wisdom is one step further than knowledge, and the top of the pyramid. Wisdom is about having the understanding to use the right knowledge in the right way, and at the right time (Davenport and Prusak 2000, Boer 2005) (see Figure 1).

Translated to organisational settings knowledge can be defined such:

> Knowledge is information that provides guidance or initiates action towards attaining the organisational mission and strategy more effective, efficient, and/or sustainable, and/or by making them more relevant.

Knowledge management interventions try to foster ways of sharing, seeking and using of knowledge, ideas and experiences, in whatever form, among individuals or groups. An interesting characteristic of knowledge is that its value grows when it is shared:

> As one shares knowledge with other units, not only do those units gain information (linear growth); they share it with others and feedback questions, amplifications and modifications that add further value for the original sender, creating exponential total growth. (Quinn *et al*. 1996, p. 69)

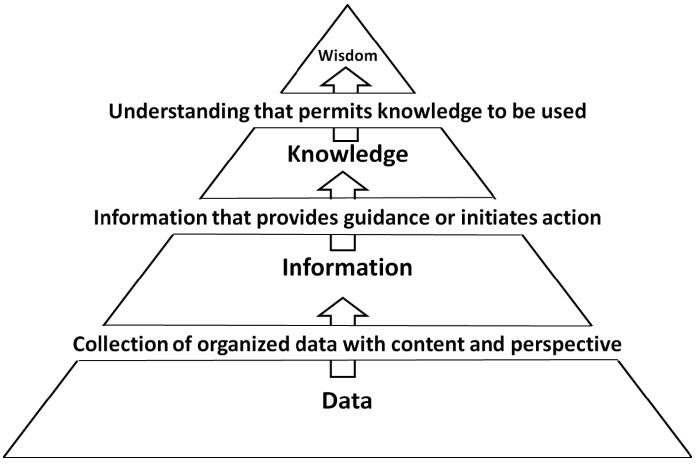

Figure 1. Knowledge pyramid.

Collison and Parcell (2004) have developed a holistic, practical model on knowledge management that has been used throughout research (Figure 2).

It states that

> Individuals and teams agree on a set of goals. Then they use knowledge [besides experience and attitude] to deliver against their targets, ultimately creating value, products, and results. The model separates learning before, during, and after significant activities. [. . .] [All this learning activity needs to be connected to] some kind of knowledge bank.
>
> If you want to learn before doing, you will want to make a withdrawal. And when you have learned lessons which you want to contribute, you'll need to make a deposit. (. . .) (Collison and Parcell 2004, p. 23)

According to empirical work by Connolly and Thom (1990), this can lead to a public good dilemma. A public good constitutes a shared resource from which every member of a group may benefit regardless of whether or not they personally contribute to its provision, and whose availability does not diminish with use. An organisation's knowledge bank is a

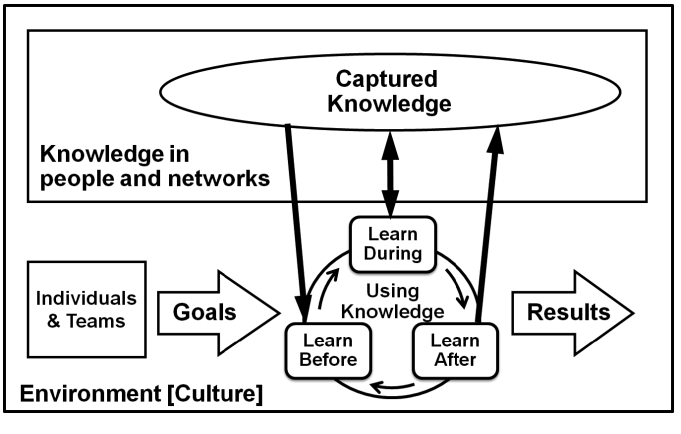

Figure 2. Knowledge Management Framework after Collison and Parcell (2004).

good example of this. People tend to take much more easily than to give, thinking that others will take care of the input. The challenge is to create a culture in which knowledge behaviour is obvious and 'the way we do things around here'.

It is impossible to capture everything, so it is crucial to link to the people and the network that hold key knowledge and insights, and to encourage them to share their knowledge with each other when need rises. The environment or culture within your organisation surrounds the model, which is critical to get started and sustain knowledge sharing (Collison and Parcell 2004).

Behaviour in knowledge processes

Our study translated the different steps from Collison and Parcell's (2004) knowledge management model of in six main researched knowledge behaviours. All other questions were based on these six behaviours for which questions were formulated:

- How often do you actively search for prior experiences within your organisation before you start a new assignment?
- When you start a new assignment, how often do you actively search for relevant information from outside your organisation?
- How often do you thoroughly reflect on your goals, results, and the process when you finish an assignment?
- How often do you formulate learned lessons into a document that is shared within your organisation?
- How often are you active in sharing and discussing lessons learned with people from other organisations?
- How often do you actively participate in such a group that is focused at sharing work experiences?

These were researched using a seven point Likert sale ranging from never to always. The scores were aggregated in order to come to a total sum score indicating the total activity in the knowledge processes. Such an aggregation was also made for the other main elements of the framework used in this study.

What causes knowledge behaviour?

The 'Theory of Planned Behavior' (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) is one of the most researched and validated models in social psychology that explains the factors that influence our behaviour (Armitage and Conner 2001). In this case we focus on 'knowledge behaviour'. In general, TPB states that the motivation to perform certain behaviour is positively correlated with the frequency of actually doing it. This motivation is in its turn caused by a combination of three variables:

- The attitude one has towards the behaviour in question
- The perceived control one has over actually performing this behaviour
- And the perceived social norm the individual feels to perform the behaviour in question (see Figure 3)

Each of the different knowledge behaviours in the study was explored with all different elements of TPB (in accordance with the guidelines of Ajzen (2006)).

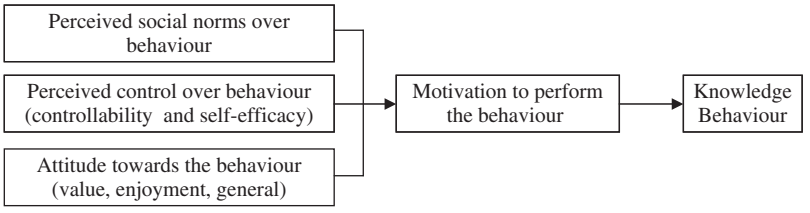

Figure 3. Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991).

Extra variables

At the end the research contained some extra questions that were gathered through a brainstorm session with trainer-consultants from MDF-Training & Consultancy. These questions were on the following topics:

- Perceived time-pressure in combination with knowledge behaviour
- The benefits of performing knowledge behaviour (personal, organisational (internal/ external))
- The costs of performing knowledge behaviour
- The perceived suitability of the technology to support knowledge behaviour
- The perceived suitability of the processes to support knowledge behaviour

Any of these variables that yielded into significant results are mentioned in this article.

Research questions

Integration of the two frameworks led to the following research questions:

- Which demographical factors have a correlation with the different knowledge behaviours and/or the elements of TPB? And what direction do they have?
- Does TPB provide significant predictors for the reported frequency of the knowledge behaviour? This means:
  - Is the motivation to perform knowledge behaviour positively correlated with the actual reported frequency of reported knowledge behaviour?
  - Are the three predictors of motivation (attitude, perceived control and perceived social norms) actually positively correlated with motivation?
  - What constructs derived from social psychology research are said to influence the different elements of the TPB in a positive way, thus improving the frequency of knowledge behaviour?
  - What practical management decisions and practice can practically influence the knowledge behaviour in practice?

Characteristics of the research

This study was conducted by weknowmore.org in close partnership with MDF-Training & Consultancy. The study made use of the devdir index, which is a database listing 51,500 development organisations, that has been prepared to facilitate international research cooperation and knowledge sharing in development work, both among civil society

organisations, research institutions, governments and the private sector. Out of this database 2500 organisations were randomly selected and sent an invitation to participate.

The study was held from March until May 2009. At the time this article was written 445 people of 89 different nationalities participated in this research. They all completed an online questionnaire, which consisted of 83 questions. In general there was quite an even or normal distribution of age, gender, organisational sizes, and sectors. The sample seems like a good representation of the total population, and the sizes of each of the subgroups mostly makes comparisons between them possible. For a detailed overview of the demographics of this study please visit weknowmore.org.

In the next section the differences between demographical groups concerning knowledge behaviour are presented.

Culture

This research included many nationalities. It is impossible to look at all nationalities, there are simply too many to compare them. The groups would be too small to develop useful conclusions. In the graph you can see that the nationalities were accumulated in four main clusters (Figure 4).

Comparing such enormous clusters of participants is difficult, but since this is a cross-cultural study the data is still presented by looking at this variable. It provides some interesting differences, except for searching for knowledge and experiences inside and outside the organisation. While the graph shows small differences, they are too small to be considered significant. There are differences looking at the other four knowledge behaviours. Africa and Asia generally reported higher knowledge behaviour frequencies than Europe and the Americas.

When comparing the different determinants of knowledge behaviour there were also significant differences. Africans and Asians report a higher motivation to exert knowledge behaviour than Europeans and Americans. This is also the case for the social norm.

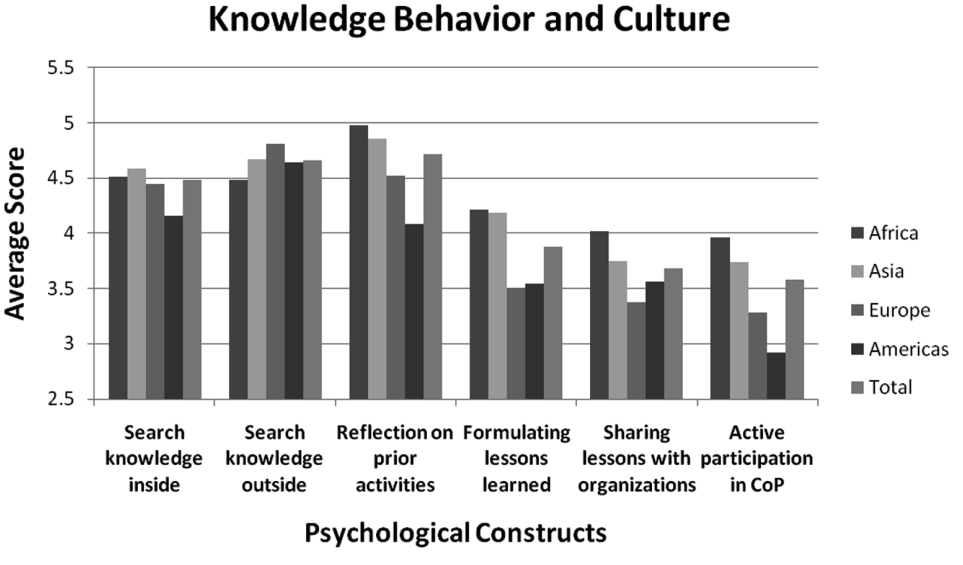

Figure 4. The average frequency of different knowledge behaviours divided by broad cultural categories.

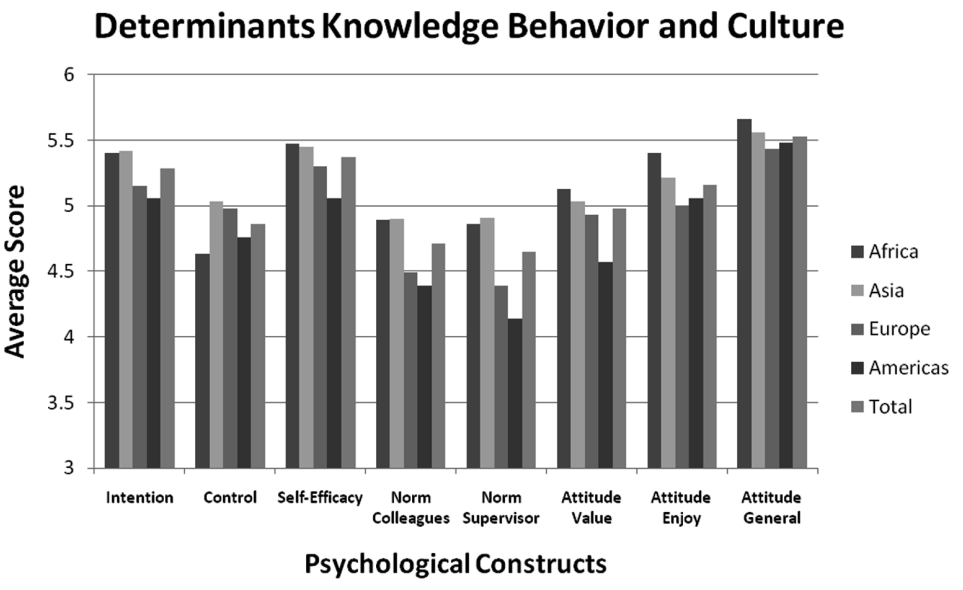

Figure 5. The average score on different determinants of knowledge behaviours divided by broad cultural categories.

There is a higher perceived social norm in both Africa and Asia. In the perceived control Africa reported the lowest score. In self-efficacy there were no significant differences. Finally, Africans and Asians report a more positive attitude towards knowledge behaviour that Europe and the Americas (Figure 5).

It is difficult to give an explanation for these findings about the difference in cultures for all these variables with the data we have gathered. Some more research needed to pinpoint the reasons and to come to meaningful conclusions.

Gender

In almost all research towards the difference between women and men regarding knowledge sharing or seeking behaviour no real differences were found. The only thing was that women tend to be a bit more active in face-to-face knowledge sharing. In this research it was striking that women indicated to search more for information inside and outside the organisation. Men scored higher on the other four knowledge management practices. Women tended to like the participation in knowledge behaviour more than men, and they report significantly higher than men when it comes to the evaluation of the suitability of the technology in their organisations for knowledge sharing and storing.

Age

The research divided the participants into 10 periods of five years. This allowed comparison over the years. A thorough analysis showed that only the last category 60–65 showed a small drop in frequencies for the formulation of lessons into a document and being active in communities of practices. But these differences were small. In general this research found that age does not play a role in reported activity in knowledge behaviour.

Organisational size

The organisational size showed no significant tendencies for the six knowledge behaviours, with the exception of one: the search for knowledge outside the organisation decreased for the biggest organisations. This tendency is dangerous, because it might lead to inward focused organisations, so-called 'knowledge fortresses' (Barnard 2003), which might have considerable negative longer term effects.

Position within the organisation

The research used the terminology of the Mintzberg Matrix, which identifies five main organisational roles: operation core, strategic apex, middle line management, support staff, and technostructure. Comparing the means, support staff and technostructure reported less knowledge seeking inside and outside the organisation, less reflection and formulation of lessons. This might be explained by the somewhat more routine nature of their work. Technostructure did score highest when it came to sharing experiences within peer groups and discussing lessons learned with people from other organisations. Between the strategic apex, middle management and the operational core no significant differences were found.

Type of organisation

Government institutions were seeking least for knowledge within their organisations. Staff from international organisations reported the lowest frequency of searching behaviour outside the organisation, the only organisational type who searched less outside than inside the organisation.

Reflection on previous task outcomes did not differ across organisational types, but the formulation of lessons showed that government and private sector stand out positively. There was no difference between organisational types when it came to sharing with other organisations and active participation in communities of practice (CoPs).

Sectors

The difference in sector was of little effect in all knowledge practices. There were minor differences, but they cannot be explained. In general, when the total Knowledge Management Indicator is compared, agriculture (scored low throughout the practices) and private sector development organisations (who significantly shared less with other organisations) score lowest. Tourism, health, gender and governance scored highest.

Now that we know what the general frequencies were, it is time to look at how to promote knowledge behaviour. The remainder of the article will provide numerous psychological theories and research outcomes, leading to general recommendations on how to further the people side of knowledge management in organisations.

Motivation in knowledge management

Motivation and behaviour

Work motivation can be defined as the psychological forces within a person that determine the direction of a person's behaviour in an organisation, a person's level of effort, and a person's persistence in the face of obstacles. In the TPB intentions are assumed to

capture the motivational factors that influence behaviour. As a general rule, the stronger the intention to perform a given behaviour, the more likely is its performance (Ajzen 1991). In other words, all else being equal, one would expect a highly motivated worker who wants to share and learn to be more active in knowledge processes than a less motivated one.

However, all else is not always equal. Other factors directly affect performance, i.e. ability, personality, the difficulty of the task, the availability of resources, working conditions, and chance or luck etc. Managers have to be careful not to automatically attribute the cause of low activity in knowledge processes to low motivation. Otherwise they may overlook the real cause of a performance problem (such as inadequate training or a lack of resources) and fail to take appropriate actions to rectify the situation.

Our research ratified this relationship. The intention and actual knowledge behaviour were positively correlated ($r = 0.537$, $p < 0.01$). Since the theory predicts it and the results show it, we can assume that motivation does in fact have a positive effect on performing the actual behaviour.

Influencing motivation

Besides the three constructs of TPB, which we will discuss below, there are other psychological theories and constructs that claim to explain causes of an employee's level of motivation (Figure 6).

Need theory

The need theory focuses on the outcome side of the equation, and on the following question: *What outcome is an individual motivated to obtain from a job and an organisation?* Workers have needs, which they want to satisfy in the workplace. They can be tangible, like a promotion or monetary rewards, but also more intangible like feelings of accomplishment or recognition. It is the task of leadership to assess each individual worker's needs and take appropriate action.

When employers have assessed the needs of their subordinates, managers can exercise control (administer or withhold) over those outcomes that satisfy the worker's needs.

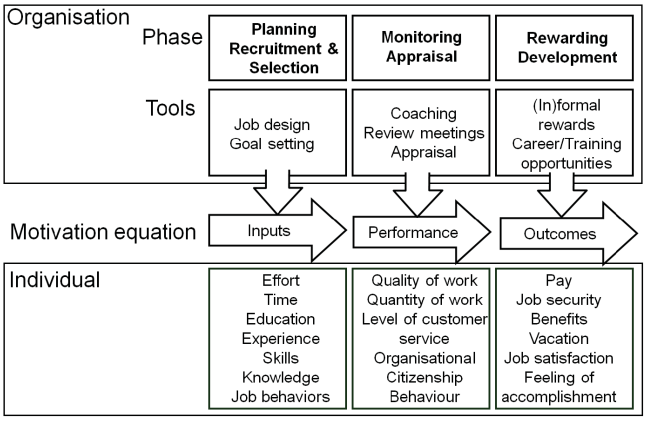

Figure 6. What influences motivation and how can motivation be influenced.

Expectancy theory

The expectancy theory addresses two questions about motivation, first: *Does the individual believe that his or her input (such as effort on the job) will result in a certain level of performance?* Expectancy theory proposes that regardless of which outcomes are available workers will not be motivated to contribute their input to the organisation unless they believe that their input will result in achieving a given level of performance. This is closely related to the concept of self-efficacy. Put simply, if a worker does not think he or she is capable of performing knowledge behaviour at an adequate level even with maximum effort, motivation to perform at that level will be small.

The second question addressed by the expectancy theory is: *Does the individual believe that performance at this level will lead to obtaining desired outcomes (pay, job, security, and a feeling of accomplishment)?* Rewards have been shown to have a significant positive effect on many work behaviours through the 'Law of Effect'. It is important to note that these rewards are not necessarily monetary outcomes. Informal rewarding, such as recognition within a group or a simple pat on the back is just as important. The rewarding system should stress the importance of performing the required knowledge behaviours.

Only when the answer to both of these main questions is 'yes' will the individual be highly motivated to contribute effort and other input to the job.

Goal setting theory

Locke and Henne's (1968) 'Goal Setting Theory' is another method to increase motivation of staff. The basic idea of this theory is that performance is increased by setting goals. Extensive research has confirmed this. The influence occurs in four main ways:

- Goals focus the attention on the desired behaviour.
- Goals mobilise one's effort to perform.
- Goals increase one's perseverance.
- Goals stimulate the search for effective strategies to attain them.

However, the goals must be specific. The employees need to have a certain commitment towards the goals. Feedback is absolutely essential. Specific goals work far better than vague ones. And a final interesting characteristic of goal setting is that the more difficult it is to attain a certain goal, the better the performance usually turns out to be.

Attitude towards knowledge management

Attitudes and behaviour

An attitude is a positive, negative, or mixed evaluation of an object or behaviour, expressed at some level of intensity. Our attitudes can vary in strength along both positive and negative dimensions. We can react to something with positive affect, with negative affect, with ambivalence (strong but mixed emotions), or with apathy and indifference (Petty and Cacioppo 1996).

David Boninger and others (1995) have identified three psychological factors that consistently seem to distinguish between our strongest and weakest attitudes. Attitudes that people held most passionately were those that concerned issues that:

- directly affected their own outcomes and self-interests,
- related to deeply held philosophical, political, and religious values, and
- were of concern to their close friends, family and social groups.

Sometimes attitudes have more influence on behaviour; sometimes they have less. To a large part it depends on the importance, or strength of the attitude. Each of us has views that are nearer and dearer to our heart than others. In general, the more favourable the attitude towards the behaviour, the stronger should be the individual's intention to perform it (Ajzen 1991).

Our study used three dimensions of measuring attitudes towards the six knowledge behaviours mentioned before:

- Value of the knowledge behaviour in question
- Pleasure of performing the knowledge behaviour
- General assessment over the knowledge behaviour

The first prominent finding was that the assessed value of the different knowledge behaviours was consistently high for all participants. This means that in general almost everybody acknowledged the importance of the different behaviours. Because of this consensus, value was not found to be a predictor of knowledge behaviour or any of the other variables in this study.

Both the pleasure ($r = 0.463$, $p < 0.001$) and the general attitude assessment ($r = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$) proved a positive correlation with intention. This means that when the attitude is more favourable, the motivation to perform the behaviour is also likely to increase.

Age, gender, size of the organisation and sector had no effect on the three attitude measurements. The only demographic that showed a significant difference were the 'expats' who indicated enjoying knowledge behaviour more than those working in the same country they were born in.

Influencing attitudes

The attitude of a person can be altered by a process of continuously stressing the importance of a certain behaviour, sharing positive results and constant feedback and appraisal mechanisms. There should be constant reminders on the benefits of what effective knowledge management can achieve; not only for the organisation, but also personal, saving him/her valuable time and needless effort. Rewarding mechanisms influences the attitude of a person in a positive way too.

Besides this there are many studies in which a connection between attitudes and trust was found. Trust is even more difficult to influence. A manager can do a couple of things to promote trust within interpersonal relationship in his department. He or she must be consistent between word and deed, being clear about what you have committed to do, so there is no misunderstanding, and setting realistic expectations when committing to do something, and then deliver. Management should ensure frequent and rich communication by setting of teams and rotating the members, so that everybody works with everybody. This will have a positive effect on trust and on the frequency of knowledge sharing behaviour between the members. Management should avoid being overly critical or judgmental of ideas still in their infancy. They should hold people responsible for trust, making it an issue in review and appraisal meetings. And finally management should ensure a shared vision and language concerning knowledge management practices.

Trust is likely to have more effect on knowledge sharing as a result of its absence, rather than due to its presence. Although the absence of trust may impede people's motivation to share knowledge with others, it is unlikely that those who have high levels of trust in others are more likely to share knowledge than those with moderate trust levels. In

a situation where professionals work together to get a task done, a sufficient level of trust is likely to be present. In such situations it is a poor predictive variable (Bakker *et al.* 2006).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy and behaviour

The self-efficacy concept of Bandura (1991) constitutes how effective people think they are in performing certain behaviour. A extensive research has demonstrated that a person's inclination to engage in a specific course of action (task effort, persistence, expressed interest, and level of goal difficulty) is heavily influenced by the person's sense of self-efficacy. Note the distinction between self-efficacy, which is task specific, and general self-esteem, which is not task specific.

In research by Cabrera *et al.* (2006) self-efficacy turned out as one of the strongest knowledge sharing behaviour correlatives. People with a high self-efficacy on knowledge sharing were more motivated to perform knowledge behaviour than those that have low self-efficacy. In relation to this, when you believe in your own ability, you automatically perform better than when you do not. This is called the 'Galatea Effect'.

Self-efficacy has at the same time been found to function as an indicator of employees' inclinations to proactively engage in organisational goal-related behaviours within jobs with broadly defined goals and on so-called organisational citizenship behaviour.[1]

As predicted by TPB, the data showed a positive correlation between self-efficacy and intention, the highest in the study ($r = 0.723$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that these two variables are closely related. In the research the demographical data did not report significant differences between them.

Influencing self-efficacy

Self-efficacy arises from the gradual acquisition of complex cognitive, social, linguistic, and/or physical skills through experience. Individuals appear to weigh, integrate, and evaluate information about their capabilities; they then regulate their choices and efforts accordingly.

Enactive mastery, defined as repeated performance accomplishments, has been shown to enhance self-efficacy the most. This means that if you share knowledge a couple of times with good feedback or results, your self-efficacy will increase. Such mastery is facilitated when gradual accomplishments build the skills, coping abilities, and exposure needed for task performance.

Another way of influencing the self-efficacy is verbal persuasion, which is aimed at convincing a person of his or her capability of performing a task. Verbal persuasion is believed to influence efficacy perceptions in some situations, but it is viewed as less effective then active mastery. If you constantly remind your staff that knowledge sharing and seeking is not difficult and that they are doing something that is good, self-efficacy increases.

Controllability

Controllability and behaviour

The importance of actual control over behaviour is self-evident: the resources and opportunities available to a person must to some extent dictate the likelihood of behavioural

achievement. Of greater psychological interest than actual control, however, is the perception of behavioural control and its impact on intentions and actions' (Ajzen 1991).

Does the staff member think: 'If I want to, I can perform behaviour in knowledge processes. That is completely up to me' Not completely would be a normal answer, and then people start about time constraints, technology that is perceived not to be fit for the job, unclear procedures etc. All factors which the staff member thinks to affect effective performance.

In the research none of the demographical data showed significant differences between groups. Controllability did show a small positive correlation with intention (r = 0.204, $p < 0.05$). It was also related to self-efficacy.

Influencing controllability

Whether a measure of perceived behavioural control can substitute for a measure of actual control depends, of course, on the accuracy of the perceptions. Perceived behavioural control may not be particularly realistic when a person has relatively little information about the behaviour, when requirements or available resources have changed, or when new and unfamiliar elements have entered into the situation. Under those conditions, a measure of perceived behavioural control may add little to accuracy of behavioural prediction. However, to the extent that perceived control is realistic, it can be used to predict the probability of a successful behavioural attempt (Ajzen 1991).

Before one can effectively enlarge the perceived behavioural control, an analysis has to be made on what external factors are causing this lack of control. Is it the fact that everybody is busy all the time and that there appears to be no time left for reflecting and storing knowledge? This perception is not a good one, since knowledge management is exactly all about efficiency, about working smarter, not harder. Awareness should be raised towards this new paradigm.

In order to improve knowledge sharing, organisations often do need to make changes to the way their internal processes are structured, and sometimes even the organisational structure itself. In addition, technology is often a crucial enabler of knowledge management – it can help connect people with information, and people with each other. Staff should have confidence in these processes and technology in order for them to work effective. Training with new technology helps, not simply dumping it on the organisation.

Social norms

Social norms and behaviour

Social norms are the product of an organisational culture and climate. Organisational culture refers to a dynamic system of rules that are shared among members of an organisation. Organisational climate refers to a shared perception of 'the way things are done around here' – a shared perception of organisational policies, practices, and procedures. This climate is a manifestation of the organisational culture, which generally refers to a deeper, less consciously held set of values, attitudes, and meanings.

In this study the perceived social norms were measured with respect to the supervisor and the co-workers. Both social norms showed a positive correlation with intention: supervisors (r = 0.477, $p < 0.001$); and co-workers (r = 0.447, $p < .001$). This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour. They are also strongly interrelated (r = 0.804; $p < 0.001$).

What is interesting to note is that they also have the highest correlation of all with the assessment of appropriate procedures (respectively r = 0.459, $p < 0.001$ and r = 0.464,

$p < 0.001$). The participants who indicated that the procedures were most sufficient for effective knowledge behaviour scored the highest knowledge supporting culture. It is difficult to determine which direction this assumed influence takes: first there are good procedures and then a culture emerges, or because of the good culture, more attention is given to streamline the procedures within the organisation. Either way it underlines the importance of having good procedures to support knowledge management strategies.

Influencing social norms

People conform for two very different reasons: informational and normative (Crutchfield 1955). Through informational influence, because they want to be correct in their judgments and they assume that when others agree on something, they must be right. Normative influence on the contrary leads to people to conform because they fear the consequences of appearing deviant. People like to think of themselves being unique. Disagreement can be stressful, and it is not hard to see why. Research shows that individuals who stray from a group norm are often disliked, rejected, ridiculed, and laughed at, and management has a whole array of managerial instruments to 'punish' such deviant behaviour.

The culture and climate in or between organisations leads to the adoption of social norms, which exert social influence. This influence is determined by the others' strength, immediacy, and number. According to Latane (1981), social forces influence people on the same way as light bulbs shine on a surface. The total amount of light cast on a surface depends on the strength of the bulbs, their distance from the surface and their number. The strength of a source is determined by his or her status, ability or relationship to a target. The stronger the source, the greater the influence. If a respected senior in an organisation keeps reminding everybody that knowledge sharing is important it will have a greater impact, than when the young intern says so. This underlines the importance of powerful change agents that endorse the importance of knowledge behaviour in the organisation. Immediacy refers to a source's proximity in time and space to the target. The closer to the source, the greater its impact. This can also be found back in the relationship between head and field offices. Finally the theory predicts that as the number of sources increase, so does their influence – at least to a point. There more people that are actively sharing their knowledge, and the more it becomes a subject within the organisation; the more people will likely join in on the action.

Strong leadership can influence the organisational climate. If the importance of knowledge management is constantly stressed by leadership and backed up by being a good example, feedback, and (in)formal rewarding mechanisms chances are that the climate in the organisations turns and shifts towards a true learning organisation.

On the other hand, the Social Impact Theory predicts that people sometimes resist social pressure. There is less impact on a target who is strong and far from the source (consider the management team of a head office who stress the importance of making time free for reflecting and sharing knowledge), than on one that is weak and close to the source (the field office manager who insists the work needs to be done, and reflecting and sharing knowledge is overestimated and costs valuable time and resources). There is also less impact on a target that is companied by other target persons than one that stands alone. Conformity is reduced by the presence of an ally and obedience rates drop when people are in company of rebellious peers.

Conclusion

Knowledge management is first and foremost a people issue. An organisation's primary focus should be on developing a knowledge-friendly culture and knowledge-friendly

behaviours among its *people*, which should be supported by the appropriate processes, and which may be enabled through technology. Getting an organisation's culture (including values and behaviours) 'right' for knowledge management is typically the most important and yet often the most difficult challenge.

This study has shown that the Theory of Planned Behaviour is a valid framework to predict the engagement of individuals in knowledge behaviour. This theory provides a starting point for developing an organisational people-focused knowledge management strategy and practice. In this article a number of theories, research and practical approaches were given to shine a light on this often disregarded aspect of knowledge management in development.

The main lesson from these theories and research is that effective knowledge leadership and a KM focused Human Resource Management (HRM) system are the two most important factors for knowledge management to succeed at the people level. With leadership and HRM the personal factors that play a role in knowledge management can be addressed and steered.

This is not surprising: leadership commitment has constantly proven to be a crucial enabler for a knowledge management strategy to succeed in numerous research settings and evaluations. And by selecting the right employees and socialising them into the organisation you can influence your workforce and stress the importance of knowledge management. By monitoring progress, and evaluating results in review and appraisal meetings knowledge seeking and sharing must become an integral issue. Leadership should be allowed to give feedback and to use (in)formal rewarding to steer staff in the right direction of 'working smarter, not harder'.

For an organisational change like adopting knowledge management to succeed, leadership should be aware of the personal factors that influence one's engagement in knowledge behaviour. Then they should take appropriate action to ensure the most effective outcomes. Leadership is not only exerted by the management of an organisation, leadership can and should also come from less formal sources like the knowledge manager or champion change agents. It is also up to them to let the knowledge flourish in their organisations, and actually live up to the strategies they have adopted. Together: we know more.

Note

1. In many organisations where being active in knowledge processes is not part of the job description and is never assessed, sharing knowledge or assisting a colleague who has a little problem can be seen as Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). OCB is usually defined as that behaviour that transcends the formal obligations of the job, but is still beneficial to the organisation. It is being spurred by two categories: altruism, helping another colleague when one is not obliged to do so; and compliance, do what you have to do and follow the rules. Job satisfaction and supporting behaviour of the supervisor enhance the occurrence of OCB.

Notes on contributor

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