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Abstract

Knowledge sharing plays a significant role in enhancing innovation and creativity. Understanding what factors influence knowledge sharing among individuals in an organization has been widely studied, especially factors which derived from social exchange and psychological contract theory. However, how career growth affects knowledge sharing behavior in terms of psychological contract theory has not been studied in the previous literature. Therefore, this study aims to investigate career growth’s effect on knowledge sharing in an organization. The career growth is reflected from four elements; career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth. From 85 questionnaires distributed to lecturers and staffs at Syiah Kuala University, the results support the hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between organizational career growth and knowledge sharing behavior.

Keywords: organizational career growth, knowledge sharing behavior.

Introduction

Knowledge sharing in an organization has become one of the main competitive advantage sources (Grant, 1996; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) for organization to face a fierce business competition nowadays (Hansen et al., 1999). Knowledge plays an important role in providing guidelines to form strategies in order for companies to sustain in the industry. From knowledge management system to individual level, knowledge sharing activities are crucial (Osterloh & Frey, 2000) as they help knowledge spread inside the organization. Employees’ involvement in knowledge sharing could benefit the providers and collectors, as well as it promotes learning organization, effective change, and innovation in an organization. Therefore, acknowledging which factors affect knowledge sharing behavior in individuals is important in the research.

From literature, topic in knowledge sharing has been widely researched, from technologies used in knowledge sharing process to its antecedents that based on interpersonal factors, organizational supports, and human resources practices in an organization. However, studies examined relationships between career growth and knowledge sharing is limited. In fact, career growth is essential for employees to plan their career and to see how committed they are to the organization. Using career growth theory developed by Weng (2010) that consist of four elements
namely career goal process, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth, knowledge sharing could become the channels and tools they use in order to achieve the four elements.

The most current study of knowledge sharing in the literature was done by Shamsudin et al. (2016) which found link between human resource practices specifically in career-related practices and knowledge sharing behavior. The focus of the study is to see to what extent employability, perceived job security, and promotional opportunities affect knowledge sharing behavior. Yet, the study did not take into account the four elements of career growth indicated by Weng (2010) in which this study would investigate. In 2011, a research done by Tan and Nasurdrin also found relationship between HRM practices and organizational innovation with moderating variable of knowledge management effectiveness, however the finding did not find the direct linkage between career growth and knowledge management. To fill the gap in the literature, this study is conducted.

Literature Review

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge is defined as information shared and justified by one's belief which consists of information, know-how, ideas, facts, opinions, skills, as well as thoughts relevant for individual, team, and organizational performance (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Bartol & Srivastava, 2002: Kogut & Zander, 1992; Machlup, 1980; Nonaka, 1994; Zander & Kogut, 1995). Knowledge sharing is an activity to either provide or receive information which is useful and know-how information to solve problems, generate novel ideas, and execute tasks given (Cummings, 2004; Pulakos, Dorsey, & Borman, 2003). From the literature, knowledge sharing has been linked to both hard and soft topics, from transferring knowledge using technology application as hard topics and soft topics such as organizational and personal behaviors (Ardichvili et al., 2003; Hall, 2001; Hinds & Pfeffer, 2003; Hlupic et al., 2002). Furthermore, the term “knowledge sharing” also refers to knowledge exchange (Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006) which is used in this study to cover both providing knowledge and seeking knowledge from others.

From the literature, knowledge has been defined in various forms. The most used forms are explicit and implicit (Nonaka, 1991). Explicit knowledge is referred to knowledge that is relatively easy to codify, whereas implicit and tacit knowledge are normally hard to explain. Other forms of knowledge are knowledge which is causal ambiguity and less ambiguous (Szulanski, 1996), knowledge that is easy to codify versus hard to codify (Zander & Kogut, 1995), and unique knowledge (Stasser & Titus, 1985).

In terms of theory, previous studies have based the research of knowledge sharing to various theories. For the purpose of this study, social exchange, organizational support, as well as psychological contract theories were used as the basis of hypothesis development. Social exchange theory addresses the benefits and costs associated to knowledge sharing activities. Individuals take into account when they share knowledge especially sharing implicit and tacit knowledge that normally requires longer time and more explanation when transferred; the cost associated is relatively higher. Therefore, the knowledge transfer process only occurs when an individual perceives that the benefits of sharing knowledge are equal or higher than the cost they exercise. The costs could be in the form of time, money, resource, etc., and the benefits include extrinsic and intrinsic rewards either from the receivers or the organization. In psychological contract as well as organizational support theory, knowledge sharing relates to when someone receives beneficial knowledge from others, there is an obligation to pay back to the contribution. In other words, both parties expect the other party to acknowledge what have been
given so then they are willing to give rewards (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). In this case, knowledge sharing activities among individuals in an organization could be a result of what have been provided or supported by the organization.

Career Growth
Weng and Hu (2009) indicated career growth into two elements, career in a single organization and career in multiple organizations. Career growth in this study is the extent to which an individual has opportunities to get higher position in one organization (Jans, 1989). There are four factors in career growth indicated by Weng (2010) that are supported by expectation hypothesis by Porter and Steers (1973) and psychological contract indicated by Rousseau in 2004, 1) progress in career goal, meaning that an individual realizes that current position is applicable and help the individual to have specific goal in their career; 2) professional ability development means that a person with current position is capable to add value in their skills as well as develop competence and expertise; 3) speed in promotion refers to the extent to which a person has possibility to be promoted; and 4) remuneration growth means the increase amount of wage and perks in an organization.

Career Growth and Knowledge Sharing
In employee-organization relationship theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), the relationship between employees and organization includes the extent to which the organization provides support to the employees, and employees have obligation to repay with positive behaviors. When an employee shares knowledge with co-workers, this action appears due to positive support provided by the organization (Bartol et al., 2009; Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Blau (1964) in the social exchange theory states that individuals normally consider costs and benefits associated with performing certain activity. In an organization, employees recognize costs such as spending time and effort to show positive performance while expect benefits in return such as their basic rights, economic and social needs provided by the organization. Individuals anticipate exchange what they have given to something worthy in return. In the process of exchanging, the cost and benefits play an important role to shape the individual’s behaviors. By giving or doing something positive at work such as engaging in sharing knowledge activity, workers expect certain benefits from the employer which in this study is career opportunities. The opportunities of having career growth are important for an individual to satisfy the need of power and affiliation in an organization. Providing knowledge is considered as a cost because for some knowledge, it requires longer time and bigger effort to articulate.

In the social cognitive theory, a person’s judgment over his or her ability in successfully completing tasks or facing challenging situations is defined as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1978). Self-efficacy drives an individual to pursue goals and expected outcomes with the ability he possesses as well as it give direction toward what ability to exercise and how to accomplish goals (Bandura, 1997). In an organization, individuals who seek for advanced career believes that high level of self-efficacy could help in shaping career goal and guide to the progress although challenges and obstacles faced ahead (Bandura, 1982). Previous studies have found positive link between high level of self-efficacy and career goal progress such as how an individual could control the progress of career growth, plan the career, and how he or she could handle challenges during goals accomplishments.

Prior researchers have found significant relationship between self-efficacy and knowledge sharing behavior. Self-efficacy plays an important role to encourage
individuals provide or collect knowledge especially in providing knowledge that is hard to articulate such as tacit knowledge. Bandura (1997) indicated that in sharing tacit knowledge, an individual would accomplish tasks with high effort and determination, including accomplishment of personal goals in career goals.

To accomplish goals in career, individuals aware that it needs improvements in his or her ability, expertise, and skills. Therefore, individuals have to involve in a proactive activity such as knowledge sharing (Gagne, 2009) to identify and collect resources for personal development in an organization (Sharma & Rani, 2013). Individuals who engage in knowledge sharing activities involves in discussion with their peers. The discussion could either provide knowledge they current have to get feedback or to actively listen to the peers giving information of their past experiences to solve problems, face challenges, or how to enhance professional skills and abilities.

In knowledge sharing literature, much attention has been given to see the link between rewards and engaging in knowledge sharing activities (Stevens, 2000). Various rewards are provided in an organization to promote knowledge sharing activities, including promotion speed and remuneration growth (Kankanhalli et al., 2005). In social exchange theory where this claim is based on, employees would voluntarily engage in knowledge sharing behaviors because by doing so would help them get promoted faster and increase in salary. Therefore, knowledge sharing activities are positive prosocial behaviors that help individuals to achieve their personal goals in terms of career growth.

Hypothesis = “Organizational career growth significantly affects knowledge sharing behavior”.

**Research Method**

**Procedure and Sample**

The objective of this study is to see the effect between career growth and knowledge sharing activity among individuals in an organization. Therefore, the relationships between the constructs were measured with linear regression. Data was collected using questionnaires distributed to total 100 lecturers and staffs in Syiah Kuala University. From 100 questionnaires, 85 were collected. Respondents were 20 percent workers and the 80% was lecturers. The portion of male respondents was 60% and female respondents were 40%. The average age of the respondents was between 26 – 45 years old.

**Measures**

The variables in this study are knowledge sharing as dependent variable and career growth as independent variable which measured using a six-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree).

**Knowledge Sharing**

5 item scale designed by Cummings included the following, “I often share knowledge with my coworkers verbally,” “I provide my coworkers with a lot knowledge,” and “I often share my knowledge with my coworkers by showing them what to do.”

**Career Growth**

Items originally proposed by Weng (2010) were modified to fit the condition in the field into 5 items. Sample items are as follows, “The current job provides me with better opportunity for development,” “my present job moves me closer to my career goals.”
Results and Discussion
This study used the simple multiple regression analysis. Table 1 presents the analysis results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Career Growth</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>3.861</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>14.908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**= p <0.1. ***=p<.001.

Table 2. Correlation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td>.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Career growth</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>.551</td>
<td>.666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**= p <0.1. ***=p<.001.

From Table 1, it indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship between organizational career growth and knowledge sharing behavior (β = .348, p< .001). Table 2 indicates that the correlation is significant at the level 0.01 level (.390). This result supports the hypothesis stating career growth significantly affects knowledge sharing behavior. Four elements in career growth including career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth are significantly affecting the knowledge sharing activities in an organization. The results support previous research stating that when individuals perceive that the organization provides clear career development, they are likely to perform positive behaviors such as knowledge sharing. This finding also supports the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) indicating reciprocity occurs when a party gives something valuable to the other party; a reward is expected as payback. Extrinsic rewards such as promotion has been linked to trigger knowledge sharing activities (Kankanhalli et al., 2005) which the finding of this study supports.

Furthermore, previous research also found that promotion or career growth is obtained from providing unique knowledge as competitive advantage of an individual (Husted & Michailova, 2002). In terms of increasing professional skills which are essential for career growth, previous studies highlight that knowledge sharing activities results in enhancing individual's skills and expertise, therefore employees who need to improve working skills for career prospect may engage in knowledge sharing. Later on in 2005, Kwok and Gao conducted a study that found employees learn from each others, and those who have high ability in absorbing the knowledge from others are likely to engage in knowledge sharing. Providing knowledge to peers at work as a positive behavior. Workers would provide knowledge as the cost to gain benefits in an organization such as promotion speed and remuneration growth. Moreover, career development requires advanced professional ability, therefore to have additional abilities and feedbacks a person would seek from peers or database available in the organization.

Referring back to theories used in this study, the results contributes to social exchange, psychological contract, as well as agency theory by showing that there are obligations between employees and employer that need to be exercised, which in this case employer provide opportunities for employees to plan their career growth and it would affect employees to engage in knowledge sharing activities, although employees know it will cost their time and effort but they will get benefits in terms of career progress.
Conclusions
The current study investigated the link between organizational career growth and knowledge sharing behavior among individuals in an organization. The results indicate that there is a relationship between organizational and knowledge sharing behavior. Some implications of the study to managerial could be the fact that both career growth and knowledge sharing activities are helping an organization to gain competitive advantage as well as to form learning organization which later stimulates creativity and innovation. Therefore, it is essential for managers to take into account the availability of career growth for employees in order to encourage knowledge sharing activities. However, the career growth is not only limited by promotion, but also the availability and opportunity to gain remuneration as well as increase in salary. Thus, increase in salary and remuneration needs to be considered. Moreover, Employees are also aware of the idea to get promotion means they need to enhance their professional abilities, therefore knowledge sharing could be an access for them to seek knowledge from others or seniors and also mirroring their current knowledge by receiving useful feedback for knowledge improvement. Therefore, managers need to pay attention on providing access to knowledge that is useful for employee's skill improvement. By considering the benefits employees would receive after engaging in knowledge sharing activities, the cost they bear during knowledge sharing process would not hinder them to share.

Some limitation occurred in this study. First, the participants in the survey were only 85; more participants would give better and stronger conclusion. Second, longitudinal survey is suggested in order to give better reflection on how individual share the knowledge; however this research is limited in time. Third, the direct link between organizational career growth and the knowledge sharing behavior may involve mediating factors, but this study does not take any mediating factors included. Finally, the study does not indicate what kind of knowledge workers would share or absorb. Therefore, future study should investigate specific knowledge in order to see what knowledge is more likely to share among individuals at an organization.

References


