Research Report

Do feelings matter? The effects of intrinsic benefits on individuals' commitment toward knowledge systems

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge management systems have been shown to increase creativity and innovation in the workplace. This study aims to find out if and how feelings matter in individuals' knowledge management practices in knowledge-intensive firms. We develop and test a research model that explores the effects of intrinsic benefits (knowledge self-efficacy and perceived self-worth) on users' commitment to knowledge systems. Theoretically grounded in the three-component model of commitment, the research model tests the relationships between the intrinsic benefit constructs and the affective, continuance, and normative dimensions of commitment. Survey results of 78 accounting professionals from both public and corporate accounting fields found support for the research model. Knowledge self-efficacy is positively associated with affective and continuance commitment. Perceived self-worth is positively related with affective and normative commitment. Knowledge self-efficacy significantly influences individuals' perceived self-worth. This study raises implications for researchers and practitioners interested in commitment in knowledge management for creativity generation and particularly for knowledge-intensive firms on how to tap into the power of commitment and intrinsic benefits to gain and sustain a competitive advantage.

1. Introduction

Knowledge management has undeniably been one of the most studied information system research domains in recent years (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003). As a multi-disciplinary field, researchers have examined numerous facets of knowledge management using a variety of methodologies and theoretical underpinnings under different contexts (e.g., Bock, Shin, Suh, & Hu, 2009; Hwang & Kim, 2007; Vera-Munoz, Ho, & Chow, 2006). In the age of digital creativity, knowledge management systems have been shown to increase creativity and innovation in the workplace (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Leonard-Barton, 1995). Creativity at the workplace enables the transformation of knowledge to generate novel ideas and new knowledge.

The sustainability of knowledge management is especially important in knowledge-intensive firms because they rely on individual employees' knowledge, expertise, and creativity to generate value and gain a competitive advantage (Alvesson, 2004; Starbuck, 1992). To foster creativity and encourage innovation, knowledge systems serve as platforms for employees to exchange ideas, share documents, and generate new knowledge in knowledge-intensive firms. Broadly defined, knowledge systems are any types of enabling technology for employees to store, organize, share, and distribute knowledge (e.g., electronic knowledge repositories, knowledge bases, and expert systems).

Much of the existent research on knowledge management focuses on the factors that affect the usage of knowledge management systems in organizations (e.g., Halawi, McCarthy, & Aronson, 2007-2008; Wu & Wang, 2006) and how to facilitate and encourage knowledge sharing among employees (e.g., He & Wei, 2009; Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Recent emphasis in knowledge management research indicates that it is crucial to not overlook the "individual" aspect of knowledge management (Jones, 2007; Pauleen, 2009) as organizational knowledge is embedded in the creative minds of the employees. Prior research has found that employees' individual beliefs and motivations are just as important factors to consider as system capabilities or technical functionalities of knowledge systems (Brazelton & Gorry, 2003; Ko, Kirsch, & King, 2005). This is especially salient in knowledge-intensive firms such as accounting or law firms where individuals' willingness to use knowledge systems is paramount to the success of such systems.

Given the increasing shift toward the "individual" factor in knowledge management research, this study examines the effects

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of individuals' intrinsic benefits on their commitment to knowledge systems. Intrinsic benefits are intangible and psychological feelings employees experience when feeling rewarded or valued. In other words, intrinsic benefits are the internal gratifications individuals feel which may become motivating forces to continue to use knowledge systems. Previous research has examined the influence of intrinsic benefits on knowledge sharing in virtual communities (Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007; Wasko & Faraj, 2005) and how intrinsic benefits may motivate employees to share knowledge with one another to generate novel ideas and solutions (Lin, 2007). Intrinsic benefits have also been shown to reduce stress at the workplace and lead to increased job satisfaction (Keaveney & Nelson, 1993). Specifically, we investigate two intrinsic benefits: knowledge self-efficacy and self-worth. Knowledge self-efficacy is individuals' self-confidence in their ability to provide knowledge and value to the organization (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1996). Self-worth captures individuals' self-assessment on how they provide value to their organization through use of knowledge systems and sharing knowledge with others (Ko et al., 2005). Together they form the positive reinforcement individuals experience intrinsically when using knowledge systems at the workplace.

Theoretically grounded in the three-component model of commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990), this study explores how knowledge self-efficacy and self-worth impact three types of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. We hope to deepen our understanding of the "personal" aspect of knowledge management by finding out whether intrinsic benefits and feelings matter to users' commitment toward knowledge systems. Using survey data collected from employees of accounting firms, the results strongly demonstrate that feelings do matter. Both intrinsic benefit factors exhibit significant and positive influence on users' knowledge system commitment, except for the effects of knowledge self-efficacy on normative commitment and self-worth on continuance commitment. The research findings illustrate that internal fulfillment and intangible rewards are important motivators to building users' commitment to knowledge systems.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we discuss the related literature and present the research model and hypotheses. In subsequent sections, we describe the research method, data analysis, and results. Finally, we conclude the paper with a discussion of the findings, implications, and limitations.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. The three-component model of commitment

Commitment is a multi-faceted concept that has been researched in different academic disciplines (e.g., Agrifoglio & Metallo, 2009; Hwang & Kim, 2007; Li, Browne, & Chau, 2006). The most extensively studied area in commitment research is organizational commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). The research on organizational commitment has had a long history of 40 years (Buchanan, 1974; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Early research on commitment focused on construct definition and conceptualization (e.g., Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Porter et al., 1974). Broadly, commitment is defined as "a force that binds an individual to a course of action" (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301). Adapted from a single-dimensional construct and a two-dimensional model, Allen and Meyer (1990) synthesized the concept of organizational commitment by proposing a three-component conceptualization: affective, continuance, and normative components. The three-component model has been widely accepted in research and has been tested and extended to various

contexts (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004; Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993; Lin & Fan, 2012).

Overall, the three components in organizational commitment generally refer to what individuals want to do, what they need to do, and what they ought to do, respectively. Affective commitment refers to an individual's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement with the organization. In other words, an individual is working for an organization because he or she wants to or desires to. Continuance commitment is the "need" component because an individual weighs the perceived gains and losses of working in an organization. Sometimes continuance commitment is referred to as calculative commitment because employees calculate the cost of leaving the organization and the lack of alternative job opportunities (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Lastly, normative commitment refers to the internalized pressure or feeling of obligation to continue employment due to the work culture and other socially accepted norms (Allen & Meyer, 1990). An individual thinks he or she should work for an organization because of moral responsibility (Wiener, 1982).

Previous research in IS has adapted the commitment model to examine users' commitment toward information system usage (Li et al., 2006; Malhotra & Galletta, 2005). Findings indicate that affective commitment positively influences intention to use or usage of IS. The role of normative commitment has been found significant in e-commerce systems adoption (Hwang, 2010). Affective commitment has been found to be an important factor in knowledge sharing (Hwang & Kim, 2007) and ERP adoption (Agrifoglio & Metallo, 2009). In knowledge management research, we found few studies that examine users' commitment to knowledge systems (Lin & Fan, 2012). For knowledge systems to sustain and remain useful, employees' willingness to use and active usage are critical. Most organizations do not monitor individual usage and usage is usually voluntary. Much failure of knowledge management systems stems from lack of employee buy-in, a top-down approach rather than a user-driven approach to manage knowledge (Sinclair, 2007). In this study, we aim to enrich the current research by investigating how intrinsic benefits impact users' affective, continuance, and normative commitments to knowledge systems. Grounded in the theoretical perspectives and motivated by the research gap aforementioned, Fig. 1 shows the research model and the hypothesized relationships. Next we discuss the hypotheses.

2.2. Knowledge self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' self-assessment or evaluation of their own ability with the skills they possess (Bandura, 1986). In
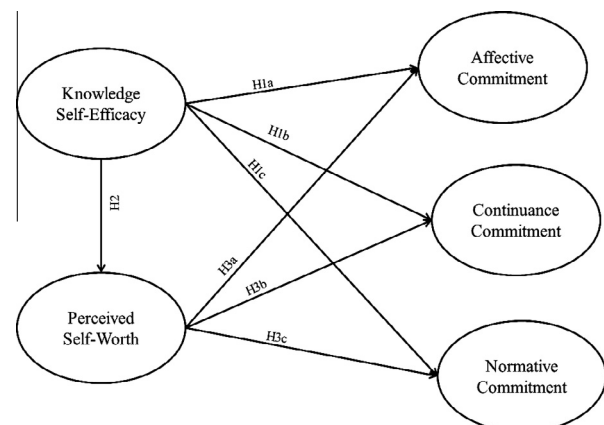

Fig. 1. Research model.