

Information behavior and value creation potential of information capital: Mediating role of organizational learning

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Abstract

This work draws on recent literature concerning information capital and organizational learning to explore how this may affect information behavior and value (IBV) of the healthcare industry in an emerging economy. Whether organizational learning mediates the relationships between information capital and both information behavior and information value (IBV) is also examined. Additionally, a parsimonious and plausible empirical model is proposed to examine the links among contextual variables. Data are collected from full-time medical staff of medical centers in Taiwan, including physicians and nurses. To clarify the relationships among these variables, structural equation modeling (SEM) is conducted to examine the model fit and three hypotheses. The SEM results clearly demonstrate the mediating role of organizational learning in the impact of information capital on both information behavior and information value. Consequently, organizational learning leads to appropriate information behavior and information value (that is, information sharing and information integrity, respectively) only when integrated with organizational learning and information capital for healthcare organizations.

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1. Introduction

Healthcare organizations and their employees differ from conventional manufacturing- and product-based organizations since they primarily deal with professional service and intangible products in a single episode or treatment. Consequently, healthcare organizations rely heavily on intellectual capital, information technology and a knowledge, since the core products of a hospital are professional healthcare and knowledge. Therefore, information capital and knowledge-based assets are important in such organiza-

tions. Information capital is probably the most important part of an organization in the knowledge economy, particularly for healthcare organizations. Information capital includes systems, databases, libraries and networks, and makes information and knowledge available to an organization (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Knowledge or information is now perceived as the most significant strategic resource in organizations, and its management is regarded as critical to organizational success (Ipe, 2003). The product of a healthcare organization relies not only on tangible resources, but also on knowledge or information capital. Consequently, to maintain competitive advantage, hospitals need to employ appropriate schemes of knowledge management. Furthermore, effective performance and growth in knowledge-intensive organizations need the integration and sharing of highly distributed knowledge (Zack, 1999). Consequently, information capital needs to be aligned with

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integrating and sharing, in order to generate value. Effective organization learning is the key factor in facilitating the willingness to share knowledge, and encouraging the dissemination and accumulation of knowledge. The niche of organizational advantage relies on organization learning to adopt the right information behavior or information value, and to employ information capital effectively. Organizational learning thus helps improve organizational performance and generate competitive advantage in healthcare organizations. However, few empirical works have addressed these issues in the healthcare industry.

The demands by patients for good quality medical service, and the potential for information technology to improve the efficiency and quality of working, have led to the application of medical information systems in hospitals. Investment in information technology in health care organizations has been increasing quickly in recent years. Information capital represents a new technology that is modifying the competitive landscape in the healthcare industry. The complexity of information capital management in organizations has led to increasing research on its influence in organizations (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Consequently, knowing how to build or leverage information capital effectively is a priority for healthcare organizations. The influence of information capital in hospitals on information behavior and value (IBV), particularly in the context of the current healthcare environment in an emerging economy, has not yet been examined, and therefore is the focus of this work.

This work utilizes the resource-based view (RBV) and knowledge-based view (KBV) of firms as the theoretical foundation to explain how information capital might affect organizational or individual outcomes (such as information behavior and value), and specifically the influence on information behavior and value (IBV). Consequently, this work contributes to knowledge of the influence of information capital and organizational learning on information behavior and value (IBV), and has three primary objectives: (a) to examine the relationships among information capital, organizational learning, information behavior and information value; (b) to determine whether organizational learning mediates the relationship between information capital and both information behavior and information value (IBV) and (c) to propose a conceptual framework to link information capital, organizational learning and information behavior and value (IBV). The SEM method is employed to analyze how a healthcare organization can promote appropriate information behavior and value using information capital and organizational learning.

The remainder of this work is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews resource-based view and deals with the theoretical foundations of the research. The research methodology is then presented, with the detailed conceptual framework, along with the instrument, samples, variables and analytical model. Analytical results are then presented, along with a thorough description of the empirical analysis, including correlation and SEM analysis. The “information capital – organizational learning – informa-

tion behavior and value (IBV)” frame is developed. Finally, conclusions are presented, and directions for future research are proposed.

2. Literature review

2.1. Resource-based view, knowledge-based view and information capital

Academics and researchers in strategic or information management have devoted increasing attention in the past decade to the influence of knowledge-based resources on the organizational competitive advantage and value creation. To develop a conceptually parsimonious and plausible empirical model of information capital and information behavior value creation, this work draws on the resource-based view (RBV) and knowledge-based view (KBV) of firms. Most recent publications on the RBV argue that unique resources, organizational and managerial capabilities influence a firm’s sustainable competitive advantage and profitability (Grant, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). RBV concentrates on how sustained competitive advantage is generated by the unique resources at the core of a firm (Barney, 1991; Conner & Prahalad, 1996). This view indicates that the so-called VRIN attributes (valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable) of physical, human, and organizational resources constitute the main source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1986). Penrose (1959) defined a firm as “a collection of physical and human resources”, and pointed to the heterogeneity of these resources. RBV implies a firm should be analyzed in terms of its resources, not simply in terms of the market activities of its products (Wernerfelt, 1984), and emphasizes the vital importance of internal resources as the path to a firm’s competitive advantage. Resources include all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, attributes and information managed by a firm, and allows the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Barney, 1991). Grant (1991) identified six major categories of resources, namely financial, physical, human, technological, organizational resources, and reputation. A firm’s resources are the assets, human resources, and processes that allow it to attain its goals efficiently and effectively (Barney, 1991; Purcell, 1999; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). Consequently, proponents of RBV contend in current literature that strategic resources contribute to the generation of sustained competitive advantage. The most strategically significant resources need to be identified. Drucker (1993) indicated that knowledge is the fundamental means of production in current organizations. Knowledge is a resource, and will become a new, valuable tool in competition. Furthermore, knowledge becomes the key component of production, competition and economic success. Consequently, knowledge is currently regarded as the most significant strategic resource for organizations (Ipe, 2003).

Information capital is formed from knowledge-based assets, which include physical infrastructure assets such

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