

Motivational factors for information sharing: the UKOLUG current awareness column

Introduction

This short article notes the main findings of an undergraduate student project conducted in 2004 with the participation of contributors to the UKOLUG current awareness column and to Current Cites. The theme was motivational factors for voluntary information sharing. The primary data was collected by questionnaire from thirty individuals who currently contribute to the current awareness column as published in e-lucidate, or who have contributed in the past.

Background

To support investigation on motivational factors that promote information sharing, a modified version of the framework suggested by Hall (2001) can be used. Hall has explored the topic of incentives for knowledge sharing in terms of knowledge management in corporate environments. Rewards that motivate information sharing as discussed by Hall are summarised in the table below.

Explicit/Hard Rewards	Soft Rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial rewards e.g. bonuses, stock option, enhanced pay Access to information as reward e.g. information sharers get opportunity to access information of others Career advancement/security e.g. Promotion, assurance to get future contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced reputation e.g. status gains Personal satisfaction e.g. seeing the positive results of helping others

Table 1: Reward based incentives (Hall (2001, pp. 142-144)

Hall (2001, pp. 141-142) has also discussed *enabling factors* that encourage information sharing. These factors are summarised in the table 2. These factors identify the behavioural aspects that organisations have to promote to ensure information sharing. First, they should endeavour to create a sense of community. Individuals who are interested in sharing information can be encouraged to form

communities. Second, making sharing a responsibility of employees can encourage information sharing: employees are more likely to share information if they know that doing so is part of their job requirement. Third, employees must be encouraged to experiment at work. If they make mistakes, they should be corrected but not penalised. Finally, organisations that use systems like the intranet should ensure user-friendly interfaces to promote usage.

Social	Technological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create sense of community e.g. cooperation, trust, provision of social interaction i.e. social events Make knowledge sharing an explicit responsibility e.g. senior managers can intervene to make sure staff practice sharing Promote experimentation e.g. permission to fail and learn from the mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide user-friendly systems e.g. ease of use and relevant content

Table 2: Enabling factors Hall (2001, pp. 140-142)

Findings

The main findings of the empirical study are summarised as follows:

Enhancement of learning

Participants contribute to voluntary information sharing because this activity enhances their knowledge (as they go through the process of abstracting material) and enhances the knowledge of others (who eventually read the abstracts). 20 out of 30 respondents acknowledged that voluntary information sharing enhances learning.

Sense of belonging

Sense of belonging was recognised by participants as one of the factors that motivates them to share information voluntarily. This happens because they know that what they contribute benefits other people. This finding is strengthened by comments made by some contributors on strategies to combat feelings of professional isolation. Some contributed to the work of the citation lists in a bid to feel part of the

wider professional community. 18 out of 30 contributors acknowledged gaining a sense of belonging as one of the factor that motivates voluntary information sharing.

Management support

Management support is important to the contributors. Even though the work they do is not officially part of their day job the majority receive support from their own management. This is because such work is regarded as part of the continued professional development. 19 out of 30 respondents perform their task in work time.

Rewards

Participants do not expect to receive monetary rewards for the work that they put into reading and abstracting content for the current awareness column. However, hard rewards in form of access to information and career advancement are acknowledged by participants.

Soft rewards were also supported by the findings. These rewards are in form of enhanced reputation and personal satisfaction. Participants contribute to voluntary information sharing because this activity enhances the likelihood of their being recognised by their peers, and they gain satisfaction from completing the job. 18 out of 30 participants acknowledged these factors.

Time pressure

In order to keep up their contributions the participants need to have time to do so.. Most of the former participants commented that lack of time made them stop contributing (7 out of 10 former participants).

Acknowledgement

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Reference

Hall, H. (2001). Input friendly intranets: motivating knowledge sharing across intranets. *Journal of Information Science*, 27(3), 139-146.

Julieth Muro

School of Computing, Napier University