



Organizational climate and its influence on brokers' knowledge transfer activities: A structural equation modeling

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in transferring knowledge into action. Obviously an interesting subject of research, it is worthwhile delving into the role played by knowledge brokers in bridging the gap between research and practice. This paper investigates the relationship between organizational climate and brokers' knowledge transfer activities. The structural equation model was tested, using survey data from 301 respondents who primarily carry out their professional activities in health services, such as knowledge brokers. The results suggest two major findings: first, that the organizational climate as a multidimensional concept has a direct positive impact on the brokers' knowledge transfer activities; secondly, that the organizational climate, characterized by the autonomy granted to brokers and a cooperative climate play an indirect role in affecting the knowledge transfer activities through the mediation of the organizational support provided to brokers.

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1. Introduction

As knowledge emerges as the primary strategic resource of firms, researchers and practitioners strive for clues on how to effectively accumulate knowledge resources and manage them for competitive advantages (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2006). Today, successful organizations are those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely in their structure, and integrate it quickly into new technologies and new products (Nonaka, 1991). These are the characteristics of the new knowledge-based organization. Organizational knowledge has become the subject of special attention where knowledge transfer as a source of value takes central stage. Indeed, the increasing amount of research on the creation and transfer of knowledge reflects the increased interest in innovative and effective strategies for the management of knowledge (Rhodes, Hung, Lok, Ya-Hui Lien, & Wu, 2008; Van Wijk, Justin Jansen, & Marjorie, 2008).

Previous research has indicated that the level of interaction between the members of different groups or units has a significant positive effect on the degree of knowledge exchange among them (Hansen, 1999; Tsai, 2002). Several studies have focused on how researchers and practitioners co-produce knowledge in an

interactive way to reduce the gap that still exists between knowledge and action (Dobbins et al., 2009; Landry, Amara, & Jbilou, 2007; Lomas, 2007). To achieve this, most of these studies focus on factors that encourage organizational practitioners and researchers with regard to knowledge transfer. In addition, the authors suggest that organizations try to “reduce the amount of distance” (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003) by building communication bridges, offering opportunities for dialogue across the organizational hierarchy, improving conditions for team learning, and creating various systems to capture and share knowledge within the organization (Argyris & Schön, 1996). However, the synthesis of the literature has revealed a lack of theoretical and empirical studies, specifically on the transfer of knowledge produced by intermediate agents, such as knowledge brokers; their role was seen as a way to improve the exchange of knowledge between two communities (researchers and users). This is, obviously, an interesting research topic that deserves to be explored to fill this gap.

In addition, the issue of how organizational climate influences the ways knowledge brokers perform their various activities of knowledge transfer has been largely underexplored. That is the major contribution of this exploratory study. Thus, drawing on a knowledge-based view of firms (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996) as well as organizational climate theories (Dickson, Resick, & Hanges, 2006; James et al., 2008; Kaushik, 2007; Schneider & Reichers, 1983; Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002), our study proposes a model for exploring the effect of organizational climate on brokers' knowledge transfer activities. The basic argument underlying our model is that organizational climate dimensions may favor the circulation of information among knowledge brokers thereby increasing

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the ability to transfer and integrate their knowledge through many activities, and this in order to reduce the gap that exists between research and practice.

The aim of this paper is four-fold. First, we develop a process of knowledge transfer among knowledge brokers who perform a series of activities effectively helping to reduce the gap between the production of scientific knowledge and its use in practice. Second, we examine the relationship between organizational climate, as a global concept, and the knowledge transfer activities conducted by brokers (additive model). Third, we explore the impact of organizational climate dimensions on brokers' knowledge transfer activities in order to identify the components whose impact is predominant (direct model). Fourth, we test whether an organizational climate, characterized by the autonomy granted to brokers and cooperative interaction, plays an indirect role in affecting the transfer of knowledge through the organizational support perceived by brokers (indirect model).

1.1. Contribution of the paper

It is widely accepted that strengthening the transfer of new knowledge from research is as a common denominator of the new research policies and innovation implemented by the economies of knowledge (CHSRF, 2006; Dobbins et al., 2009; Roy & Fortin, 2009). Indeed, many countries are fully involved in such developments and take the necessary means to develop greater interaction between academic research and practitioners or policy-makers. This interaction constitutes an important lever for health services organizations (Roy & Fortin, 2009). It facilitates knowledge transfer from a research to a practice environment, in order to promote decision-making based on evidence (Proulx, 2006). In this perspective, several strategies have been implemented to build a bridge between researchers and users of knowledge. Among these strategies are: (1) improving access to information (i.e., systematic reviews, meta-analysis, clinical practice guidelines, etc.) (Cook, Greengold, Ellrodt, & Scott, 1997); (2) developing better tools to identify, collect, analyze and present relevant information (Kiefer et al., 2005); and (3) involvement of users of evidence in the process of research and knowledge transfer (Dobbins, Cockerill, & Barnsley, 2001). A knowledge broker, one of the popular emerging knowledge translation and exchange strategy, can promote interaction between researchers and end users. However, little is known of the role which it can play, reducing the gap between knowledge and practice. In order to fill this lack in knowledge, our study contributes to the advancement of knowledge by focusing on intermediaries operating as *brokers*, whose aim is to bring parties together for effectively transferring knowledge useful for solving problems in decision-making (Dobbins et al., 2009; Lomas, 1997; Roy & Fortin, 2009).

Many studies have assigned specific activities for knowledge brokers to effectively transfer research results to the practice environment (Dobbins et al., 2009; Howells, 2006; Landry, Amara, & Jbilou, 2007; Roy & Fortin, 2009). However, the majority of these writings are limited to studying the possible role of the broker's knowledge in the creation of linkages and integration of new knowledge. In addition, none of these studies has examined all the activities of knowledge brokers in the knowledge transfer process. We will endeavor, in this paper, to remedy this by broadening the scope of activities performed by knowledge brokers in a dynamic process of knowledge transfer. Therefore, we consider that knowledge brokering is a dynamic activity that goes well beyond the standard notion of transfer as a collection of activities that help move information from a source to a recipient. This paper aims to contribute to advancing knowledge by investigating a larger variety of brokers' knowledge transfer activities, while considering five major steps: (1) acquisition of new knowledge,

(2) integration of new knowledge, (3) adaptation of research results, (4) dissemination of research results, and (5) creation of links between researchers and users.

Despite the large number of studies on the determinants of knowledge transfer in organizations (Héliot & Riley, 2010; Landry, Amara, & Ouimet, 2007; Wu, Hsu, & Yeh, 2007), little research has concerned the study of the role played by the organizational context, specifically the role that an organizational climate can have in the effectiveness of knowledge transfer. This study suggests that for knowledge transfer to take place effectively, we need knowledge brokers operating in an organizational climate conducive to the integration of scientific knowledge as well as to their proper role of intermediary and transmitter. Furthermore, based on the results of previous studies on the impact of organizational climate on organizational outcomes (efficiency, absenteeism/turnover, change, ethics, etc.) or individual outcomes (stress, satisfaction, health/safety, etc.), we find that, to our knowledge, no research has addressed the relationship between organizational climate and transfer of knowledge from the perspective of knowledge brokers operating in the health services organizations. Particularly, the impact of the dimensions of organizational climate on brokers' knowledge transfer activities, with a view to identifying the components whose impact is predominant. Moreover, the knowledge brokers, contrary to the other professionals as the doctors, are more subjected to the organizational constraints such as the organizational climate; it is about a variable of intervention to be exploited and which was not so far investigated. Accordingly, this paper aims to develop a better understanding of the relationship between organizational climate and brokers' knowledge transfer activities.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we will review prior studies to derive the dependent variable (brokers' knowledge transfer activities) and its explanatory variables (dimensions of organizational climate). Second, we will present the survey data collected from 301 knowledge brokers that primarily carry out their professional activities in health service organizations. In Section 3, we will discuss the analytical plan and results of the measurement and the structural models. The fourth and final section of the paper will conclude with a discussion of implications, resulting from brokers' knowledge transfer activities.

2. Literature review and hypothesis

2.1. Brokers' knowledge transfer activities

The literature shows that some authors have studied the transfer of knowledge by emphasizing the source of knowledge (the researcher) (Héliot & Riley, 2010; Landry, Amara, & Ouimet, 2007; Szulanski, 1996). Others have studied in greater depth the mechanisms of practical knowledge (users) (Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001a, 2001b; Landry, Lamari, & Amara, 2003). However, a relatively recent body of literature has highlighted the lack of communication interfaces between research and practice, including the lack of individuals able to boost the exchanges between the two communities, researchers and practitioners (Bardoel, Cieri, & Mayson, 2008; Huberman & Gather Thuler, 1991; Landry, Amara, & Ouimet, 2007; Roy & Fortin, 2009). Even though information technology and communications have greatly facilitated the practitioners' access to research results, there is still a significant gap between knowledge that is produced and that actually used in practice (Landry, Amara, & Ouimet, 2007). Particularly in the health sector, it is this gap between research and practice that could be the basis of the under valuation of scientific knowledge during the decision process (Meyer, 2010; Ward, House et al., & Hamer, 2009). Thus, our study will focus on knowledge brokers, as individuals who have

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