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Internalised Values and Fairness Perception: Ethics in Knowledge Management

Isabel D. W. Rechberg

Introduction

Is there the need for ethical consideration in knowledge management (KM)? The OEDC (2015: 28) suggests that ‘knowledge-based capital is essential to investment and growth’, and vital for the ‘improvements in human well-being’ (World Bank 1998: 1). An unequal distribution of knowledge poses great difficulties within and among nations (OECD 2015; World Bank 1998). ‘Knowledge is power’ (Francis Bacon 1857), and processing knowledge for corporate gain is important for corporate competitiveness. KM is the practice by which knowledge is managed in organisations. If incorporated well, KM functions as an enabler of corporate performance (Andreeva and Kianto 2012; Wang et al. 2016), innovation and product development, team and organisational performance, cost reduction and sales growth (Adam and Mahadi 2016; Hu and Randel 2014; Im et al. 2016; Lin 2007; Wang et al. 2014).

Where knowledge is power, and KM is used as a practice to aggregate and enrich corporate power, ethical issues will arise (Chatterjee and Sarker 2013; Holsapple and Joshi 2004; Mingers and Walsham 2010; Spender and Scherer 2007). Knowledgeable individuals working for an organisation are the source of knowledge, and KM practices are the medium used by organisations to enable knowledge-processing for corporate gain. A conflict of knowledge ownership occurs where individual knowledge is appropriated (Rechberg and Syed 2013).

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The dominant outlook on KM is positive; yet, where knowledge is managed in organisations without ethical considerations, such an outlook is both ‘paradoxical’ (Evans and McKinley 2010; Land et al. 2007) and ‘utopian’ (Alter 2006). Knowledge processes, such as the application, creation and sharing of knowledge have a definite ethical dimension (Holsapple and Joshi 2004). Organisations treating knowledge independent of its source—the individual knowledge carrier—causes an ethical dilemma (da Costa et al. 2010), while ethical issues often remain neglected in KM theory and practice (Bryant 2006; Evans and McKinley 2010). With this study we aim to bring attention to the fact that ‘knowledge is power’ and ‘knowledge is ethics’ correlate to individuals’ knowledge-processing behaviour. We explain the need to consider individuals’ internalised values and fairness perception as driving knowledge-processing, when intending to manage knowledge. It is argued that it is through ethical considerations in KM that knowledge may be processed in order to enable organisational and individual growth.

To develop our argument for an ethical agenda in KM, we first discuss the source of knowledge—the individual person. We address that knowledge is power and note the struggle that resides within it. We then turn to the essential link between knowledge and ethics, followed by a discussion of internalised values, held by individuals and organisations in relation to KM and knowledge processes. The fairness perceptions of individuals and organisations that govern KM are discussed, followed by examples of knowledge-processing, such as knowledge-sharing and creation to illustrate how power and ethics impact such processes. In the discussion, we advise for ethical considerations in KM research and practice, before highlighting the implications and further questions that support our claim, followed by the limitations and conclusions of this study. In this chapter, ‘the organisation’ refers to a large private corporation, an academic institution, a small firm or a government agency. The ‘individual’ or ‘employee’ is the employed person in an organisation and the source of all knowledge.

The Source of Knowledge: The Individual Employee

In KM research, the emphasis is on group processes and organisational decision-makers (e.g., Baba et al. 2004; Chang and Wang 2009; Choi et al. 2010; Germain 2011; Jafari et al. 2012; Kirkman et al. 2011; Riantoputra 2010). The positive impact that KM can have on an organisation is, however, enabled through

employees engaging in knowledge-processing (Rechberg and Syed 2012). The word knowledge originates from the words 'know', 'ken' and 'can' (as in 'canny') and refers to 'the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject' by an individual person (OED). Knowledge is the ability, skills and awareness acquired through a person's *sense-making* of the world (Weick 2001). All knowledge is originally rooted within the individual person and the individual is the source of knowledge and knowledge-processing (e.g., Polanyi 1998; Wright 2005).

Knowledge managed in corporate settings is explicit or tacit in nature. Explicit knowledge, such as information and data, forms through individual employees participating in the codification of knowledge. Knowledge transformed into data can be shared, stored and transferred, for example through information systems. In this case, an information system may become the source of explicit knowledge owned by an organisation. Kaufmann and Runco (2009) explain that knowledge owned by the organisation can, however, only be of value if individual employees engage with it. Or as Azmi (2010: 62) clarifies, 'the success of any knowledge management system is dependent upon people willing to codify and store their knowledge'. Without individual sense-making of data, IT systems remain of little use.

It is, in particular, tacit knowledge that can lead to a competitive advantage (Von Krogh et al. 2000). Tacit knowledge is so valuable because it is needed for knowledge creation (von Krogh et al. 2000). Tacit knowledge is embrained, embodied and embedded within the individual who carries it, and is private to that individual (Collins 1993; Tywoniak 2007). Tacit knowledge often remains so and may only be made explicit through individuals' participation in the corporate space (Nonaka 1994). Wang (2004) notes that knowledge will gain value if shared, and knowledge-sharing is reliant on employee enthusiasm to participate (Ruppel and Harrington 2000; Song and Chermack 2008).

Organisational knowledge is not simply a collection of individuals' knowledge but rather the outcome of individuals' participation in knowledge processes in the corporate space (Spender 1994). An organisation may seek to manage the knowledge source—the individual knowledge carrier—less than knowledge itself. Where knowledge is power, individuals may, however, be reluctant to share what they know.

Knowledge Is Power

Organisational researchers have called for the need to address the link between knowledge and power (Heizmann 2011; MacKinlay 2002; Rechberg and Syed 2013). Recognition of this link dates back to Francis Bacon (1857), who

first stated that ‘knowledge itself is power’. Foucault (1977: 52) explains that knowledge and power coexist, and that ‘it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power [as it is] not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge’. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) finds that numerous developed and developing nations now invest more in knowledge-based capital than traditional capital. Knowledge is treated as power primarily in the capitalistic context (Glisby and Holden 2003), where knowledge is the source for competitiveness (i.e., Abeson and Taku 2009; Carneiro 2000). Knowledge is power because effective management of knowledge enhances corporate performance (Andreeva and Kianto 2012; Wang et al. 2016). The link between knowledge and power is also found in ‘knowledge culture, knowledge alliances, knowledge strategy, knowledge organisations, and knowledge processes’ (Baskerville and Dulipovici 2006: 91)

Knowledge is power for the organisation and for the individual. Individuals are hired and retained for their embodied knowledge base and sense-making ability. Organisations attract and then seek to manage individual knowledge through KM practices. Bryant (2006) is concerned that organisations use KM practices in order to increase the power of the organisation over that of individual employees. Since knowledge is the source for organisational competitiveness but also for the individual knowledge carrier, a conflict of knowledge ownership can occur (Rechberg and Syed 2013). Blackler (1995) defines this as the conflict between knowledge as the commodity an organisation seeks to process and sell and as individuals’ active, living experience of knowing.

Knowledge is the source for competitiveness of organisations, as much as knowledge is an individual’s sole source of bargaining power. An organisation’s intention to translate individual tacit knowledge into explicit forms, stored in the organisational infrastructure, may lead to the loss of employee indispensability (Bryant 2006). That an organisation takes advantage of its power over the individual person is a valid concern. Where knowledge is power, inherent to the individual and used by organisations to compete, ethical questions arise; for this reason, we turn to a discussion on ethics and knowledge.

Ethics and Knowledge

Ethics may be relevant to the philosophical foundation of KM (Spender and Scherer 2007). KM practices occur in social systems, causing knowledge processes to have an ethical dimension that needs consideration (Chatterjee and

Sarker 2013; Holsapple and Joshi 2004; Mingers and Walsham 2010). Ethics is a practical discipline and the source for critical guidelines in the conduct of life (Tseng and Fan 2011); it is the study of morality where morals represent standards used to judge right from wrong, independent of our subjective perception of them (Deigh 2010; Stahl 2008). The word 'ethics' derives from the concept of 'custom', where ethics amounts to the value system embedded in the community where we live (MacIntyre 1985; Stahl 2008). Ethics is ambiguous and holds no immutable truth; it follows David Hume's law of 'ought to', addressing how one ought to live and what actions one ought to take in the conduct of life (Hume 1750). An action is ethical if one behaves ethically (Mingers 2011); if the action taken reaches an ethical conclusion (teleology (Mill 1861)); or if the action is in itself conducted in an ethical manner (deontology (Kant 1785)).

Ethics needs consideration, as knowledge and ethics have synonymy (Courtney 2001). Aristotle said: '[t]o be ethical is to be knowledgeable and to be knowledgeable is to be ethical' (in Chatterjee and Sarker 2013: 454). Only with an ethical outlook may knowledge transform into wisdom (Evans and McKinley 2010), and only through theoretical as well as practical knowledge may an individual act ethically (Rowe and Broadie 2002). Together with knowledge, ethics determines how we make sense of the world, guiding individuals' internalised values and fairness perceptions. The ethics that an individual holds affect their attitude towards KM practices as well as their ability to interpret and process, reflect on and value knowledge made available to them. This link between ethics and knowledge-processing needs consideration and will be discussed in the following sections.

Internalised Values

An individual's sense of accountability, duty and reliability is driven by internalised values, and so an individual's participation in KM practices is guided by their internalised values (Bivins 2006). An individual may progress through three levels of value maturity during the course of their life that will impact their behaviour, attitudes and interpretation of the world, and their KM practices. Kohlberg (1981) identifies these three stages of development: namely, the pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. Victor and Cullen (1987) call the three stages egoism, benevolence and principle, categorised under their ethical climate criteria.

The pre-conventional or self-centred stage, is the first stage of an individual's value development; here egoism and personal profits rule behaviour.

During the pre-conventional stage, an individual may seek to acquire knowledge through others while hoarding their own—free-riding. During the conventional stage, an individual acts based on benevolence. The individual thrives on social approval and will share valuable private knowledge in order to receive management approval. The final stage that an individual may elevate to is the post-conventional, where individuals act on internalised core values or ‘self-chosen ethical principles’ (Damico 1982: 432). These values may differ from widely accepted social norms and may cause opposition. One nonconforming behaviour may be sharing knowledge that the organisation has declared as confidential; the individual may perceive sharing such knowledge beneficial to the greater good—whistleblowing.

Since an individual’s behaviour is motivated by their internalised values, management faces a complex situation (Yeoman and Mueller Santos 2016). The national culture that an individual grows up in has a profound impact on their ethical understanding and behaviour (Su 2006). Yet, the values that an individual holds are as private to that individual as is knowledge in itself. Ethics are often brought to the workplace and not developed within the organisation (Lee and Cheng 2012). What a knowledge worker perceives as fair may promote or hinder their knowledge-processing and differ greatly from values put forward by their organisation. The standards by which knowledge is processed in the organisation are often driven by corporate, not individual values. In the corporate setting, individuals are given guidance to respect collective ethical norms (Tseng and Fan 2011).

McCuen (1998: 41) explains that ‘individuals assign different weights to different values, which has important implications for the professional life’. An individual’s values may change over the course of their lives, and will impact their participation in knowledge processes. Aligning corporate and individual values is difficult; where organisational values and those of individuals contradict, KM practices may not be supported (da Costa et al. 2010). Janz and Prasarnphanich (2003) warn that the assumption that individuals will subordinate their personal values to that of the organisation is misplaced. Where knowledge is power, an individual’s fairness perceptions will influence the extent to which knowledge will be processed for corporate gain. A person’s fairness perception is based on their internalised values and has a profound impact on individuals’ knowledge-processing behaviour. For this reason, individuals’ fairness perception has to be addressed, and will be discussed next.

Fairness Perception

For Hayes and Walsham (2003), organisations promote their being knowledge-intensive firms in order to enforce conformity. Here ‘tacit knowledge of the workforce is [...] a resource to be willingly shared by all’ (MacKinlay 2002: 77). Knowledge, when processed, is then property of the organisation. Such an approach to KM may be counterproductive, as an individual’s fairness perception may lead to knowledge-hiding, rather than knowledge-sharing.

Fairness is a social practice driven by an individual’s internalised values and their perceived organisational justice (James 2012). Justice can be conceived of as ethics in practice, and is tied to corporate implementations. Organisational justice is based on four dimensions: interactive, informational, distributional and procedural justice (Colquitt and Shaw 2005). Interactional justice reflects the quality of the interaction between individuals in the workplace (Colquitt et al. 2001), whereas informational justice refers to the quality of the communication (Suliman and Al Kathairi 2013). Procedural justice implies fair resource allocation (Colquitt and Shaw 2005), and distributive justice is driven by the fair allocation of resources, including remuneration (Adams 1965; Chen et al. 2010). Employees’ attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their perceived fairness of organisational practices. Where perceived justice is served, there is a positive correlation with job satisfaction and organisational commitment (i.e., Bakhshi et al. 2009), job performance and organisational citizenship behaviours (i.e., Rezaiean et al. 2010), trust (i.e., Chiaburu and Marinova 2006) and a negative correlation with employee turnover (i.e., Al Afari and Elanain 2014).

Like values, what is perceived as fair is as personal to an individual as is knowledge in itself. Internalised values brought to the workplace will influence individuals’ interpretation of the fairness of KM practices, and whether they feel justly treated. Managing knowledge may be challenging if the profits reached through successful processing of knowledge are ‘preserved solely at the level of the organisation or the decision-maker, rather than the level of the individuals in an organisation’ (Quintas et al. 1997: 30). KPMG (2002) matches this approach to KM, stating that intellectual property owned by an organisation also includes individual know-how. Individual’s ‘sharing knowledge represents a kind of organisational “good”’ (Wang 2004: 374). And the argument may be made that an organisation rightfully claims ownership over individual knowledge, as knowledge is developed through the support of the organisation (Argandona 2003).

An individual's refusal to share knowledge hurts the organisation and is interpreted as unethical behaviour (Lin 2007). Where individuals share the view that knowledge-processing is 'usual, correct, and socially expected workplace behaviour' (Constant et al. 1994: 404), KM practices can be successful. Knowledge is, however, the source of power, not only for the organisation but also for the individual. Organisations claiming ownership over individual knowledge may be perceived as carrying out unfair treatment (Glisby and Holden 2003), leading to a conflict of knowledge ownership (Rechberg and Syed 2013).

Assuming that the participation in KM practices is a part of work ethics may be morally persuasive (Chan and Garrick 2003) but 'cannot be successful, and [could] result in social and economic havoc' (Bryant 2006: 9). Peter Drucker (2001) reminds KM theorists and practitioners that 'in a knowledge economy there is no such thing as conscripts, there are only volunteers'. Furthermore, even though individuals seek to act ethically, their fairness perception matters and is influenced by their concern for efficiency and need (Konow 2003). We turn to examples of knowledge-processing to illustrate how fairness perception and the struggle around knowledge as power may impair knowledge-processing.

Knowledge-Processing

An individual's attitude towards knowledge-processing will have a profound impact on their knowledge-processing behaviour (Kuo and Young 2008). Knowledge-processing is entirely self-motivated and controlled at the level of the individual; it cannot be forced. Knowledge private to the individual is often hidden in their minds and cannot be managed if not shared. An organisation is dependent on an individual's goodwill to reveal knowledge. The full volume and quality of knowledge in an organisation may never be entirely known. Even an individual may struggle knowing what they know, yet where an individual perceives the corporate environment as unfair, knowledge may deliberately be hidden, hoarded or manipulated. Where knowledge is power and is treated as such in the corporate context, the quality of knowledge-processing and the quality of the knowledge being processed may see a profound negative impact.

An individual's willingness to participate in KM practices is determined by their internalised values and fairness perception. Sharing knowledge results from the intrinsic motivation to share, a motivation that is largely dependent on a shared intention between the individual and their colleagues (Wasko and

Faraj 2005). In their comparative study of Chinese and Russians, Michailova and Hutchings (2006) found that Chinese individuals are more inclined to share knowledge, as their values follow the interests of the collective group. In contrast, Russian employees will share knowledge only if it profits their own interests.

Ethics is a question of individuals' interaction with their environments. The ethicality of the context within which the individual ought to participate impacts knowledge-processing. Michailova and Husted (2003) found that a hostile work environment will hinder knowledge-processing. The contextual environment, the interpersonal relationships and the exchanges taking place ought to be ethical (Fray 2007). An individual may ask, 'how should I live within and by my company?' (Fray 2007: 77).

Individuals participating in KM practices may be motivated by a feeling of moral obligation (Tseng and Fan 2011). 'Guilt may develop if workers refuse to share their knowledge with others and disobey the ethical codes in their mind' (Wang 2004: 380). Yet, where knowledge is power, a fair-minded individual will not always behave fairly (Fehr and Schmidt 2001). The awareness that knowledge is power may lead individuals to treat knowledge as part of their job security, rather than as the common good (DeLong and Fahey 2000), as knowledge-processing is a trade-off between 'self-interest and ethical concerns' (Wang 2004: 380).

Knowledge is a greater source of power if held privately with the individual knowledge carrier (Larrat and McKinley 2004). Sharing knowledge may negatively impact the weighted value of knowledge. Workplace competition can have a negative effect on knowledge-processing. If workplace competition is high, so is an individual's self-interest (Wang 2004). A competitive working environment will caution individuals to share their sources of power, and they may be concerned about the possibility of becoming obsolete when sharing their knowledge with colleagues, and so hoard it instead. Chow et al. (2000) suggest that an individual will refrain from sharing knowledge when doing so will harm their self-interest. This behaviour was more commonly found among employees in the United States, and much less so among employees in China.

The knowledge-power struggle affects knowledge processes throughout corporate infrastructure. Eagerness and willingness to share knowledge mediate between an individual's pride and intention to process knowledge (van den Hooff et al. 2012). An individual may be expected to process knowledge as part of their job, but an individual may choose only to share knowledge if they receive valuable knowledge in return (Bolender 2003).

Knowledge-processing may also be motivated (Bolender 2004) or hindered (Wang and Noe 2010) by positional power. A higher ranked individual may be inclined to share knowledge with a lower ranked individual in order to elevate their authority. In reverse, a lower ranked individual may share knowledge with their leadership, motivated by favouritism. In contrast, the level of seniority may cause an individual of lower rank to feel discomfort when sharing knowledge. Elenkov (1998) established that Russian employees may hoard knowledge out of respect for hierarchy and formal power. Higher-ranked members in an organisation may also use their position power to gain access to valuable knowledge (Bolender 2003), and sharing knowledge with colleagues can be motivated by existing power differences (Bolender 2004).

Position power may also influence to what extent an individual's knowledge is valued by others. In their case study research in the United Kingdom, Rechberg et al. (2013) discovered that knowledge of production among factory-floor employees at a UK company remains unexplored and undervalued. The weighted value of individual knowledge is therefore also impacted by the position held in the organisation. An individual may ask: Are me and my knowledge valued? If the answer is no, individuals may be more reluctant to share knowledge.

Valuing knowledge has an additional dimension. An individual's internalised values affect the degree to which available knowledge is treated as important. Subjectivity governs values held and they are thus 'rarely the subject of absolute standards' (Land et al. 2007: 3). Knowledge is valued by an individual's opinion of it. An individual may not be aware that the knowledge they hold is of value and thus refrain from sharing it. If left untouched, knowledge is simply tacit or explicit knowledge, yet never a source of power. Only if valued will knowledge be drawn on and interpreted. Yet, how knowledge is interpreted is up to the individual. Knowledge can therefore only be a source of power if an individual seeks to make sense of knowledge presented.

The extent to which knowledge is valued has a profound impact on corporate performance. The foreignness encountered between individuals, groups and organisations, based on varying internalised values, can lead to knowledge loss. Harvey and Novicevic (2000) explain that 'global organisational ignorance' causes misinterpretation, errors and delays in knowledge-sharing. Furthermore, Schmidt and Sofka (2009: 462) explain that 'barriers to knowledge flows such as social, cultural, cognitive, administrative, institutional and organisational differences' are not automatically removed when joining foreign direct investments. Familiarity and similarity between individuals meant to process knowledge matters, as does the extent to which individuals are perceived to be rightfully entitled to share and receive knowledge.

Driven by internal values, knowledge may be valued variously by different individuals. In particular, an individual who has reached the post-conventional stage, may value knowledge differently to their organisation. Unused knowledge may suddenly be a discovery. Or knowledge meant to stay hidden could be shared through whistleblowing. If an individual's values are shared by the community, then their act may be praised and rewarded. But when acting against corporate values, the actor will be punished.

King (1999) analyses that individuals working in vertical organisational structures are more reluctant to report the wrongdoing of their colleagues. The corporate culture impacts individuals' attitudes towards whistleblowing (Park et al. 2008). Sims and Keenan (1999) explain that the link between the cultures within which the individual resides and their whistleblowing behaviour may be based on an individual's sense of belonging. The authors find that individuals in a collectivist culture are more likely to refrain from whistleblowing in order to maintain harmony within the group. In contrast, individuals from individualistic cultures are more inclined to represent their internalised values. Japanese executives, for example, will not report wrongdoing in order to protect their job security (Chikudate 2002) and Chinese employees are significantly less likely to blow the whistle on colleagues than American employees (Michailova and Hutchings 2006).

A further dimension of the sharing of confidential information occurs on the corporate level. An organisation may see it as reasonable to share confidential information, such as customer-related data with, for instance, a marketing firm. Ethics and business interests impact corporate policy. Often, however, economic profits are inconsiderate of ethics (Chatterjee and Sarker 2013: 472).

Internalised values also drive knowledge accuracy. Knowledge manipulation is a construct in the struggle between knowledge, ethics and power (Lee and Cheng 2012). The power that knowledge holds is impacted by its quality. Whether knowledge shared is complete also impacts its outcome. To gain or maintain power, 'knowledge can be created, omitted or withheld, suppressed, amplified or exaggerated, diminished or distorted' (Land et al. 2007: 2). Accidental knowledge manipulation may occur during the transcription of tacit knowledge into codified knowledge (Alter 2006). Knowledge may also be abstracted purposefully. Where knowledge-sharing is compulsory, or where peer pressure is high, individuals may be reluctant to share what they know. Instead, individuals may 'compromise by sharing some knowledge with their colleagues while hiding other knowledge' (Wang 2004: 379). True knowledge-sharing is not guaranteed, and where individuals perceive unfair treatment, purposeful knowledge-hoarding is the result. Similarly, an organisation may manipulate

knowledge to accomplish their goals, and 'the management and manipulation of knowledge and information provide one of the principal means to achieve this' (Land et al. 2007: 5).

Where knowledge is power, reaped by the organisation, individuals may not be willing to share knowledge. Knowledge creation is the most powerful and delicate knowledge process individuals can engage in (Von Krogh et al. 2000). It is the most powerful because it is through knowledge creation that innovation can take place. Knowledge is created either through individuals interacting with already existing explicit forms of knowledge or through socialisation in space (Nonaka 1994). Although knowledge may be created in isolation (Polanyi 1998), individuals interacting with each other is the most value-adding knowledge process available in organisations. Outside forces also influence the socialisation process. Knowledge creation is particularly vulnerable to 'expert, structural, or other forms of power, peer pressure, and efficiency imperatives, real or imagined' (Chatterjee et al. 2009: 142).

In circumstances where individuals feel that sharing knowledge is obligatory, without perceiving that doing so as fair, knowledge shared may be altered or hidden altogether. Half-truths or white lies may be the result. The dynamic of knowledge as power and individuals' internalised values can greatly manipulate and obstruct knowledge creation. Competition, position power and fairness perception impact the extent to which knowledge will be processed and the quality of knowledge processed. We next turn to discussion and implications of the search for solutions for the knowledge-power-ethics dilemma.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to highlight the effect that internalised values and fairness perception have on individual participation in knowledge-processing. We learn that the context within which knowledge is meant to be processed matters a great deal (Tseng and Fan 2011). Scarbrough (1999) sees the management of an organisation as the agency by which individual knowledge is exploited for corporate gain. Using individuals and their knowledge as the means to an end for organisational gain may be morally unjust, sparking ethical concerns, and be counterproductive. In today's labour market, lifelong employment is rare and individuals' knowledge is often their only source of job security. Individuals are required to invest in building knowledge to compete in the labour market, to develop and share knowledge to stay competitive and keep enough knowledge hidden to remain of value to the organisation. In a context perceived as unfair, knowledge will not be processed.

The dynamic of 'knowledge is power' leads organisations to claim ownership over individuals' knowledge, makes already highly sensitive knowledge-sharing and -creating processes much harder (Rechberg and Syed 2013). An organisation is not required to use its strength against an individual. Dilenschneider (1990) explains that it is morality that will determine how KM can be either a discipline of mutual empowerment (see Rechberg and Syed 2013) or the source of growing inequality (see Bryant 2006). Appropriating individuals' knowledge for corporate gain is ineffective (Rechberg and Syed 2014)—if an individual is feeling exploited, they will obstruct knowledge-processing.

Knowledge created in the corporate space may be sold by organisations, yet it may never be owned by organisations (Jasimuddin et al. 2005). The extent to which an organisation can claim ownership over individual knowledge depends on the individual's ability, willingness and interest to share knowledge (Wasko and Faraj 2005). If treated unfairly, individual ethics and goodwill may be compromised, jeopardising knowledge-processing. Organisations intending to manage knowledge thus need to do well in understanding the source of knowledge: the individual employee and their needs.

For KM practices to withstand the knowledge power struggle, ethics need to be taken into consideration. Ethics can mediate knowledge processes and guide in developing fair KM practices. Aligning individual and organisational values may, however, be difficult. Sims (1992: 34) explains that organisations often solely consider corporate performance and that resources are scarce to address the 'moral content of organisational decision-making'. Morals, the author states, are often seen as 'esoteric', lacking 'substantive relation to objective and quantitative performance' (Sims 1992: 34). Notwithstanding, if KM practices are meant to contribute to corporate performance, then ethics need consideration.

Tseng and Fan (2011) address the need for an ethical culture in KM. To establish an ethical climate, a paradigm shift in KM practice and theory is needed (Nonaka et al. 2008). The assessment needs to shift from knowledge as an asset, to knowledge as a process enabled through individuals' participation (Rechberg and Syed 2013; Wang 2004). Under this framework, organisations provide the corporate space to enable knowledge-processing; identified as *ba* by von Krogh et al. (2000). An ethical organisational climate can be constructed on Kahneman et al.'s (1986) principle of 'dual entitlement'. Built on benevolence and shared principles, both parties, the individual and the organisation, are entitled to fair compensation. A rightful incentive might then go beyond financial compensation, and be based, for example, on a combination of financial benefits and, where applicable, official recognition as an expert in a certain field (Davenport and Prusak 1998).

Individuals care about fairness, as fair practices lead to fair interpersonal relationships and moral principles (Cropanzano et al. 2001). A fair approach to KM is also beneficial to the organisation. Konovsky (2000) found that when treated fairly, individuals have a positive attitude towards their colleagues and the organisation, are satisfied with their job, are committed to their organisation and feel a sense of trust (see also Colquitt et al. 2001; Li et al. 2017). Fair KM practices also foster knowledge-sharing and innovation (Bosse et al. 2009), a knowledge-sharing culture (Hislop 2003) and a sense of safety when processing knowledge (Rechberg et al. 2013).

A fair work environment is also important when developing corporate wisdom. Wisdom can be a powerful antecedent for individual and corporate competitiveness (Evans and McKinley 2010). Knowledge coupled with ethical consideration forms wisdom. The more reflective an organisation, the higher its ability to foresee and guide behaviour. Wise corporate practice may sustain knowledge manipulation and increase stakeholder satisfaction. Organisations gain wisdom through developing wiser organisational members. Drawing on individuals' 'tacit nature of ethical knowledge' knowledge can transform into wisdom (Lee and Cheng 2012).

If not treated and incorporated in an ethical manner, knowledge may be hidden, manipulated and of lesser value. In the next section, I provide suggestions to enable ethical and effective KM practices.

Implications

Only through appreciating individuals' internalised values may knowledge be fully utilised as a source of power. Corporate influence, Dilenschneider (1990: xviii) explains, is in itself not negative, 'it is the morality with which influence is used that makes all the difference'. An organisation can draw on Lawler's (1986) 'high-involvement management'. Through promoting active participation in the dialogue on KM, aligned with freedom of expression and incorporating individuals' suggestions, then individuals' fairness perception can be satisfied.

Those holding positions managing others may play an important role in developing a corporate environment that enables knowledge-processing. Managers in organisations may obstruct knowledge processes, as they are trained to 'manage conscripts', not knowledgeable individuals (Drucker 2001). Since the unfair treatment of individuals leads to knowledge-hoarding and manipulation, management's agenda to enable knowledge-processing should shift from developing initiatives on how individuals ought to process

knowledge, to strategies on how to empower individuals to willingly process knowledge.

Management of knowledge is impossible without the organisation's ability to align individual values with its own. Shifting the management role from controlling to facilitating knowledge-processing, Nowakowski and Conlon (2005) suggest considering corporate and individual values: corporate values including the corporate culture, structure and mission; and individual values, their work experience, personality and expertise. To establish fair corporate practices where both individual and organisational values are incorporated, one can draw on Yeoman and Mueller-Santos' enabler for effective communication: 'Mutual respect, openness and availability of information, readiness to listen to different points of view and commitment to the outcome' are necessary for individuals to be able to voice their concern and to be heard (2016: 5). By systematically prioritising different competing internalised values, KM practices can be established that are fair to the individual and the organisation alike.

To remedy power impairing knowledge-processing, and to develop a reflective and fair environment for individuals to feel driven to process knowledge in, trust is needed—between individuals and in the employer. Trust is built on commonly shared values, as well as honest, reliable and predictable behaviour (Fukuyama 1995). Building trust is difficult, so Coleman (1990) suggests starting to develop trust in smaller homogenous knowledge-sharing groups.

KM practitioners may draw on Gourlay (2006), suggesting indirect management practices to facilitate knowledge-processing. Embedding fairness into corporate strategy can benefit KM practices and mobilise individuals to process knowledge. An individual's awareness of knowledge as power may impact their willingness to process knowledge. An individual's internalised values and fairness perception will impact the extent to which individuals perceive KM practices to be fair. Their interpretation of the practices thus has a profound impact on their knowledge-processing behaviour. During their case study research, Rechberg et al. (2013) found that through the integration of individuals in KM decision-making, knowledge can be effectively managed.

In this context, practitioners may rethink the role of management in KM. Whereas management of knowledge may hinder knowledge-processing, a leadership approach may be able to facilitate knowledge-processing, acknowledging individuals' needs and thereby empowering them.

Researchers may wish to address the current shift to individualism away from collectivism; it is one that will have profound implications on individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviour. Moreover, the impact of globalisation on

knowledge processes needs consideration where internalised values and fairness perception may clash between individuals who ought to work together. How can such diversity be brought under one umbrella?

The KM research community, in particular, has a moral obligation to promote ways for fair and effective KM practice. The effective management of knowledge can be an important contributor to individual progression, organisational success and national competitiveness. Knowledge and knowledge processes have a private base and knowledge is owned by the individual who carries it. Nonetheless, the KM discipline largely focuses on the positivist, quantifiable, explicit element of knowledge that is external to the individual and can be managed by managers. The focus is less on seeking to understand knowledge processes in the context of the individual creating and interacting with knowledge. If approached through a traditional management paradigm, knowledge cannot be managed. The discipline is in need of a paradigm shift from the management focus to a focus on individuals and their needs.

Future Research

There is room for research on the ethicality of KM. This review has only touched on the impact that internalised values and fairness perception have on knowledge-processing, leaving many questions. Can a KM practice be established that meets all contributors' needs? Or are individuals' internalised values too diverse to bring into complete agreement? Cross-cultural, cross-industry and cross-functionality studies may find trends of internalised values and fairness perceptions.

Is there ethicality in the way knowledge is managed in organisations? Or are KM practices purely driven by self-interest and greed? One may draw on the legal system to determine the true right that an individual has over their knowledge. Inequality between individuals, organisations and nations is increasing, not declining, and knowledge is the key ingredient to smoothing out such differences. Is the act of de-privatising knowledge through KM practices a deliberate act? Is KM a practice of the organisation or should it be a tool kit for the knowledge carrier—that is, personal KM (Pauleen 2009).

May it add value to determine if there are moral obligations for individuals to process knowledge, and if an individual might participate in KM practice in a right or wrong way? Is unfair treatment only perceived in some corporate roles and by subordinates? Or is management in a position to hoard knowledge as well? Can knowledge manipulation and hoarding ever end? How will it then ever be possible to experience true knowledge accuracy? And can

organisations thrive without it? Lastly, reflecting on corporate and individual wisdom in relation to knowledge-processing behaviour may be a study that can bring valuable insights into the need for ethics in KM practices.

Conclusion

Addressing the dynamic of knowledge power and ethics, this study has questioned the ability to manage knowledge in organisations. Knowledge is private to the individual; corporate explicit knowledge is only a source of power if processed by individuals. The internalised values that individuals hold determine their willingness to process knowledge. Where an individual holds values different to those of the employer, and KM practices are perceived as unfair, knowledge may not be processed. Ethical consideration in KM is essential for the discipline to be effective. To be an organisation with proper ethical consideration, managers ought to take into account not only organisational, but also individuals' needs. Only by understanding the source of knowledge—in other words, the individual—will it be possible to manage knowledge in organisations.

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