Passing the Baton: Knowledge Continuity between Incumbents and Successors

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THESIS SUBMITTED AFTER CONFERRAL OF THE MASTER'S DEGREE

University of Haifa
School of management
Department of business administration

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Abstract

Knowledge continuity (KC) is a relatively new field of research in the broader field of KM, which has evolved to mitigate and help prevent lost knowledge. KC focuses on passing critical knowledge (operational as well as organizational) from current employees (transferring, resigning, terminating or retiring) to their replacements (Beazley, Boenisch, & Harden, 2003). The study examined KC behavior as reported and perceived by 50 dyads (n=100) of departing employees and their successors. We investigated the potential role of both personal and organizational variables, namely professional identification, supervisor support, self efficacy and type of work transition (push/pull) in KC behavior, which was measured on the basis of a scale specifically designed and validated for the study.

Employees who strongly identified with their profession, those reporting high levels of self-efficacy, and those who viewed their work transition as the outcome of voluntary process, were more likely to engage in KC behavior. Notably, there were significant differences in the results of the study hypotheses when considering KC from the perspective of the departing employee and his/her successor.

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Proposed topic and motivation for the study

"In an economy when the only certainty is uncertainty, the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge. When markets shift, technologies proliferate, competitors multiply and products become obsolete almost overnight, successful companies are those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organization and quickly embody it in new technologies and products. These activities define the "knowledge creating" company (Nonaka, 1991).

Knowledge management (KM) is an overarching concept that has increasingly been used to encompass a variety of practices intended for handling knowledge in organizations. Knowledge management is an interdisciplinary concept drawing from different fields, including management and education. It incorporates culture, business processes and supporting infrastructure to implement knowledge, use existing knowledge and create new knowledge, in order to realize the corporate vision and business objectives effectively and efficiently (Argote & Ingramb, 2002; Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003)

Knowledge Continuity (KC) is a relatively new field of research in the broader field of KM, which has evolved to mitigate and help prevent lost knowledge. KC is designed to capture and catalog acquired knowledge and wisdom from experienced employees before they leave their position (Hedlund, 1994). For clarity purposes, it is important to distinguish KC from KM. KC is an offshoot of or a sub-field in the field of KM. Whereas KM concerns capturing and sharing valuable know-how (i.e., expertise and experience) among employees (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997), KC focuses on passing critical knowledge (operational as well as organizational) from current employees (transferring, resigning, terminating or retiring) to their replacements (Beazley, Boenisch, & Harden, 2003). In other words, KM focuses on those practices designed to make the best use of knowledge held by current employees to achieve sustainable competitive advantage or sustainable high performance, while KC

focuses on those practices designed to ensure appropriate knowledge transfer from employees that leave their position to those taking their place (Hedlund, 1994).

Notably, KC depends heavily on the willingness of the departing employee to transfer the knowledge to his or her successor, as well as the conditions under which he or she hand the baton in to their successor. More specifically, KM may be viewed in the context of an exchange process, where employees both share and receive such knowledge-based resources as technical skills and customer information in an ongoing fashion (McAdam & McCreedy, 2000). Moreover, recognizing that they may not be able to properly complete their tasks without such knowledge-based resources, employee may feel obliged to 'do their share', i.e., share knowledge with others, in order to receive knowledge in return (Ranft & Lord, 2000). At the same time, KC takes place in those points in the employee-organization relationship where the mutual obligation to exchange knowledge may be considerably lower (the employee is either taking another role or is leaving the firm), and so may be seen more as a voluntary practice on the part of the employee. Field (2003) reinforces this notion, maintaining that it is difficult to make sure those who are exiting hand an intact baton on to their successors, because, simply put, there are lower incentives for investing in something that is going to be used after they have left the company, and, in case they move to another position with the same firm, may fear being deemed expendable. Moreover, time and efforts to help the successor may be on the expense of time and efforts needed for the adjustment to the new job, and may thus impede the departing employee from ‘moving on’(Field, 2003).

In this context, I will address the knowledge-based theory of the firm which, at least in knowledge-intensive firms, considers knowledge as the most strategically significant resource of firms. Its proponents argue that knowledge-based resources, being embedded in employees’ mind as well as organizational culture, policies, routines, and documents, are usually difficult to imitate,, non-tradable people resources, often considered

as major determinants of sustained competitive advantage and superior corporate performance. Originating from the strategic management literature, this perspective builds upon and extends the resource-based view (RBV; Barney 1991; Penrose, 1959). Knowledge management systems and practices, including KC, can play an important role in the knowledge-based view of a firm in that they can be used to synthesize, enhance, and expedite large-scale intra- and inter-firm knowledge management (Alavi & Leidner, 2001).

More specifically, KC is important for two main reasons**.** First, employees that leave the organization most often 'take the knowledge' with them, leaving a knowledge vacuum. This may be particularly salient in cases of involuntary leaves, as when employees are being fired or forced to go on early retirement (Menicucci, 2006). Second, the relatively high turnover rates of employees from Y generation and impending baby boomers retirement on the next two decades, pose an unprecedented threat to organizations, thus presenting complex challenges for KC in many firms (Menicucci, 2006; Kalkan, 2006). Operational knowledge seems to have never been more critical to firm success; and the challenge is well described by Beazley, Boenisch, and Harden (2003) "How can firms keep knowledge from walking out the door when employees leave". Many inefficiencies and even business failures could be traced to knowledge not having resided in the right place. Either knowledge is not shared, person-to-person, or it is lost when its possessor leaves the job – and has to be re-created the hard way by that employee's successor (Beazley et al., 2003)

Review of past research indicates that whereas many studies have dealt with KM, very few have focused on KC. Moreover, those studies that have focused on the latter offer rather limited understanding of the topic in that they are often conceptual in nature, with empirical evidence only occasionally provided. Finally, most prior research considers KC from the perspective of the departing employee, with little attention given to those stepping in (i.e., the

successors). As we explain in detail below, the current study seeks to address these gaps in the literature in terms of both theory and methods.

A literature review, gaps identified, and research hypotheses

Knowledge management and knowledge continuity

Knowledge Management (KM) comprises a range of strategies and practices employed by organizations to identify, create, represent, distribute, and enable adoption of professional insights and experiences. Such insights and experiences comprise knowledge, either embodied in individuals or embedded in organizational processes or practices (Nonaka, 1991). Many large organizations have resources dedicated to enhance KM efforts, often initiated by the 'business strategy', 'information technology', or 'human resource management' departments. The main goal of such efforts is to encourage employees to share their knowledge. Knowledge sharing refers to the provision of task information and know-how to help others and to collaborate with others to solve problems, develop new ideas, or implement policies or procedures (Noe & Wang, 2010). Knowledge sharing is often dependent on building shared cognition or epistemology or 'language for action' between different organizational units. This language is developed through socialization, face-to-face interactions, information exchange and experience (Addicott, Ferlie, & McGivern, 2006).

In the last two decades, KM has begun to emerge as an area of interest among both academic scholars and practitioners. Most studies refer to knowledge as the basic foundation of firms and suggest that to be successful, firms must consistently create new knowledge and disseminate it widely throughout the organization (Argote & Ingramb, 2002; Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003, Beazley, Boenisch, & Harden, 2002, Nonaka, 1994). This line of research highlights the importance of knowledge construction as a central feature of KM, which helps individuals and groups share valuable organizational insights, to reduce redundant work, avoid reinventing the wheel per se, reduce training time for new employees, retain intellectual capital, and adapt to changing environments and markets, with all of these expected to help firms achieve competitive advantage (Kirby, 2005; McAdam & McCreedy, 2000; Thompson & Walsham, 2004). Another main research venue in KM focuses on

organizational efforts to develop information systems designed to facilitate and support KM (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Menicucci 2006).

Within this broader context, the transfer of knowledge (i.e., KC) between employees, and in particular between employees who leave the organization or the specific role and those who take their place, is of great importance. As discussed in detail below, when properly practiced, KC is likely to benefit both the employer (for example, in the form of lower training costs) and the employee (for example, in the form of smother job intake). KC also helps preserving knowledge between generations of employees (Beazley et al., 2003). More and more baby boomers are about to retire in droves in the coming years. When these employees leave, it is important to keep some of the knowledge they have accumulated over the years, and this may be particularly salient the more central a position is to the company. In this respect, KC specifically addresses the process of vertical transfer of job specific operational knowledge from incumbent to successor employees affiliated with different generations (Beazley et al., 2003).

Despite the richness of research in the area of KM, very few studies have been conducted on KC. For example, a number of studies (Beazley, Boenisch, & Harden, 2002; 2003) discuss the diverse types of knowledge – both explicit and tacit, both individual and institutional – that should be transferred from employees that leave to their successors. Other studies (Argotea & Ingramb, 2002; Herbane et al.,1997; Kalkan, 2006; Menicucci, 2006; Sherwood, 1994) focus on the transfer of knowledge as a basis for competitive advantage in firms. For example, Argotea and Ingram (2002) claim that by embedding knowledge in employee interactions, organizations can both effect knowledge transfer internally and impede knowledge transfer externally; Kalkan (2006) suggests that KC processes should be viewed as an integral part of firm strategy, and their effectiveness should therefore be evaluated primarily by the contribution they make to firm performance. Finally, a number of

studies (e.g., Edvinsson & Malone, 1997; Hedlund, 1994; Nonaka 1991) describe the organizational benefits of KC, such as speeding the learning curve and decreasing errors of new employees.

The summary above suggests that the extant literature, which is rather scant to begin with, is largely conceptual, rarely providing empirical data to support the underlying assumptions. In addition, the few studies that have used empirical data are limited in scope, focusing on the departing individuals (i.e., those who engage in [or not] KC). Consequently, we are aware of no study that has considered both the departing employees and their successors. The proposed study seeks to address these gaps in three ways. First, the proposed research model considers several variables that have not yet been investigated in relation to KC, allowing us to examine this issue using different theoretical lens. Second, we offer a dyadic research design, which takes account of pairs of employees, namely departing employees and their successors. Finally, as part of the proposed research, we will develop and validate a measure specifically designed to assess KC.

Antecedents of KC

Whereas several studies have examined potential outcomes associated with KC, we know little about variables that may influence the degree to which employees engage in KC. Past research has examined a number of variables likely to enhance KM. These mainly include demographic variables such as age (generation), seniority and gender (Conelly & Kelloway, 2003; Sveiby, 2001). While these variables may also relate to KC, in the current research we seek to examine factors other than demographic characteristics. In particular, we are interested in (1) supervisor support, (2) professional identification, and (3) self efficacy. These variables allow us to take account of both personal and inter-personal antecedents in

the study of KC. In the following sections, we discuss these variables and the theoretical mechanism potentially linking them to KC. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research model.

The role of supervisor support

Social support, whether from a trusted group or valued individual, has been shown to contribute to employee well-being, for example, by buffering the psychological and physiological consequences of stress, and enhancing immune function. Cobb (1976) provided one of the first definitions of social support, as individuals' belief that they are cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and belong to a network of communication and mutual obligations. Individuals may have access to different sources of support, including work-related and non-work-related sources. However, these sources may vary in effectiveness, or may be effective only for particular circumstances or stimuli (e.g., Dupertuis, Aldwin, & Bosse, 2001). Work-related sources of support, such as the employer, the supervisor and colleagues, appear most pertinent to the working environment, as these individuals can provide valuable information and advice to help employees confront and solve work-related problems (e.g., Thoits, 1986).

Perceived supervisor support (PSS) refers to employees' beliefs that their supervisor cares about them and values their contributions (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). A number of scholars (e.g., Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003) have argued that employees' relations with their supervisor are at the nexus of organization-employee relations because supervisors – through performance reviews, personnel decisions, etc. – represent the organization to employees. Accordingly, research has shown that supervisors have the potential to play a highly salient role in shaping individuals' sense of attachment to and identification with the organization (e.g., Knippenberg, Knippenberg, Cremer & Hogg, 2004). Indeed, the organization is often seen as a distal entity from the point of view of the individual employee, and the employee-

organization relationship may thus not be as tangible, and therefore as influential, as the relationship between employees and their immediate supervisor (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997).

PSS may be viewed as the supervisor's – and more broadly the organization's – contribution to a positive exchange relationship with employees, as employees tend to extend their effort to reciprocate PSS (e.g., Chen & Chui, 2008; Knippenberg et al., 2004). In this sense, employee perceiving high supervisor support may be more inclined towards engaging in KC. More specifically, employees may feel obliged to respond in a similar, supportive manner, for example by means of transferring knowledge to their successor, in order to smooth transition and avoid disruption of targets and activities of the group/team (for which the supervisor is often held liable). Such reaction is in line with Social Exchange Theory (SET; Homans, 1958), which suggests that social relationships are generally governed by an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as support or approval. A core tenant of SET is the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960): if party "A" is supportive of party "B", party "B" should respond in kind. Given that knowledge is perceived as a precious resource in the process of employee-supervisor exchange, employees are more likely to engage in behaviors intended to enhance KC to the extent that they feel their supervisor cares about them and appreciates their contribution. Indeed, prior research has confirmed that employee perceiving high supervisor support often seek to reciprocate the caring treatment by, for example, engaging in organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Chen & Chui, 2008). KC may be viewed as an additional means of reciprocation. Accordingly we propose:

Hypothesis 1: *Supervisor support will be positively associated with KC behavior*.

The role of professional identification

Professional Identification is a type of social identification referring to the sense of oneness individuals have with a profession and the degree to which individuals define themselves as members of a specific profession (Blake & Fred, 1989; Cheney, 1983; Pratt, 1998). Organizations tend to be concerned with efficiency and profitability, whereas professions care mainly about providing the highest-quality service, almost regardless of cost or revenue considerations (Freidson, 2001). From the perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), employees who highly identify with their profession may be intrinsically motivated to perform well because they value the contribution they make to the profession. Understanding social identity processes in work organizations is important in that these processes may point to the way in which people internalize organizational/professional norms and align their behaviour with these norms (e.g., Terry, Hogg & White 1999; Yeung, 1997). Gouldner (1957, 1958) outlined a potential conflict inherent in the professional employment situation. He expressed this in terms of the "cosmopolitan–local" tension created by two latent identities negatively related to each other. One identity was to the profession. Those who assumed this identity were called cosmopolitans and lacked loyalty to the employing organization and were highly committed to specialized role skills. By contrast, locals were loyal to the employing organization and were not particularly highly committed to specialized role skills. This categorization was supported by other studies. For example, one study found that veterinarians in nonveterinary medicine organizations identify more strongly with their profession than with their organization (Bergami & Edwards, 1998). Accordingly, over the last 50 years researchers have studied the degree to which employees' professional identity influences their work behaviors (Gouldner, 1957).

In the current study we propose that employees who strongly identify with their profession may be more motivated and committed to engage in behaviors that enhance KC. Drawing from Terry, Hogg and White's (1999) theory of social identity and attitude-behavior

relations, employees who strongly identify with their role/profession may feel responsible for the continuity of success even after they leave, as professional identify in not just about their own, personal success, but also about the success of broader goals (e.g., project). Accordingly, they may be more likely engage in actions that are aligned with the profession's norms and requirements. For example, a recent study by Pearsall, Christian and Ellis (2010) found that professional identification predicted the development of interaction mental models and transitive memory in teams, which may be attributed to pride in one's (contribution to the success of the) project. Accordingly we propose:

Hypothesis 2: *Professional Identification will be positively associated with KC behavior*.

The role of self efficacy

Self efficacy refers to the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals; Individuals' beliefs in their own competence, in their ability to succeed in a particular situation (Bandura 1982; Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006). Self Efficacy Theory (Bandura 1982, 1994) suggests that one's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills comprise what is known as the self-system. This system plays a major role in how one perceives and responds to different situations. Self-efficacy plays an essential part of this self-system, in that it serves to determine how people think, feel, and behave (e.g., Pajares & Miller, 1994).

Studies have considered diverse factors potentially affecting self-efficacy. For example, Bandura (1986, 1988) discussed the effects of such variables as goals setting, type of goals set (e.g., process vs. product goals), and choice of activities on self-efficacy. In this respect, self-efficacy theory postulates that goal progress feedback, as a persuasive form of self-efficacy information, may enhance perceptions of self-efficacy by indicating to the individual

that he or are competent (Bandura, 1986). Relatedly, one's ability to perform well (as indicated by past performance) has also been found to positively affect perceptions of self-efficacy (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). At the same time, studies have demonstrated the potential positive effects of self-efficacy on such outcomes as job satisfaction, performance and recovery after failures or setbacks (e.g., Dodgson & Wood, 1998; Judge et al., 1997; Korman, 1970; Locke, McClear, & Knight, 1996). For example, Locke, McClear, and Knight (1996) found that individuals with high self-efficacy often view a challenging job as a deserved opportunity which they can master and benefit from, whereas those with low self-efficacy are more likely to view it as an undeserved opportunity or a chance to fail. Similarly, Dodgson and Wood (1998) suggested that individuals with high self-efficacy maintain optimism in the face of failure, which makes future success (and thus future satisfaction) more likely.

In particular, individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered that provide opportunities to develop a challenging, deeper interest in the activities in which they participate, as well as form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities (Gist 1987). In line with this notion, we suggest that employees high in self-efficacy would be more motivated to share their knowledge with those replacing them. In that they are confident in their ability to succeed and to be relevant and important in any work situation, they are unlikely to fear losing valuable knowledge resources and the status associated with these resources. For such individuals, who often feel in control over the conduct of their lives, transferring knowledge to a successor is not perceived to be threatening for the self – neither personally nor professionally (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Miller & Pajares, 1994). Therefore they are more easy to "let go" of tasks/roles and support others as they take their place. Furthermore, research has found that the probability of knowledge sharing increases when individuals perceive that the contribution they make is

meaningful, that is, when their self-efficacy is high (Miller & Pajares, 1994). Accordingly we propose:

Hypothesis 3: *Self efficacy will be positively associated with KC behavior*.

The role of work transition agency

The literature on work transition makes a distinction between involuntary and voluntary departure. Involuntary transition refers to departures that occur due to the dismissals, and may also be the outcome of job change (e.g., the employee is moved to a different role) and early retirement when initiated by the employer, that is, when employees are pushed out of their current role or the organization. Voluntary transition refers to departures that occur when employees pull (embrace willingly) the change, that is resign, move to another job with the same employer (e.g., promotion) or go on early retirement upon their request (Williamson, Rinehart, & Black, 1992).

Previous research suggests that the impact of work transition on individuals' psychological well-being is largely driven by the degree to which individuals' actual labor force participation matches their desired participation (Herzog, Regula, House, & James, 1991), or in other words, the degree to which individuals perceive their transition (e.g., retirement, job change) as resulting from a voluntary or involuntary decision on their part. There is substantial empirical support for the idea that transition agency influences post-transition adjustment and emotional well-being. For example, whereas involuntary workforce disengagement is associated with poorer physical and mental health (e.g., Gallo, Bradley, Siegel, & Kasl, 2001; Herzog et al., 1991), Dooley and Prause (1997) demonstrated that when self-initiated, retirement can offer relief from employment-related negative emotional states and consequently enhance the well-being.

Shultz et al. (1998) provide empirical support for a ‘‘push–pull” theory of work transition, indicating that how individuals perceive the voluntariness and involuntariness of their work transition decision, also has an impact upon their adjustment and well-being following the transition. Notably, Shultz et al. (1998) suggest that while for most individuals, the work transition decision is a function of both ‘‘push” and ‘‘pull” motivations, the relative strength of each is likely to influence one’s experiences and behaviors following the transition.

In the current research we propose that the type of transition (voluntary vs. involuntary) may be an important factor in one's willingness to engage in KC. As noted above, voluntary and involuntary turnover leads to different post-transition attitudes and behaviors, including emotional satisfaction, usefulness, and self-image. On the one hand, employees perceiving their turnover as involuntary appear to have generally lower self ratings of physical and emotional health and lower post-turnover satisfaction. This may be particularly evident when the departing employee lacks other employment options (Calvo, Haverstick, & Sass, 2009). In this respect, research has found that employees who involuntarily leave the organization hold negative attitudes towards the organization (Angle & Lawson, 1994; Fullagar & Barling, 1991). Layoff victims often view their termination as a significant psychological contract violation, and as an unfair act, and as a result, display anger and frustration (Bennett, Martin, Bies, & Brockner, 1995). More (1962) also suggested that employees who were involuntarily laid off view the organization as no longer deserving of the emotional attachment they had previously given it. Similarly, involuntary termination was found to destroy employees' sense of obligation to the employer (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994). From this evidence we propose that it is unlikely that the departing employee will devote time and effort in knowledge transfer. Indeed, feeling hurt and frustrated, such employees might even gloat

when things do not work well after they have left, and see this as an opportunity to avenge the organization for mistreating them.,

On the other hand, employees who voluntarily leave the organization are often happier and more satisfied after leaving their position (Gall, Evans, & Howard, 1997). A voluntary transition gives workers time to shift their daily activities, social relationships, and identity in a more deliberate manner than an involuntary transition. Furthermore, and as was confirmed in past research (Bennett, Martin, Bies, & Brockner, 1995; Bies & Tyler, 1993; Grunberg, Anderson-Connolly, & Greenberg, 2000; Wanberg, Bunce, & Gavin, 1999), voluntary transition is less likely to involve legal issues (e.g., law suits) against the employer or any other negative acts towards the firm (e.g., acts of violence, such as sabotage, spreading rumors, etc.). Given that perceptions of organizational commitment while being employed are powerful predictors of post-transition attitudes toward the company, and that commitment following a voluntary transition is often not damaged in the process of transition, employees who willingly leave their position are likely to be committed to and care for the success of the firm after they leave (Angle & Lawson, 1994; Fullagar & Barling, 1991). Indeed, individuals' willingness to endorse the organization in another reflection of commitment, which could be considered an aspect of continuance commitment, may be practically realized via actions aimed at helping their successor make a smooth transition into the job (Maignan, Ferrell, & Hult, 1999). Taking both considerations into account, we posit:

Hypothesis 4a: *Employees who view their work transition as the outcome of involuntary process (i.e., being ‘‘pushed’’ into transition), will exhibit less KC behaviors.*

Hypothesis 4b: Employees who view their work transition as the outcome of voluntary process (i.e., being ‘‘pulled’’ into transition), will exhibit more KC behaviors.

In addition to the direct effect of transition agency, we also propose that this variable may also attenuate/increase the association between supervisor support, professional identification and self-efficacy on KC behavior. First, to the degree that employees perceive high supervisor support, yet at the same time perceive their transition as involuntary, they may perceive a word-deed inconsistency or low integrity on the part of their supervisor. This can seriously damage the reputation of, and trust in, the supervisor and the organization as a whole, and provoke negative reactions on the part of the employees (Brunsson, 1989; Simons, 2002). Under such conditions it is less likely that employees would engage in behaviors that benefit the supervisor/organization (like KC). Second, employees who strongly identify with their profession may be less inclined to leave their organization and have more negative attitudes towards leaving than employees who do not identify as strongly with their profession. For the former, leaving their position means losing an important source of identity (Michinov, Fouquereau, & Fernandez, 2008; Ogilvie, 1986). Consequently, when forced to leave (being "pushed"), such individuals may not only feel betrayed, but also feel that they lose an important source of self-esteem and recognition (Ogilvie, 1986; Wan-Huggins, Riordan, & Griffeth, 1998). This should only further enhance negative feelings toward the organization. Again, under such conditions it is less likely that employees would engage in behaviors that benefit the organization. And finally, being pushed from one's position may signal to the employee that his or her contribution is not appreciated. Such a negative performance feedback may undermine one's sense of self-efficacy, resulting in lower desire to contribute. On the other hand employees who perceive high supervisor support/high professional identification and high self-efficacy, yet at the same time perceive their transition as voluntary may be more inclined towards engaging in KC for the reasons described above. Taken together, these arguments suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: *Work transition agency attenuates the association of (a) supervisor support, (b) professional identification, and (c) self-efficacy with KC behavior.*

Method

Sample and design

Data were collected from 100 engineers employed in a large hi-tech company (located in the north and center of Israel). The 100 participants comprised 50 dyads; that is 50 engineers who have left their position in the past 6 months and their 50 successors. This dyadic approach, which allows us to draw data about the independent and dependent variables from two sources, should reduce the threat of common method variance affecting our results. The lists of departing employees and their successors were generated from the firm personnel archives. In generating the list, attention was given to a random selection from among those who have left their position in the past 6 months.

Measures

Both the departing employees and their successor completed a self-report survey. Departing employees asked to report about all study variables. The survey for successors included the control variables as well as KC. unless otherwise stated, all items in answered via a 7-point Likert scale, with anchors at 'strongly disagree' (1) and 'strongly agree' (7). Using the two-step, reverse-translation method suggested by Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike (1973), all measures translated by the researchers from English to Hebrew and then back-translated to English to ensure the accuracy of the translations.

Perceived supervisor support. On the basis of an 8-item index adopted from Anderson and Williams (1996), respondents were asked to indicate how often during the past month their direct supervisor provided them with support. Sample items include "Provided you with encouragement (positive feedback) about your work" and "Offered to assist you with work when you were having a stressful shift".

Professional identification measured using the scale developed by Jauch, Osborn, and Terpening (1980). Participants asked to report how important it is for them to "Contribute new ideas to the field of work", "Build professional reputation", etc.

Self efficacy measured using the scale developed by Chen and Gully (1997). Sample items: "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself" and "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them".

Work transition agency We assessed the degree to which respondents felt that they were ‘‘pulled’’ or ‘‘pushed’’ into transition on the basis of two separate scales (both drawn from Shultz et al., 1998), one measuring perceived pull and the other, perceived push. Items for both scales appeared in the same section of the survey, prefaced by the following statement: ‘‘People often report that a variety of reasons led to their work transition. Please indicate how important each of the following factors were for you in making your decision to leave your previous position noting that (1) indicates that the factor was not important at all while (5) indicates that the factor was very important . . .’’.

Sample items: "Didn’t like the people you worked with" and "Afraid of being laid off/fired".

Knowledge continuity. There is no scale designed to measure knowledge continuity. Accordingly, we developed a scale to explicitly measure this variable. Following convention for scale development in the social sciences (Schults et al., 1998), in developing the commuting norms scale we have taken the following steps:

based on existing knowledge management literature (e.g., Alavi, 2001 ; Beazley , Boenisch& Harden, 2002; Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Muthusamy &White, 2005; Kogout & Zander,1992; Zellmer-Bruhn &Gibson, 2006),

In developing the KC scale we have taken the following steps:

1. An item bank has been created based on the extant literature and related or similar scales (e.g., Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001; Gong, Huang, & Farh 2009).

Additional items were generated from pilot and interviews with 35 engineers from large hi-tech company, from them we got different ideas to create the questionnaire. The list included items like:"When asked, I assist in issues related to projects that I was involved in, or areas of knowledge in which I have experience" and "I create shared folders and enter data at the PLM in order to transfer knowledge to new employees".) Participants will be asked to respond along a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= 'Strongly Disagree' to 7= 'Strongly Agree'.

2. The item list sends to experts in this field, including, including Dr. Hamilton Beazley (St. Edward's University) and Dr. Sheng Wang (University of Nevada). Items will be adjusted, deleted and added based on their comments and suggestions.
3. Preliminary validation with a separate sample of 45 employees to examine item clarity. Participants in this phase asked to suggest additional items which may be relevant. Adjustment made according to the participants' comments.
4. The 45 filled questionnaires tested for validity (orthogonal–rotation factor analysis) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) purposes.
5. The revised scale tested among another group of 20 employees. At this point, we tested for structural validity. Specifically, in order to test for convergent validity, we tested the correlation between the newly developed scale and theoretically relevant variables (i.e., Knowledge Management [i.e., Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001; Gong, Huang, & Farh) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1989). In addition, we tested for discriminate validity by means of two theoretically distinct variables, namely Altruism (Kopfman & Smith, 1996) and persistence (Meyer , Allen & Gellatly 1990)
6. Test-retest reliability with another group of 15 employees who completed the KC scale twice in an interval of two weeks between measurements.

To obtain a more accurate understanding of KC, the measure described above was adopted to reflect both the perspective of the departing employee and the successor. For example, the item for the departing employee's survey was phrased: "I couldn't assist the successor due to load and stress involved in my new job"; and the item for the successor's was phrased: "The employee that I replaced could not assist me due to load and stress involved in his/her new job".

Control variables. We controlled for age, gender, seniority (tenure), and education (Highest educational level attained). These variables were found in past research to affect knowledge management (e.g., Conelly & Kelloway, 2003; Shermerhorn, 1977).

Analysis technique

Research hypotheses tested with a multiple, stepwise regression analysis consisted of the following steps: The first step will include the control variables. In the second step, supervisor support, professional identification and self efficacy. In the third, final step, the centered moderating variables as well as the centered interaction terms entered.

Results

Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities and correlations between the study variables are presented in Table 1. The bivariate results indicate that KC as reported by the departing employee is positively associated with professional identification (r=.284, p<.05), and KC as reported by the successor is positively associated with pull factor (r=.371, p<.05). Interestingly, Table 1 also indicates that the two measures of KC are only moderately correlated (r=.407, p<.01).

The results of our multivariate analyses testing the study hypotheses are described in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 considers the dependent variable (KC) from the perspective of the departing employee, and Table 3 – from the perspective of the successor.

Specifically, Hypothesis 1 stated that supervisor support will be positively associated with KC behavior. The results do not support this hypothesis, neither for the departing employees (β=-.011, n.s.) nor for the successors (β=-.070, n.s).

Hypothesis 2 stated that professional identification will be positively associated with KC behavior. The results indicate that this hypothesis was supported at a marginally significant level for the departing employees (β=.194, P<0.1) and insignificant for the successors (β=.034, n.s.).

Hypothesis 3 stated that self efficacy will be positively associated with KC behavior. Here too, the results are marginally significant for the departing employee (β=.355, p<0.1) and insignificant among the successors (β=-.057, n.s.).

Hypothesis 4a stated that employees who view their work transition as the outcome of involuntary process (i.e., being ‘‘pushed” into transition), will exhibit less KC behaviors. The results do not support this hypothesis, neither for the departing employees (β=-.000, n.s.) nor for the successors (β=-0.034, n.s.).

Hypothesis 4b stated that employees who view their work transition as the outcome of voluntary process (i.e., being ‘‘pulled” into transition), will exhibit more KC behaviors. The

results support this hypothesis for the successors (β=.230, p<0.01), but not for the departing employees (β=-.019, n.s.).

Hypothesis 5a stated that work transition agency will attenuate the association between supervisor support and KC behavior. For the push factor, the results are insignificant among the successors (β=-.094, n.s) and insignificant among the departing employees (β=.068, n.s.). For the pull factor the interaction was significance among the departing employees (β=.201, p<0.05) and insignificance for the successors (β=-.090, n.s.).

Hypothesis 5b stated that Work transition agency attenuates the association between professional identification with KC behavior. For the push factor, the results are insignificant among the successors (β=-.023, n.s) and insignificant among the departing employees (β=.112, n.s.). For the pull factor the interaction was insignificance among the departing employees (β=.000, n.s) and insignificance for the successors (β=.150, n.s.).

Hypothesis 5c stated that Work transition agency attenuates the association between self-efficacy with KC behavior. For the push factor, the results are insignificant among the successors (β=.190, n.s) and insignificant among the departing employees (β=.085, n.s.). For the pull factor the interaction was insignificance among the departing employees (β=-.010, n.s) and insignificance for the successors (β=.007, n.s.).

Discussion

The study presented above examined knowledge continuity (KC) behavior as reported and perceived by 50 dyads (n=100) of departing employees and their successors. We examined the potential role of both personal and organizational variables, namely professional identification, supervisor support, self efficacy and type of work transition (push/pull) in KC behavior, which was measured on the basis of a scale specifically designed and validated for the study.

Knowledge Continuity (KC) is a relatively new discipline of research, rooted in the broader field of KM, which focuses on efforts to avoid the lost of knowledge as a result of employees' departure from their position (Beazley et al., 2003; Hedlund, 1994). The transfer of knowledge between employees, and in particular, among workers who leave the organization or the specific position (departing employees) and those who replace them (successors), is highly important from a resource-based view (RBV), which suggests that human resources (i.e., the skills, knowledge, and behavior of employees) have the potential to provide the firm with a competitive advantage (Colbert, 2004). In particular, rooted in the RBV, the knowledge-based view - KBV (Price, 2007), emphasized the critical role of unique knowledge ownership (Hoskisson et al., 1999; Marr, 2004; Roos et al., 1997; Stewart, 1997; Sveiby, 2001;). Drawing from the KBV, the unique characteristics of intangible company resources (especially knowledge) are particularly important to ensure that competitive advantages are sustainable, as time and routines often make knowledge become tacit and embedded in employees' mind, and are therefore more difficult to imitate than other economic assets (e.g., land, machinery; e.g., Balogun & Jenkins, 2003; Gardner, 2005; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003).

Despite the importance of the topic, as reflected by such strategically-driven, theoretical perspectives as the RBV, there have been very few empirical studies that have examined KC, with the few studies that have addressed this issue limited in that they bring about the point of

view of the departing employee only. As a result, we know little about the successor perceptions of knowledge transfer. Our research pioneered in its theoretical and methodological approach, attempting to contribute to the KC literature in several ways. First, we proposed and tested a model consisting of variables that have not been studied in relation to KC. Second, we performed a dyad study, examining pairs of employees (departing employees and their respective successors). Finally, we developed and validated a measurement scale designed to assess KC, which may be further useful in future studies in this field.

Before discussing the main results obtained, we wish to discuss what we believe is an important issue that emerged from the particular design of the study. Specifically, there were significant difference in the results of the study hypotheses when considering KC from the perspective of the departing employee and his/her successor.. Following these differences we performed an additional (post hoc) analysis, intended to examine the differences between the two groups in terms of the perceived level of KC. The difference between the mean KC levels was greater than 1 (where the scale ranged from 1 to 6), and significant ($t=-9.281$, $p<0.00$), with successors reporting lower scores. One explanation for this gap in the reports could be socially-based biased perceptions on the part of the departing employees (i.e., failing to admit they did not do enough to transfer knowledge) that led to inflation in their evaluations. But what can we infer from these differences? For example, it may be that the departing employee may engage in sincere effort to transfer relevant knowledge, yet the successor, for some reason (e.g., being overwhelmed by the transition) may not be able to take advantage of this effort. It may also be that successors are expecting too much from their precedents on the job. Organizations may need to formalize knowledge transfer, for example, by setting clear objectives both for the successor and the departing employee. In addition, firms can reward KC-related behaviors.

Moving to the research hypotheses, we believe it is important to note that only about half of them were supported, and this may be due to the sample size (50 dyads). Indeed, in several cases (unsupported hypotheses) the results were on the expected direction, yet not reaching (but being very close to) the required significance level.

Hypothesis 1, suggesting that supervisor support will be positively associated with KC behavior, was rejected. A possible explanation may be that departing employees take advantage of their supportive supervisors, assuming that they will carry out knowledge transfer. Indirect support for this explanation is provided by Gomersall and Myers (1966). They found that supportive supervisors were highly instrumental in training newcomers. They enhanced newcomer efficacy by telling newcomers that they could master their new tasks. Manager clarifying behaviors could also result in increased performance efficacy by removing performance barriers. Schaubroeck, Ganster, Sime, and Ditman (1993) took the issue one step further and trained managers to engage in clarifying behaviors with newcomers. Furthermore, supervisors may be even formally considered mentors and perform mentoring functions (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Tepper, 1995),in addition to influencing attitudes and actions of subordinates (Yukl & Van Fleet,1992), for example, those associated with knowledge transfer.

Hypothesis 2, suggesting that employees who strongly identify their profession will be more motivated to engage in KC behavior was supported among the departing employees, and rejected among the successors. Terry, Hogg and White's (1999) theory of social identity suggests that employees who highly identify with their profession may feel responsible for the organization success even after they have formally finished their duties.

In Hypothesis 3 we suggested that employees high in self-efficacy will be more motivated to transfer their knowledge to those replacing them. Here too, the Hypothesis was supported only among the departing employees. This finding is in line with prior research that

found knowledge sharing behaviors to be more common when employees perceived that their work as significant, important and meaningful, all of which enhancing perceptions of self-efficacy (Miller & Pajares, 1994).

We were unable to support our Hypothesis 4a, which suggested that employees who view their work transition as the outcome of involuntary process will exhibit less KC behaviors. One explanation for this result may be the reason for involuntary turnover. Specifically, Phillips and Connell (2003) referred to dismissal for poor performance, layoff, early retirement incentives, or resignation under pressure. These reasons could lead employees want to prove the opposite- i.e., that they are dedicated, high performing workers. KC behaviors could be one way of showing this.

Hypothesis 4b, suggesting that employees who view their work transition as the outcome of voluntary process will exhibit more KC behaviors, was confirmed among the successors and rejected among the departing employees. From the perspective of the departing employee, studies have shown that voluntary turnover is in fact a foe of knowledge management (Stovel & Bontis 2002). Voluntary turnover may also result in departing employees migrating to competing firms, in some cases creating critical problematic situations where this knowledge can be used against the organization from which they departed (Johnson et al., 2000). These reasons can lead the departing employee to use less KC behavior. This situation requires firms to consider the potential drawbacks of voluntary turnover, and create contingency plans using knowledge transfer programs that are formally supported and encouraged by supervisors, controlling the process from start to finish while providing targets for both the departing employee and the successor. Otherwise, senior management may be caught unprepared, if (or when) their best performers leave.

In addition to the 4 main effects Hypotheses, we also proposed that the type of transition (voluntary/involuntary) would interact with supervisor support, professional identification and

self-efficacy to affect KC behavior (Hypotheses 5a, 5b, and 5c, respectively). Of the three Hypotheses, only Hypothesis 5a was supported – only for the voluntary transition (pull) and only among the departing employees. However, the result was opposite to our expectation, that is, under conditions of more voluntary transition, supervisor support was associated with lower levels of KC behavior. This may be because departing employees take advantage of their supportive supervisors, assuming that they will carry out KC-related behaviors instead of them being responsible for this, such that they personally engage in fewer behaviors of knowledge continuity. This is consistent with Gomersall and Myers' (1966) conclusion that supportive supervisors were highly instrumental in training newcomers.

Taken together, the findings of our research offer new avenues for the study of KC in knowledge-intensive firms. Significant differences were found between the perceptions of the departing employees and their successors. These differences warrant careful thought about the application of KC-related programs.

Limitations and Suggestion for Future Research

There are some limitations in this study that require future research which will address these limitations. The first limitation stems from the study population which focused on engineers at one high-tech Company. This is too focused type of population requires a comprehensive examination. More research is needed in order to examine whether the findings can be generalized to other populations as well. The second limitation stems from the research tools. The research results are based only on one source of data collection at one point of time (questionnaire). Future research should include information/data from different sources collection so we get a broader vision of the topic. Another limitation in the study refers to the fact that we evaluate self-report questionnaire and it may be biased by social desirability. Future research should consider longitudinal designs which may obscure this effect. Another limitation is the fact that most of the departing employees change their role within the organization and not leave the organization to other companies (mobility). This may affect the results since it specific type of transition. Future research should examine the issue further angle and focus on transition extraterritorial the organization. A final limitation, since the questionnaire is closed, it not allows expressing the employees' feelings. Numerical score makes it difficult for real measurement of sensations. Future research should conduct qualitative studies using in-depth interviews.

Implications

The findings of this research study will be important both on the theoretical level and practical level. Theoretically, the findings point on connections between new variables that were not considered so far at literature. In addition, our study is the first to introduce, develop and test the concept of knowledge continuity perception. This new KC scale could be used in future studies.

In terms of practice, managers at organizations should understand that knowledge is the most important resource in the organization. They must understand that there is a huge difference between the perceptions of the successor and departing employees regarding the knowledge transfer process they experience and that supervisors most control this process to become more efficient.

Conclusions

In summary, our paper brings the notion of KC to the fore of knowledge management research, focusing on several organizational and individual variables likely to be associated with the degree to which employees engage in KC behavior.. The study also offers a new measurement tool that can further help in the development of KC as a standalone research topic.

Tables and figures

Figure 1: Research Model

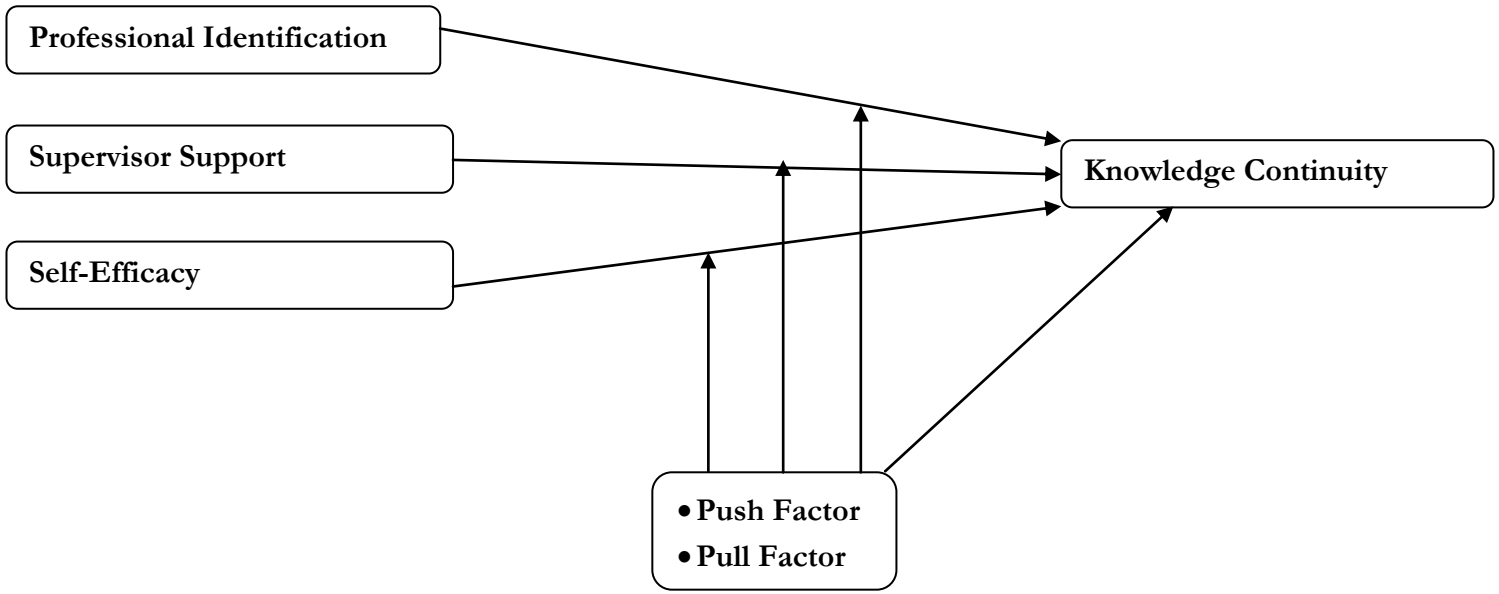

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation, Alpha-Cronbach and Correlation (n= 50dyads)

	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	----	1.14	0.35	-----							
2. Age	----	39.08	7.5	-.270	----						
3. Supervisor Support	0.92	3.79	1.08	-.191	-.361*	----					
4. Professional Identification	0.89	3.76	0.87	.113	.202	-.036	----				
5. Self Efficacy	0.88	5.02	0.52	-.044	-.269	.057	.110	----			
6. Push factor	0.88	2.61	1.37	.001	.214	-.312*	.206	-.184	----		
7. Pull factor	0.78	3.67	1.00	.015	.105	-.074	-.051	-.056	.364*	----	
8. Knowledge Continuity (successor)	0.88	3.46	0.62	.090	.211	-.217	.136	-.119	.110	.371**	----
9. Knowledge Continuity (departing employee)	0.88	4.46	0.69	.171	.185	.149	.284*	.166	.145	.003	.407**

Table 2: Results of Regression Analyses- Knowledge Continuity as Reported by the Departing Employee

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Gender	.468#	(.28)	.458	(.30)	.458#	(.30)	.398	(.28)	.398	(.28)	.534#	(.28)	.534#	(.28)	.471#	(.29)
Age	.023#	(.01)	.022	(.01)	.022#	(.01)	.018	(.01)	.018	(.01)	.030*	(.01)	.030*	(.01)	.023#	(.01)
Supervisor Support			-.011	(.10)	-.011	(.10)										
Supervisor Support*Push					.068	(.06)										
Supervisor Support*Pull					-.201*	(.09)										
Professional Identification							.194#	(.11)	.194#	(.11)						
Professional Identification*Push									-.112	(.09)						
Professional Identification*Pull									-.000	(.11)						
Self Efficacy											.355#	(.19)	.355#	(.19)		
Self Efficacy*Push													.085	(.14)		
Self Efficacy*Pull													-.010	(.16)		
Push Factor															000	(.08)
Pull Factor															-.019	(.10)
R^2	.047		.026		.080		.085		.080		.096		.062		.005	
ΔR^2			.000		.089#		.055#		.034		.065#		.007#		.001	

#p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01; ♦Relative to Model 1, i.e., the control model

Table 3: Results of Regression Analyses- Knowledge Continuity as Reported by the Successor.

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Gender	.278	(.25)	.212	(.27)	.212	(.27)	.265	(.26)	.265	(.26)	.267	(.26)	.267	(.26)	.256	(.24)
Age	.021#	(.01)	.016	(.01)	.016	(.01)	.020#	(.01)	.020#	(.01)	.020	(.01)	.020	(.01)	.019	(.01)
Supervisor Support			-.070	(.09)	-.070	(.09)										
Supervisor Support*Push					.094	(.06)										
Supervisor Support*Pull					-.090	(.08)										
Professional Identification							.034	(.10)	.034	(.10)						
Professional Identification*Push									-.023	(.08)						
Professional Identification*Pull									.150	(.10)						
Self Efficacy											-.057	(.17)	-.057	(.17)		
Self Efficacy*Push													.190	(.13)		
Self Efficacy*Pull													.007	(.15)		
Push Factor															-.034	(.06)
Pull Factor															.230**	(.09)
R^2	.027		.018		.026		.008		.017		.008		.016		.117	
ΔR^2			.012		.048		.002		.050		.002		.048		.123*	

#p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01; ♦Relative to Model 1, i.e., the control model

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להעביר את המקל: המשכיות ידע בין עובדים למחליפיהם

הגר שמיר

<u>תקציר</u>

המשכיות ידע הינו תחום מחקר חדש יחסית בתחום המחקר הרחב והמקיף של ניהול ידע. תחום זה התפתח על מנת למנוע מקרים של איבוד ידע חשוב , במיוחד בארגונים בהם הידע הינו המשאב המרכזי.

תחום המשכיות הידע מתמקד בהעברתו של ידע קריטי והכרחי (אופרציונלי וארגוני גם יחד) מהעובד הנוכחי (עובר תפקיד, מפוטר, מתפטר,פורש) לעובד המחליף אותו בתפקיד.(ביזלי , בוניש והרדן 2003).

מחקר זה בוחן התנהגות המשכיות ידע המדווחת ונתפסת בידי 50 זוגות עובדים (דיאדות), סה״כ – 100 נחקרים של עובדים העוזבים את תפקידם מהסיבות הכתובות מעלה וממשיכיהם בתפקיד.

אנו חקרנו את התפקיד הפוטנציאלי של משתנים בינאישיים ובינארגוניים : הזדהות עם התפקיד, תמיכת ממונה, חוללות עצמית, סוג העזיבה (רצונית/לא רצונית) והשפעתם על התנהגות של המשכיות ידע.

משתנה המשכיות הידע נמדד באמצעות סולם אשר פיתחנו ובנינו באופן ייחודי עבור מחקר זה.

עובדים אשר הזדהו בצורה חזקה עם התפקיד שלהם, עובדים אשר דיווחו על חוללות עצמית גבוהה ועובדים אשר ראו את עזיבתם את התפקיד בצורה רצונית, נצפו כמאמצים יותר התנהגויות של המשכיות ידע מאשר עובדים אחרים. בנוסף, ניתן היה לראות במיוחד הבדלים מובהקים בפרספקטיבות השונות של העובדים העוזבים אל מול העובדים הממשיכים בתשובותיהם ותפיסתם את הנושא.

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להעביר את המקל: המשכיות ידע בין עובדים למחליפיהם

מאת: הגר שמיר
בהנחיית: דר' מיכל בירון

עבודת גמר מחקרית (תזה) המוגשת מהדרישות לאחר קבלת התואר
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