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Intra-Firm Value Co-Creation: Role of High-Performance Work Practices

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Abstract

Organizations, who intend to abide by their desire to engage in value co-creation with their customers, need to introspect and focus on knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination as core drivers and enablers of the firm‘s desired behaviors. These behaviors encourage employees, departments, and other stakeholders to take collective responsibility in creating value internally, thus enabling an internal value co-creation orientation. In this regard, high-performance work practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, work design and teamwork; theoretically hold the HRM key to ensure firms‘desired behaviors. Moreover, the benefit of adopting this new orientation within the firm‘s behavioral paradigm is to create capabilities that lead to the creation of an intra-firm value co-creating system.

Keywords - value co-creation, knowledge sharing, inter-functional coordination, high-performance work practices

Introduction

A paradigm shift towards value co-creation as a joint endeavor between the firm and its customers has been underway in management practice as well as in literature recognized and driven by the seminal work of Vargo & Lusch (2004). An imperative of the above shift is driven by the service-dominate (S-D) logic (Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Lusch, Vargo, & Tanniru, 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2011, 2016) necessitates a closer look at the way organizations behave and interact with their internal systems. The S-D logic conceptualization of value co-creation suggests that there is no value until an offering is used and the experience and perception resulting from such use is essential to determining the value inherent in the transaction (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). In the S-D logic, therefore, a key assumption is that resources do not have value by themselves rather, the value is co-created by consumers when resources are used by them. Moreover, as per Vargo and Akaka (2009), S-D logic concludes that no single entity has adequate resources to create value, therefore firms need, ―A network-within-network conceptualization of relationships that converge on value creation through a web of resource integration‖ (p. 38). In this view, Vargo (2008), argues, ―‗Resource integration' is multidirectional (all parties uniquely integrating multiple resources for their own benefit and for the benefit of others)‖ (p. 211). In other words, the value is co-created through the combined efforts of firms, employees, customers, stockholders, government agencies, and other entities forming an eco-system and are known collectively as ‗actors', who are constituents of any given exchange, however, this value is always determined by the customer. Thus, value co-creation activities in such an envisaged setup within the organizational context will be based on iterative, integrative, and synergistic behavior between various organizational departments. As the firms expand, these inter-firm value co-creation activities will become more complex as specialized functional areas try to integrate with each other to better achieve organizational objectives (Griffin & Hauser, 1996; Liedtka, 1996). In this context, both parties—the supplier (giving department) and the consumer (receiving department)—become resource integrators. Together, they have the opportunity to create value through customized co-produced offerings, where consumers can engage in a dialog with suppliers during each stage of value creation. This paper proposes that organizations need to focus on the growing significance of the above shift in the manner that value is to be created (co-created in this case) in the organizations and to develop a viable value co-creating mechanism within the organizational value chain processes.

The paper offers a conceptual perspective on how to improve an organization's performance focusing on the way value is delivered by the organizational internal actors i.e., as organizational employees as internal suppliers and consumers of value. This paper, by shifting the logic of externally oriented value co-creation (that has found strong adherents in the field of marketing), aims to embed it in the intra-organizational context.Thus for developing an intra-organizational value co-creation orientation, this study proposes two critical behavioral components, such as knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination, as the core behaviors necessary to co-create value. These are necessary and desirable to successfully embed the value co-creation orientation in the firms and have also been recognized as behaviors that are critical to the performance of the firms in different contexts.

Knowledge sharing requires a process of communication where at least two parties are involved in the knowledge transfer activities (Ipe, 2003; Usoro et al., 2007). This knowledge sharing behavior involves an individual's willingness to translate or share implicit knowledge or learning (which they have created or acquired) with others thus improving organizational capability (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Tsai, 2002).On the other hand, inter-functional coordination requires that the superior value can be created by the coordination of all the business functions to work together (Slater & Narver, 1994). Thus, the value is created within the organization based on primary activities and supporting activities (Porter, 1985), which implicitly incorporates some form of coordination (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) among organizational actors.

However, the argument that knowledge sharing is a common practice or employees generally share their knowledge does not hold, as indicated by research thathas tried to ascertain the rationale for knowledge hoarding (Serenko & Bontis, 2016; Trusson, Hislop, & Doherty, 2017). Similarly, within organizations, inter-functional coordination is extremely complex, particularly in dynamic environments where knowledge hoarding or lack of voluntary contribution creates an explosive mist that can be extremely damaging to organizational success (Evans, Hendron, & Oldroyd, 2015; Faraj & Sproull, 2000).

The concept of knowledge sharing and hoarding can be further studied from an external or internal competitive framework. Keeping in view the external environment‘s imperatives, knowledge hoarding by the organizations is considered as one of the sources of competitive advantage (Abbas, 2016; Das & Chakraborty, 2018), and therefore justifiable. However, from an internal perspective, knowledge hoarding takes place when employees keep their knowledge in an implicit form as a weapon to compete with their peers in terms of work performance (Fong, Ooi, Tan, Lee, & Yee-Loong Chong, 2011). This behavior, in turn, undermines organizational performance. As such, organizations make efforts to motivate and enhance not only their employees‘ knowledge sharing but also their coordination behaviors using formalized processes (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Gittell & Weiss, 2004). Moreover, this conceptual study argues that the core drivers of the desired organizational outcome of becoming a value co-creating organization cannot be assumed to occur automatically in the organization, but needs to be cultivated using high-performance work practices (HPWPs). These HPWPs are customized practices specifically aimed at fostering employees' required behaviors and competencies (Buller & McEvoy, 2012; Chahal, Jyoti, & Rani, 2016; Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). The HPWPs include practices such as recruitment and selection, training, incentives and reward system, promotions and career development opportunities, and opportunities to participate in decision making and to work effectively in teams (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016).

To summarize, this paper furthers the marketing‘s acknowledgmentof the value co-creation process with its external focus to propose an intra-organizational value co-creating orientation. In this regard, the focus of this study is on proposing how a firm can harness the value co-creating orientation within the domain of organizational practices from the lens of two internal organizational behaviors such as knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination. Moreover, HPWPs are used in this study as antecedent, aimed at encouraging knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination behaviors that will help create a successful intra-firm value co-creation orientation.The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

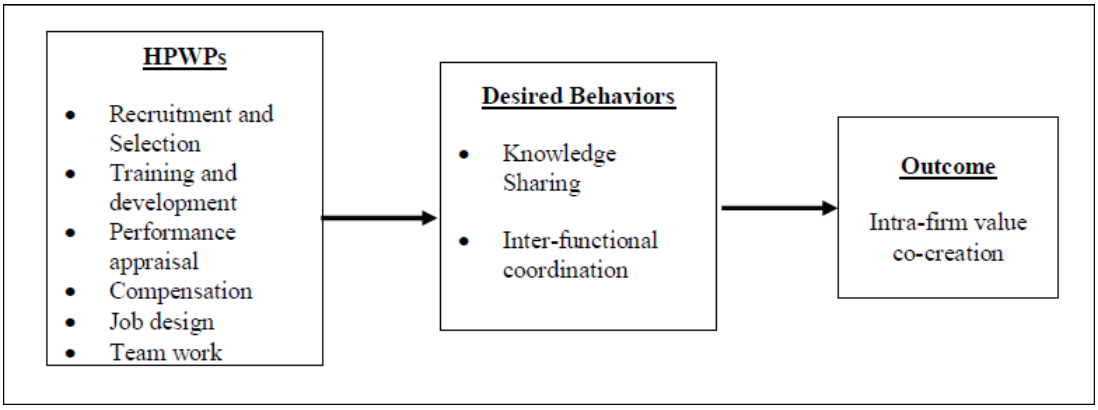

Figure 1. **Conceptual Model**

The following section highlights the linkage of HPWPs with knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination behaviors, to see how HPWPs enhance employees‘ knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination behaviors within the firm, which are the core drivers in developing a value co-creating organization.

Linking HPWPs with Knowledge Sharing and Inter-Functional Coordination

So far various researchers have identified HPWPs that singly or collectively enable the desired organizational outcomes (Chahal et al., 2016; Jyoti & Rani, 2017). Recruitment and selection are one of the core HR practices that involve attracting and selecting people whose knowledge, skill, and abilities (KSAs) best match the organization‘s desired profile (Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Schimansky, 2014).Nevertheless, at the time of hiring the organizations should generally keep in mind certain competencies and behaviors that will help employees to adjust to the environment of the organization as well as to work in teams and coordinate with others. For example, along with other competencies, organizations need their employees to be good team players as mentioned above, who can work effectively in teams not only by freely sharing their valuable knowledge resources with other members but also involve in supporting coordination across functions. However, sometimes in existing units, people who are hired may not be amenable to knowledge sharing and coordination. In such a situation, employees' lack of training is considered to be the primary reason for miscommunication and lack of coordination in organizations (Kahn & Mentzer, 1998; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). To overcome this shortcoming, involvement in multi-functional training will help employees to communicate and coordinate with other functional areas. An example of one aspect of training outcome could be understanding terminologies that can help reduce communication barriers between functions (Griffin & Hauser, 1996). Training and development include practices that help employees to acquire new attitudes that precede behaviors that are necessary to perform current as well as the future job imperatives (Bos‐Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Kees Looise, 2013). Delaney and Huselid(1996), also stressed how organizations can enhance their employees‘ knowledge sharing and coordination behaviors, by hiring quality individuals and by improving the level of their existing skills through training.

Moreover, within HR practices, compensation and rewards are considered as a tool to motivate individual employees to enhance their desired knowledge sharing behavior (Foss, Pedersen, Reinholt Fosgaard, & Stea, 2015). Consequently, we reason that firms use compensation and rewards as the instruments to elicit, enhance, and sustain the desired knowledge sharing behavior of the employee (Collins & Clark, 2003; Foss, Minbaeva, Pedersen, & Reinholt, 2009; Hansen, Nohria, & Tierney, 1999; Zárraga & Bonache, 2003). In the same manner, Good and Schultz (1997) affirm that compensation and reward systems are also used in the firms as mechanisms that can be applied to induce coordination between various operational areas by bringing together disparate people to achieve common goals. This assertion is also supported by numerous studies, which show that competitive compensation in the shape of incentives and reward system, extensive benefits, promotion, and career development opportunities, when combined have a synergistic and positive effect on coordination and integration of various working units and thus promote cooperation and facilitate positive affective relations (Arndt, Karande, & Landry, 2011; Hutt, 1995; Kaše, Paauwe, & Zupan, 2009). Further, these rewards and incentives, on the other hand, are contingent on performance appraisal and help to attract as well as retain the desired talent in the organizations (Munteanu, 2014; Raidén, Dainty, & Neale, 2006), and also stimulate their motivation and commitment towards successful implementation of knowledge sharing and coordination behaviors (Foss et al., 2015; Mohsen & Eng, 2016).

To this end, the use of competence-based performance appraisals serve as a feedback mechanism for employees, which provides employees with direction to their performance oriented competencies and enables them to focus on organizational knowledge needs (Lopez‐Cabrales, Pérez‐Luño, & Cabrera, 2009; Minbaeva, 2005; Simonin & Özsomer, 2009), as well as focus on encouraging coordination and teamwork (Mäkelä & Brewster, 2009). On the other hand, the firm will be able to identify gaps between actual against desired behavior and ensure training to cover the gaps. Thus, a performance appraisal system if properly administered can serve as a motivator and put positive pressure on employees to drive for better performance through greater sharing of knowledge (Fong et al., 2011) and enhance coordination to improve responsiveness (Narver & Slater, 1990).

Moreover, by effective implementation of job design and teamwork practices as well as provision of continuous career-relevant opportunities and a supportive learning environment from the employer provides a platform to employees where they can effectively coordinate and share knowledge with other members which in turn encourage them to be receptive to new or unfamiliar experiences (Fong et al., 2011; Reinholt, Pedersen, & Foss, 2011; Siemsen, Roth, & Balasubramanian, 2008). In this regard, various studies have demonstrated that provisions of job and career-relevant opportunities also make an effective contribution to the employees‛ knowledge sharing behavior (Reinholt et al., 2011; Siemsen et al., 2008). Similarly, within intra-organizational networks, researchers consider work design as an antecedent to shared experience and richer interpersonal ties (Beugelsdijk, 2008; Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Mäkelä & Brewster, 2009; Simonin & Özsomer, 2009). Intuitively then for knowledge sharing to occur within a firm, the firm‛s working environment needs to be composed of members, who are cooperative with other members of the team (Fong et al., 2011; Goh, 2002). Thus, teamwork enhances knowledge sharing behavior in organizations and creates an environment that enables a broader communion of knowledge among members of cohesive teams with similar norms and values (Lim & Klein, 2006; Zárraga & Bonache, 2003). In the same manner, cross-functional teams help consolidation of various skills within an organization and many organizations regard this as an efficient means to deal with work environmental complexity (Griffin & Hauser, 1996; Pinto, Pinto, & Prescott, 1993).

Proposition 1: High-Performance Work practices enhance employees’ knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination behaviors within the firm.

The next section of this paper expands on the rationale of the impact that knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination behaviors have on a firm‛s internal value co-creation processes.

Knowledge Sharing and Intra-Firm Value Co-Creation

Knowledge sharing is a process through which the abilities and behaviors of the employees tend to improve based on shared experiences (Argote & Ingram, 2000), as well as the conversion of implicit to codified or explicit knowledge. This process of knowledge sharing starts with a single unit spreading knowledge across the network and thus facilitates organizational functions in terms of production (Epple, Argote, & Murphy, 1996; Galbraith, 1990), and service sectors (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Darr, Argote, & Epple, 1995). However, from the firm‛s internal systems perspective, this knowledge sharing reflects behaviors or procedures of communication in terms of exchange of ideas and information among firms‛ internal participants that help drive the transformation and creation of knowledge within the organizational structure (Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009; Ryu, Ho, & Han, 2003).

Likewise, this creation of knowledge in terms of generating value creating ideas, not only improve the organization's innovative capability, business processes, and product and service offering, but at the same time assist them in creating and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Fong et al., 2011; Lin, 2007). Leading from the knowledge spiral proposition (Nonaka & Konno, 1998), knowledge move from tacit to explicit, explicit to explicit, and then explicit to tacit through four phases as Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization (see Figure 2). Through this process, knowledge sharing is highlighted among individuals and enhanced through teamwork and involves knowledge conversion to ultimately create value within the organizational structure.

Proposition 2: To foster a value co-creating orientation, organizations need to encourage their employees' knowledge sharing behavior within the firm.

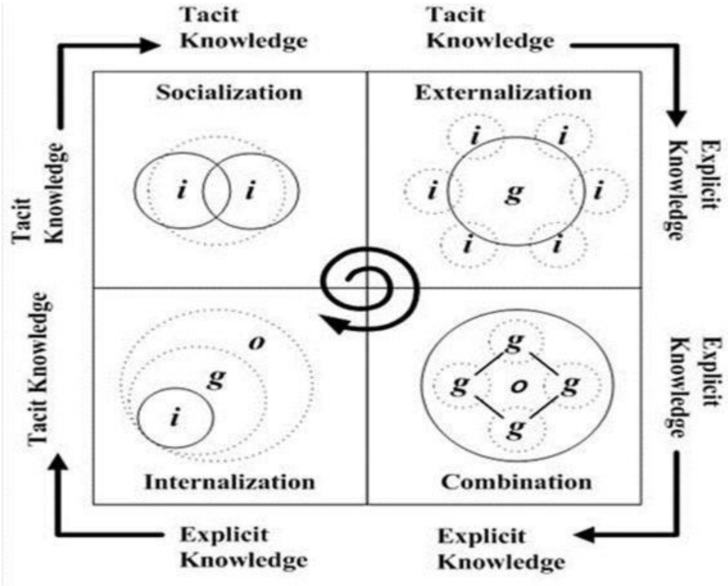

Figure 2. **Knowledge spiral in the value chain**

Inter-Functional Coordination and Intra-Firm Value Co-Creation

There is a widely held opinion that an organization's survival and success are mainly dependent on the effort, behaviors, and interactions of employees as they pursue the mission and strategy of the firm in a coordinated manner (Collins & Smith, 2006; Wright & McMahan, 1992). The ability to coordinate across functions enables firms to quickly respond to the dynamic environment changes through a strong coordinating mechanism. At the same time firms also enhance their capacity for flexibility to continually reform their operations while responding to changing market trends and thus create customer value and attain a sustainable competitive advantage (Neill, McKee, & Rose, 2007). For example, J.C. Penny under their former CEO Ron Johnson failed to adjust the misalignment in their two operational areas of the firm namely in-shop and online operations. While the new CEO Marvin Ellison, who replaced Ron Johnson was able to solve the problem of misalignment. Ellison, thus created value for the customers and restored JCP to profitability by better realignment of its operations through strong coordination across activities spanning functional areas. This is one way in which inter-functional coordination brings improvement in value creation for the final customer.

Moreover, as per Pera, Occhiocupo, & Clarke (2016), in co-creation of value, each actor (supplier as well as consumer) contributes resources to the ecosystem where each resource is then available to all other actors who build on, transform, augment, and apply the resource to achieve the shared purpose. The value is not innate to the resources themselves, rather the value is relying on the collective application, combination, and consolidation through sharing and coordination. These resources, in other words, are not _owned‘ by individual participants, but are processed collaboratively. Furthering this line of argument, researchers suggest that coordination in the use and exchange of resources occurs only becauseno individual actor has all the necessary resources to work effectively. Rather, multiple actors and units participate in the resource integration practices, where they contribute and integrate required resources to inherently objectify the inter-functional coordination as a value creator (Adler & Heckscher, 2006; Gummesson & Mele, 2010).

From a co-creation perspective, therefore, organizations need to reformulate their strategies by participating in collaborative networks involving their customers, communities, and business allies in a joint value creation process (Kohtamäki & Partanen, 2016). It is in this manner that we believe inter-functional coordination will improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and resource integration in the firm in pursuit of creating value internally for the firm. This is to say, that effective integration of resources is the outcome of higher order inter-functional coordination, with its concomitant impact on value co-creation within the firm.

Proposition 3: To foster a value co-creating orientation, organizations need to encourage their employees' inter-functional coordination behavior within the firm.

Discussion

This study seeks to embed a value co-creation framework in the organization‘s value chain and involve practices and behavior that are deemed critical to the success of such an effort. The marketing attribution of value co-creation conceptualization draws extensively on the S-D logic in terms of interactions that are perceived to be enacted between the supplier and consumer of value. This paper relies on a similar set of interactions within the organization‘s internal processes, namely amongst the intra-firm participants (actors) as being both supplier and consumer of value. However, the paper also envisages that some intervention will be required to ensure an open dialogue and cooperation along the organization‘s internal functions aimed at effectively enhancing the internal value co-creation system. As such, two critical internal organizational behaviors, i.e., knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination, which in the opinion of the paper will be at the center of the efforts of the firms to develop a value co-creating orientation. In the first instance, the participating actors will require to share knowledge within and across departments at each value creating step. In the same vein, secondly, the intra-functional coordination effort will affect a firm's capability to impact the manner in which the firm utilizes the knowledge to develop and improve the internal processes to leverage the same to enhance customer value co-creation in the external marketing environment. The study also tries to establish that to affect these behaviors, the organizations will require a necessary set or bundle of HR practices called the HPWPs. These HPWPs such as recruitment & selection, training, and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, job design and teamwork, etc undertake desired behavioral goals that will help create a successful intra-organizational value co-creation.

Implications and Contribution

The study has made innovative contributions to management and organizational practices using intra-firm value co-creation as its central focus. The first major contribution of this paper to practice is to bring focus on the internal processes and systems, especially on behaviors that are critical to the success of any implementation strategy. The second contributionis to underscore the logic that behaviors need to be encouraged through the formalized system and not left to chance. For this, the third contribution is in the form of identifying specific HRM practices configured from the HRM outcomes such as enhancing the abilities of employees in shaping appropriate behaviors as well as motivating them while simultaneously providing them opportunities to do so. In terms of academic contribution, the paper adds to our knowledge by incorporating value co-creation conceptualization from the external customer perspective towards the organizational internal processes where each department and its human resource is both a supplier and consumer of value and have to interact in a reiterative manner across departmental boundaries to create an intra-organizational value co-creation orientation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears to be certain that employees perform well to achieve an organizational objective when they have the necessary abilities, adequate motivation, and opportunities to take part in a desired outcome or behavior. Consequently, this study has focused on the intra-organizational ability to co-create value within the organization to establish that unless appropriate interventions are undertaken in building the value co-creation orientation within the firm‘s setup, it will not be possible to optimize value created by the firm for the market. Moreover, the paper argues that internal organizational behaviors, especially knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination are not to be assumed, but cultivated using HPWPs such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, work design, and teamwork, etc. The benefit of adopting this new orientation within the firm‘s behavioral paradigm is to create capabilities that help to create a well-established intra-firm value co-creating system based on knowledge sharing and inter-functional coordination behaviors.

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