

Researchers' knowledge acquisition through personal networks and websites

Yukiko Murakami, Waseda University

Abstract

The importance of acquiring new knowledge from outside the organization has been widely recognized to stimulate innovation. Recent developments in information and communication technology make it possible to acquire knowledge from websites and to communicate with many unspecified people in virtual communities. This article aims to theoretically and empirically clarify whether personal networks are still an important channel of acquiring knowledge in such an age and in what contexts and why people rely on personal networks rather than websites.

This research constructed hypotheses from researchers' utility maximization point of view and examined them using approximately 1000 samples of researchers collected from national universities and laboratories in Japan. The analyses found that individual factors (ability and career) and environmental factors (organizational/regional environment) promote knowledge acquisition through personal networks rather than websites. In addition, it was found that the effects of these factors differ by kind of knowledge. Therefore, it is concluded that researchers who can form and maintain personal networks at low costs and obtain large benefits from them use personal networks rather than websites in acquiring knowledge whose characteristics give an advantage to the use of personal networks.