Individual attitudes and organisational knowledge sharing

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Abstract

The purpose of this empirical study is to explore how employees process information after they have collected it, and investigate how individual attitudes to learning, sharing and storing influence organisational knowledge sharing. The data are derived from 499 respondents working in international tourist hotels in Taiwan. The results show that two significant factors, individual attitudes to (a) learning and (b) sharing, significantly impact on organisational knowledge sharing. This study implies that front-line managers should help rank-and-file employees to both learn and share knowledge and encourage the habituation of such behaviour patterns. It is suggested that this practice would enhance organisational performance.

Keywords: Individual attitude; Knowledge sharing; Organisational learning

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Today the business environment is more competitive and uncertain than in the past. In order to succeed, organisations have to rapidly create new knowledge, products and services. A study of the research literature published over the last decade suggests that some companies have gained benefit from establishing knowledge management (KM) practices. Parlby (1998), Ahmed, Lim, and Zairi (1999) and Lim, Ahmed, and Zairi (1999) have all demonstrated that the benefits include: (a) minimising potential losses on intellectual capital from employees leaving; (b) improving job performance by enabling all employees to easily retrieve knowledge when required; (c) increasing employee satisfaction by obtaining knowledge from others and gaining from reward systems; (d) providing better products and services; and (e) making better decisions. These factors result in retaining and improving competitiveness in the marketplace. In addition, Beckett’s (2000) study indicates that KM implementation enables an organisation to eliminate the duplication of knowledge, i.e. to avoid “silo operations”.

KM has been studied in several disciplines. Much of the literature describes KM from an information technology (IT) perspective; a perspective possibly over-emphasised by some scholars and practitioners. IT clearly plays a crucial role in new approaches to managing knowledge. However, as Nonaka (1985, 1988), Sveiby and Lloyd (1987), and Davenport and Prusak (2000) have argued, technology is designed and operated by people, and its contribution to managing knowledge depends on fitting an organisational social context. As Pucinelli (1998) states, “knowledge is fundamentally a product of people and not technology. …Sharing is such a valuable component to the success of KM because it focuses on the human side of knowledge (p. 40)”. This human focus is also reinforced by Büchel and Raub (2002). They claim that, as information and knowledge are recorded on devices of IT, sometimes it might be difficult for knowledge receivers to understand the context of the origination of the knowledge.

As a result, individuals play a crucial role in implementing KM practices. Guthrie (2001) and Stovel and Bontis (2002) indicate that employees are major contributors to overall organisational effectiveness. Consequently, the requirement for employee involvement in organisational knowledge generation is growing in importance. For
example, managers can involve employees in developing problem-solving alternatives and enlarging organisational resources. Under these circumstances outcomes can be significantly determined by individual attitudes to learning, sharing and storing knowledge. Yet, in spite of the number of previous KM studies, there seems to be a paucity of research investigating the influence of these factors on knowledge sharing and management.

Recently, increasing numbers of hotels have applied the concept of the profit centre at department level (Arora, 2002). As one department needs a product or service from another, funds are transferred in exchange. This process may lead to the construction of invisible boundaries between departments, and the danger exists that antagonistic rather than collaborative attitudes emerge between competing sections. Therefore, knowledge collecting, sharing and storing may become more difficult. The issue of how this acquiring, sharing and retaining affects hotels' effectiveness has been ignored by academic researchers in hospitality, and apparently also by hotel managers. If these concepts could be applied to business operations, it seems hotel owners could gain valuable assets in terms of knowledge sharing and management.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the influence of individual attitudes on the outcomes of KM implementation, in particular of knowledge sharing. The research investigates how individual attitudes to learning, sharing and storing affect knowledge sharing. It also examines how employees process information after they have collected it.

1.2. Research on KM in the tourism literature

In the tourism and hospitality literature, few empirical studies have examined the capture of individual knowledge and its subsequent sharing and transfer to become an organisational asset. The literature mainly focuses on areas of quality assurance, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and yield management. The knowledge sharing issue can be seen in some of these areas but the discussion focuses more on control and power; for example, empowerment, delegation, sharing risks and ownership of the job. These issues are often discussed in the context of how to implement reward programs, including intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and profit sharing (Brymer, 1991; Hales & Klidas, 1998; Lefever & Reich, 1991; Partlow, 1993). In addition, although the literature addresses issues of IT, it concentrates on the introduction and development of those technologies and their costs and benefits rather than impacts on knowledge sharing and use (see for instance, Feinstein & Stefanelli, 1999; Hudson, 1994; Jones, 1996; Van Hoof, Verbeeten, & Combrink, 1996).

However, notable studies such as Yang (2004a), show that, after acquiring job-related information and knowledge, many interviewees in one hotel would think, reflect and provide feedback on what they had learned, and then make changes if applicable. On the other hand, in other companies, the learning attitude of employees was quite passive; they usually waited for instructions. That raises the question, what causes these differences?

Yang and Wan (2004), drawing on a sample from international tourist hotels in Taiwan, indicate that in one hotel, a climate favourable to KM seemed to exist on an informal basis. In others, the climate did not favour KM although some employees acted on their superiors’ instructions or used their own approach to learn new things. Apparently some managers had not seriously considered the benefits of KM practices, and appeared unconcerned about the effect of losing individual knowledge even though they had a general belief that KM could help their company. All of the top managers realised that nurturing a KM climate was important although paradoxically they did not formally foster this culture or tackle factors inhibiting KM. In short, a prerequisite of effective knowledge interflow and storage is to develop an organisational culture where knowledge sharing and acquiring are explicitly encapsulated into each job and to provide resources such as time, training to develop the required work culture of KM. Most managers had not yet taken such steps.

2. Fundamental theory

2.1. Knowledge management

A comprehensive approach to defining KM that is useful is Rowley’s (2000) emphasis on identifying, sharing, creating and storing of knowledge in pursuit of organisational learning (OL):

Knowledge management is concerned with the exploitation and development of the knowledge assets of an organisation with a view to furthering the organisation’s objectives. The knowledge to be managed includes both explicit, documented knowledge, and tacit, subjective knowledge. Management entails all of those processes associated with the identification, sharing and creation of knowledge. This requires systems for the creation and maintenance of knowledge repositories, and to cultivate and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and organisational learning (p. 11).

Of these stages, creation has received considerable focus from scholars who explicitly distinguish knowledge creation (KC) from KM. KC involves continuously replenishing knowledge to deal with unresolved situations in an organisation, while KM adds to KC “the systematisation of existing knowledge” (Bajaria, 2000, p. S562). In other words, KM focuses on efficient and systematic use of existing knowledge, whereas KC deals with the acquisition and reformation of new knowledge. Nonaka, a key proponent of many of the concepts behind KC, similarly distinguishes KC from KM. More explicitly, Von Krogh, Ichijo, and Nonaka (2000) propose that “the creation of knowledge cannot be managed, only enabled (p. 3)”.

Nonaka and Konno (1998, p. 42) emphasise that “knowledge creation is a spiralling process of interaction
between explicit and tacit knowledge”. Nonaka’s four-stage SECI model—Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination and Internalisation—demonstrates this spiral process (Nonaka, 1991). Socialisation involves sharing tacit knowledge between individuals. Externalisation involves the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge. New explicit knowledge is created through the integration of explicit knowledge in one field (person) with explicit knowledge from other fields (persons)—the so-called systematisation stage, formerly called the “combination” stage by Nonaka. Internalisation occurs when explicit organisational knowledge is converted into individual tacit knowledge as employees continuously engage in “learning-by-doing”.

The SECI model focuses on KC: the fundamental purpose of its four components is the pursuit of continuous innovation. However, Li and Gao (2003) argue that for overall organisational effectiveness and performance, KC by itself is sometimes not sufficient for companies facing a turbulent external environment and rapid pace of change. A systematic process of organising and distributing knowledge is also a necessity. The literature also suggests that, in addition to individual competencies (e.g. O’Dell & Grayson, 1998; Szulanski, 1996), individual attitudes influences outcomes of knowledge sharing, in particular, attitude to learning (e.g. Cameron, 2002; Davenport, De Long & Beers, 1998; Roth, 2003), attitude to sharing (e.g. Armistead & Meakins, 2002; Baum & Ingram, 1988; Dixon, 2002) and attitude to storing (e.g. Argote & Ingram, 2000; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Zollo & Winter, 2002).

2.2. Individual and OL

According to Argyris and Schon (1978), Swieringa and Wierdsma (1994) and Jones, Herschel, and Moesel (2003), individual learning enables employees to correct and change their behaviours while/after learning. OL enables organisations to create new knowledge and change and upgrade policies and strategies through continuous collective learning processes. This means that members in the organisation operate differently to enhance organisational capabilities and improve organisational systems. In other words, OL can take place simultaneously with changes in individual and organisational behaviours.

Once having created knowledge, Kakabadse, Kakabadse, and Kouzmin (2003) claim that knowledge acquisition and sharing can be viewed as the first step in pursuing OL. Organisations acquire, create, share and re-utilise knowledge relevant to their business operations, in order to add value for their customers (Martin, 2000). The level of learning may be linked to an organisation’s ability to produce, over time, a given competitive response to obtain a major competitive advantage. The stronger the learning culture that an organisation possesses, the greater the degree of sustainable competitive advantage it develops. In particular, in a global business (e.g. international hotel chains), as a company learns and shares quickly, the process of decision-making may become more effective and efficient than in companies that do not adopt similar policies. Roth (2003, p. 34) suggests that “If we want people in our organisations to share what they have learned, it would be wise to create the conditions where sharing results in personal benefit to both parties”. Individual learning therefore involves sharing and not only learning from past experience or the present moment.

2.3. Knowledge sharing and individual attitudes

Bartol and Srivastava (2002) define knowledge sharing as the action in which employees diffuse relevant information to others across the organisation. According to Bock and Kim (2002), knowledge sharing is the most important part of KM. The ultimate goal of sharing employees’ knowledge is its transfer to organisational assets and resources (Dawson, 2001). Additionally sharing activities have to be voluntary and cannot be forced (Käser & Miles, 2002).

An employee’s attitudes and competencies may impede knowledge sharing. Szulanski (1996) and O’Dell and Grayson (1998) find that many employees are unaware of the importance of sharing and transferring knowledge. Some individuals possess an attitudinal “unwillingness to share” due to personal insecurity, such as a fear of being seen as ignorant and therefore unfit for job advancement or new career opportunities. This is sometimes described as the notion that “knowledge is power” (Dunford, 2000; Grandori & Kogut, 2002; Hendriks, 1999; Szulanski, 1996). Employees may also fear a loss of superiority and knowledge ownership after sharing their own personal knowledge (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Szulanski, 1996). Hislop’s (2003) study reveals that the most important factor in knowledge sharing is the question of employee attitudes, not the motivation that leads employees to share. Wah (2000) claims that one major obstacle to establishing KM is the propensity of people to hoard knowledge. In reality, it would appear that hoarding knowledge does exist; after all, “sharing” seems to be unnatural, particularly under the condition of gains and losses, “knowledge is power”, etc. For example, people working in sales departments have imposed on them the needs to meet quotas, and everyone competes with each other for the sake of their personal productivity to meet required targets. For his part Tsai (2002) considers the positive side of inter-unit competition in promoting alliances. While “the competitive aspect refers to the use of shared knowledge to make private gains in an attempt to outperform the partners” (Tsai, 2002, p. 180), Tsai further notes the development of organisation-coordination rules, in either formal structures or informal horizontal networks. These rules enable different units within an organisation to articulate and enhance knowledge sharing. He uses the term “coopetition”, a combination of “cooperation” and “competition”. An obvious example in a hotel where coopetition may be beneficial is where multiple restaurant outlets operate.
Partial transfer of knowledge may be a more common kind of hoarding, where sharers share selected circumstances of a case rather than the totality (Goh, 2002). Fisher and Fisher (1998) give the example of people hoarding incomplete ideas and personal mistakes. Ellis (2001, p. 36) indicates that “salespeople tend not to want to share hot selling tips, but they do want documentation of product solutions. The thing they like is to share their success”. No matter what individuals misunderstand, forget, filter, ignore and/or fail to pass on, or whether this kind of withholding behaviour is unintentional or deliberate, organisational performance can be impaired. Incomplete transfer of knowledge therefore incurs “knowledge depreciation” or “organisational forgetting” (Argote, 1999).

Removing hoarding behaviour therefore seems to be difficult. Inspiring individuals to share becomes crucial, and organisations have to create a healthy climate based on collaboration, cooperation and trust.

2.4. Knowledge storing

After knowledge is shared and absorbed with respect to routines of operational performance, individuals and organisations should codify it onto organisational memory (i.e. knowledge retaining or storing) through any pertinent media such as manuals (Zollo & Winter, 2002). Moreover, in their extensive review of literature on forming dynamic capabilities within organisations, Zollo and Winter say that this codified process of organisational memory leads to the effective diffusion of organisational knowledge. This knowledge consists of prior individual experience, internal existing routines, new operating routines and any kinds of knowledge related to organisational operations.

According to Hickins (2000, p. 102), “[p]eople are loath to spend time adding content to a knowledge repository. And everyone knows that a database is only as good as the information it contains”. Retaining and storing is an important process. KM will not succeed unless some are specifically made responsible for compiling, planning and organising knowledge networks and technology repositories. In reality, knowledge might be transferred through conversations and its use in routines. However, it is possible that people never retain explicit records as part of the organisational system. As employees come and go and leadership and ownership change, knowledge might be dissipated. Evidence of this is provided by Wagner (2003, p. 98), who states “organisations learn haphazardly from experience and rarely capture it in ways that can be transformed into available knowledge embedded in the organisational memory”.

Argote’s (1999) research on OL shows knowledge is retained in three different memory systems: individual memory, an organisation’s information technologies and tools, and its structures and routines. When high levels of employee turnover exist and individual knowledge is not captured, all three suffer. How to place individual knowledge into collectively accessible memory systems is a key issue for human resource (HR) managers, and is even more so under conditions of high labour turnover.

An interesting example of such a system in the hotel industry is the Marriott chain’s “codification system” that stores employees’ knowledge of day-to-day operations and standard operation procedures to provide consistent customer services (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). This is accompanied by a reward system for those who share, create and mobilise new knowledge relevant to the business. A similar practice in the Ritz Carlton chain reinforces customer loyalty by recording guests’ special interests in the first visit and leads to personalised treatment based on records thereafter (Davenport, Harris, & Kohli, 2001).

3. Research design

3.1. Sampling design

The Tourism Bureau (Taiwan ROC) has classified all hotels in Taiwan into three levels: international tourist, tourist and ordinary hotels (http://www.taiwan.net.tw). In 2004, nine of 60 international tourist hotels were globally managed or franchised by international companies of hotels and resorts such as Hyatt International and Shangri-La. The other properties were locally managed hotels.

With a large number of properties existing in the hotel industry in Taiwan, the study needed to be more focused. With respect to the sampling frame, the focal point of this investigation was thus limited to nine international tourist hotels that are globally managed or franchised by well-known groups: Four Points by Sheraton, Four Seasons & Regent, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Hyatt, Nikko, Shangri-La, Sheraton and Westin. This sample also provided easier access than other hotels to information about knowledge sharing practices.

According to Cooper and Schindler (1998), from the statistical perspective, the sample validity needs to be tested and is determined by two criteria: accuracy and precision. The involvement of all levels of staff should reduce bias sampling with respect to these two criteria.

Even though the international tourist hotels in the sample were selected because of ease of accessibility, the author was not allowed to contact potential respondents directly as the HR managers of the participating hotels could not legally distribute mailing lists. Therefore, questionnaires were given to the HR managers, who then distributed them to potential respondents. However, the HR managers assured the author that the respondents would be randomly chosen and the completed questionnaires returned with anonymity.

In order to minimise random sampling error, the following procedures of collecting the data were undertaken. First, HR managers of all hotels in the sampling frame were contacted for permission to distribute the questionnaires. Second, all of the questionnaires were
sent to HR managers. Third, these passed the questionnaires to departmental managers. Fourth, the questionnaires were then randomly distributed to potential respondents. Fifth, the completed questionnaires were returned to the HR department. Sixth, after the collection of the questionnaires from each department, they were sent back to the author. Through this procedure, the sample elements were randomly selected and drawn; thus every attempt was made to avoid systematic variance and sampling errors/random fluctuations that can distort survey results.

All levels of employees were invited to participate in this study, in order to gather sufficient information from different perspectives and to enhance statistical efficiency. The distribution of the questionnaires was planned as follows: 20% of the distributed questionnaires were from the top management, such as general manager, assistant general manager and departmental managers/directors. Of the remaining total, 40% were collected from middle and lower level management (such as sub-departmental managers and supervisors) and another 40% from front-line employees. This plan was based on the composition of the workforce in international tourist hotels in Taiwan. An average of 60 survey forms was sent to each hotel, depending on the size of the hotel, which number formed approximately 30% of the hotels' full-time employees (this also was negotiated with the HR managers and/or managers of operations).

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. The development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire used every-day operational words from the hotel industry and lay terms to explain theoretical concepts, in order to prevent the instrument being an error source. Moreover, the author ran three interviews to review the questions while distributing the piloted questionnaire and waiting for its completion so as to examine whether respondents understood the questions in terms of wording and meaning. The questionnaire was then revised based on their comments. This minimised respondents’ tendency to make improper responses through misunderstanding questions (Cooper & Schindler, 1998).

The questionnaire was translated from English to Mandarin. The author conducted the following procedures in order to ensure the reliability, credibility and validity of the translation. First, a discussion forum was organised for the translation of the research questionnaire. Second, three competent participants with a bachelor-degree qualification and at least three years of supervisory experience in the hotel industry, were invited to translate the questionnaire from English to Mandarin. Third, during the resulting discussion, the author tried to reconcile what the participants said/translated with the statements of the questionnaire. Last, the finalised questionnaire in Mandarin was developed on the basis of the outcomes of this discussion process.

In order to minimise errors of leniency, central tendency and the halo effect, items were both positively and negatively worded (DeVellis, 2003; Spector, 1992). Through the author's personal acquaintance the managers in the chosen hotels were convinced to encourage their colleagues and subordinates to pay good attention to items when filling out the questionnaire.

To minimise missing data the messages: “please make sure that you respond to all questions” and “please check that you have responded to all questions” were included at the beginning and end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire did not contain items about sensitive or controversial issues.

3.2.2. Content of the questionnaire

To ensure internal validity, many constructs were measured by the application of existing instruments where applicable. A small part of the question was carefully devised on the basis of the literature review. The first section sought to obtain individual behaviours of knowledge sharing and storing intentions, and individual competencies. The statements, forming the constructs of the first three individual attitudes were developed on the basis of the studies of Yang (2004a, 2004b) and Yang and Wan (2004). An example of “attitude to sharing” items is: “You share knowledge with your colleagues without their asking.” An example of “attitude to storing” items is: “Customer-related knowledge needs to be stored in the hotel computer system.” An example of “individual competencies” items is: “You have enough job-related skills to handle daily operations.” The last independent variable of “individual learning attitude” was adapted from the survey questions of Cameron and Quinn (1999). The following is representative of the scale items: “When your colleagues come up with a new idea, you are willing to know of and learn about it”, and “You usually invite your colleagues to provide regular feedback about how they think you are doing on the job.” This instrument has been shown to have high reliability and good validity. The anchor was “1: strongly disagree” and “7: strong agree”. The seven-point scale facilities sensitivity of measurement and extraction of variance (Cooper & Schindler, 1998).

The second section examined the outcomes of knowledge sharing practices. Firstly, “flow of knowledge” was investigated, in order to show how employees processed information after they had collected it. Respondents were requested to tick only one item from the nine listed. The items of the instrument were devised on the basis of the literature review (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Jones et al., 2003; Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1994). Secondly, five items from Sveiby and Simons (2002) scale, which is widely employed and has demonstrated validity and reliability, were included for measuring outcomes of knowledge sharing. A representative of the scales regarding knowledge sharing is “Combining the knowledge amongst staff has resulted in many new ideas and solutions for this hotel.” and “In this hotel, information sharing has increased your knowledge.”
The anchors were “1: strongly disagree” and “7: strong agree”.

The last section contained some demographic data of gender, the tenure in the current employment/hotel, the tenure in the hospitality industry, organisational hierarchy and employment status.

4. Results

The survey was distributed to 1200 participants across international tourist hotels in Taiwan. Of the potential number of respondents, 546 surveys were completed and returned, including 47 unusable. The response rate after deducting the unusable questionnaires was 42%. The ratio of usable questionnaires was: 22%, 36% and 42% from top management, the middle and lower management level and the rank-and-file employees, respectively.

Of the 499 samples, 57% were female respondents and 43% were male. In this study, 26% had experience of working in the hospitality industry for 1–3 years, and 23% had 5–10 years experience. Having almost one-half (43%) of people experienced in the industry for 3–10 years was seen to provide a significant feedback value with reference to the issues.

The fundamental results in this study can be summarised as follows. Many (78%) respondents were favourably disposed to share their competencies and knowledge with their colleagues including subordinates, peers and superiors without colleagues asking. In other words, three quarters of the sample were willing to talk about what they knew.

Also, respondents were asked about the extent to which they and/or their colleagues suffered costly mistakes because of lack of sufficient knowledge. Clearly, knowledge of operational procedures (79%) and knowledge of customers (73%) were the two most crucial aspects, in comparison with knowledge of IT (48%) and knowledge of competitors (44%). Knowledge of customers would include customers’ preferences, requests, wants and needs. This may reflect the fact that a large number of respondents were in positions requiring face-to-face contact with customers—about 80% worked at middle and lower levels of the organisational hierarchy. Such employees are expected to care more about knowledge of customers and daily routines than about knowledge of their competitors and IT applications. The results reported here demonstrate frequencies of employee dissemination of information about their competencies to one another, and lead to a decrease in the number of mistakes.

4.1. Flow of knowledge

The results, summarised in Table 1, show how employees processed information after they had collected it. Respondents were requested to tick only one item from the nine listed. One group of respondents merely wrote the new information down and did nothing (16%). If this information was valuable, the company might lose opportunities for better performance, and this behaviour seems to strongly limit learning. Another group of equal size (15%) did think about, share and use knowledge, a form of single-loop learning. A third and smaller group (12%) tried out new ideas before sharing them. The most common response (about 25% of respondents) used these approaches along with updating of documentation in standard operating procedures (SOPs), enabling everyone in the workplace to keep up-to-date; this is double-loop learning.

4.2. Individual attitudes and knowledge sharing

The correlation matrix in Table 2 shows that a positive “Attitude to Sharing and Learning” was associated with “Knowledge Sharing”. “Attitude to Storing” and “Individual Competencies”, were moderately correlated with “Knowledge Sharing”—these constructs did not contribute a lot to the prediction of “Knowledge Sharing” scores.

Multiple regression analysis with the Enter method was used to explore the relationship between the four independent variables (“Attitude to Sharing”, “Attitude to Storing”, “Attitude to Learning”, and “Competence”) and the dependent variable, “Knowledge Sharing” (Table 3).

“Individual competence” was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.06, p = 0.06$). The other variables accounted for

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flow of knowledge ($N = 499$)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Behaviour</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Forget it</td>
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<td>2. Write it down in a certain place</td>
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<td>3. Think about it</td>
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<td>4. Directly share with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Think and share with colleagues, and report it to superiors</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Think about it, share and discuss with colleagues, try to apply it to the work</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Think, and apply it to the work (trial-and-error), if workable, discuss it with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Think, apply, discuss with colleagues, and report workable cases to superiors, if they agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Think, apply, discuss with colleagues, and report workable cases to superiors; if they agree colleagues pursue the new approach WITH updating documentation of SOPs</td>
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54% of the total variance in “Knowledge Sharing” (adjusted $R^2 = 0.54$), which is highly significant as indicated by the $F$ value ($p < 0.001$). An examination of the $t$-values indicates that “Attitude to Sharing”, “Attitude to Storing” and “Attitude to Learning” were significantly related to “Knowledge Sharing”. On the other hand, individual competence ($t = 1.90$, $p > 0.05$) did not statistically contribute to “Knowledge Sharing”. The correlation matrix (Table 2) shows that a low correlation coefficient value was found.

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1. Flow of knowledge

Respondents were asked how they were most likely to deal with new knowledge. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the extent to which the KM and OL concepts were employed in this population. A number of options relating to sharing and use were presented in the questionnaire. Three possibilities for sharing involved: no sharing, sharing with other individuals and sharing at an organisational level.

In Table 1, a small group (16%) selected “write it down in a certain place” which describes no gain to the workgroup or organisation. Further, the likelihood of an individual remembering and using the information may not be strong if it is just written down. Other responses showing little systematic KM were “think about it” (11%) and “share with others” (7%). Overall, around a third of respondents could be classified as working at the least sophisticated level of KM.

A larger group both shared knowledge with colleagues and thought about it (6%), and tried it out, either before sharing (15%) or after (12%). This second level of KM (also involving one third of employees), theoretically results in more effective experimentation and sharing of knowledge between individuals. Even if new knowledge is not workable, and a person does not share it, this allows OL in the sense of not passing on unworkable information.

A third group of respondents performed “thinking”, “discussing” and “applying” activities and either reported new workable knowledge to superiors (8%), or reported it to superiors and updated organisational documentation (e.g. SOPs) if appropriate (25%). Both responses address OL. The latter maximises such learning and represents full implementation of the KM concept at all levels—individuals, workgroups and organization—and in terms of the processing and application of new knowledge.

It is highly significant that only about one quarter of the respondents carried out KM and OL to the full extent. Although the results discussed above show staff were generally quite open to sharing knowledge and able to identify effective ways of doing so, top managers face a significant challenge to stimulate and facilitate their staff to proceed to the highest level of KM. It is likely that the
results show that a major opportunity to improve business performance exists.

5.2. Individual attitudes and knowledge sharing

The literature review indicates that certain individual competencies, along with positive attitudes to sharing, storing and learning, should be associated with high levels of knowledge sharing (e.g. Argote & Ingram, 2000; Baum & Ingram, 1988; Cameron, 2002; O’Dell & Grayson, 1998; Zollo & Winter, 2002).

The results (Table 2) support the previous study, with attitudes to learning and sharing having the highest correlations with knowledge sharing. Results of regression analyses (Table 3) show that the three attitude variables, but not competencies, were significant contributors to the prediction of knowledge sharing, although individual competencies were only just insignificant ($p = 0.06$). The strongest predictors were attitude to sharing and attitude to learning, with attitude to storing making minor contributions. These results show that it is crucial to nurture individuals’ willingness to learn and to share in developing an organisational KM system (Baum & Ingram, 1988).

6. Conclusions and implications

The results show that although individual attitudes to sharing, storing and learning were correlated with knowledge sharing, the extent of these relationships was only moderate. That is, sharing is an outcome of more than just possessing a positive attitude. Some of the additional factors behind sharing are explored below. The major conclusions of this study concerning influences on knowledge sharing practices are that managers have to stimulate and facilitate employees towards the highest level of knowledge sharing, individual learning and OL.

In this theory, KM is a function of OL, which is itself an outcome of knowledge sharing processes. OL additionally involves systems to turn individuals’ experience into knowledge and to store and propagate that knowledge across the organisation. Knowledge sharing is seen as a function of organisational culture and leadership roles as well as individual behaviour. Finally, individuals’ propensity to share knowledge and undertake OL is seen to depend on their attitudes, competencies and, although not directly measured, their actions.

Employees performing KM can be seen as undertaking sharing, thinking and learning behaviours, creating a so-called “flow of knowledge”. These three activities have a reciprocal relationship: an effective sharing process enables individuals to think about others’ ideas and insights and learn from them, resulting in the enlargement of their capabilities. Managers implementing KM need to facilitate this; equally they also need to create systems to convert individual knowledge to organisational knowledge so that it does not become “orphaned”. This prevents knowledge depreciation and reinforces organisational capabilities.

To achieve success, because the business environment in the hotel industry is characterised by competitiveness, diversity and variety, the development of knowledge sharing needs a multi-faceted approach rather than a “one-size-fits-all” view. This approach would include knowledge acquisition from both internal and external sources, an emphasis on strategic information, and attention to mentoring, training and rewards.

References


