

The Impact of Knowledge Sharing Practices on Human Capital Creation: A Conceptual Synthesis and Framework for Future Research

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Abstract

In any hyper-competitive intricate global setting that is now characterised by volatility, unpredictability, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), organisations are beginning to recognise their human resource as their most valuable strategic asset; the cumulative knowledge, skills, capabilities and learning through experience they have acculturated in their workforce (Kianto et al., 2020). The most prominent point that the paper makes is that knowledge sharing is the most critical social and organizational process in which individual, tacit, and, in most instances, latent knowledge is converted into explicit, shared, and exploitable human capital (Ferraris et al., 2022). The paper has taken a cautious account of the academic literature that has emerged in recent years, and it bases its argument on a solid theoretical foundation such as Knowledge-Based View of the firm, Social Capital Theory and Organizational Learning theory. It explores the numerous aspects of knowledge sharing, clears up the distinction between the types of formal and informal sharing, and describes their respective and complementary impact on the basic aspects of human capital, i.e., the enhancement of functional competencies, the reinforcement of innovative capabilities, and the attainment of adaptive resilience (Yao et al., 2020; Muhammed and Zaim, 2020). The developed conceptual framework of this paper presupposes that a system of enabling conditions including a culture of trust and psychological safety, transformational leadership, and friendly technological infrastructure plays an important role in the efficiency of knowledge sharing in the formation of human capital (Mikalef et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021). It arises that the organization which takes the initiative to enhance the enablers is theorized to be more adept at translating episodic knowledge transfer to the long-term competitive advantage through enhancing of human capital. The article wraps up by considering the valuable implications on theoretical as well as managerial practice and expressly outlines the drawback of such conceptual writing paper, and outlines a specific plan of action that the empirical research can pursue in the future to support and defend the framework.

Keywords: *Knowledge Sharing, Human Capital Creation, Intellectual Capital, Organizational Learning, Knowledge-Based View.*

1-Introduction

A paradigmatic change in the nature of organizational value and competitive differentiation has been the major alteration in the nature of an industrial economy to a knowledge economy. In this new age, capital, land and labour in the conventional sense are not the prime factors of production, but instead, the intellectual and knowledge-based resources that can be utilised positively within an organization (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Foray, 2004). This shift has propelled the concept of human capital as a marginal interest in economic theory to a core of interest in strategic and organizational management and scholarship. Human capital as a concept is based on two seminal works by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) and subsequently developed by other contemporary scholars is the stock of knowledge, skills, capabilities and experience held by the employees of an organization, which can be exploited to generate economic value, attain strategic goals (Bontis, 1998; Snell and Dean, 1992). There is ample and significant empirical evidence that effectively links the power of the human capital of an organization to high financial performance, high innovation results, and high organizational agility (Crook et al., 2011; Hatch and Dyer, 2004; Subramaniam and Youndt, 2005). The meta-analyses in the recent past still confirm this high positive correlation, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors (Kianto et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, there should be a critical conceptual difference: human capital is not the mathematical aggregate of personal employee knowledge. It is rather a collective, organisational level creation that arises out of the intricate interplay and integration of personal know-how (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Wright et al., 2001). Active and voluntary sharing of knowledge is an essential part of this process of integrating and giving rise to a new entity, which can be generally described as knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is a broad concept which refers to the numerous multitudes of activities and processes that involve the sharing of knowledge (tacit and explicit) between or among individuals, groups, and across various organizational units (Ipe, 2003; Van den Hooff and De Ridder, 2004). It is the indispensable social lubricant that enables the solitary expertise of people to be transformed into a common company asset, thus avoiding the stagnation of knowledge and making possible the recombination of the existing ideas into new solutions (Kogut and Zander, 1992; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). This process is also becoming mediated by sophisticated technologies in the era of digital, and it facilitates and transforms the old forms of sharing (Mikalef et al., 2020).

Although the causal effects of each independently of the other are well-established in the literature on knowledge sharing and human capital, the exact operationalization of how distinct knowledge-sharing activities are associated with the actual generation of human capital is somewhat fragmented and undertheorized. Numerous studies analyze the antecedents of knowledge sharing (e.g., Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005; Lin, 2007) or the outcomes of human capital (e.g., Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011) separately, but few give a process-oriented model that explains the causal relationship between the former and the latter. Recent literature cries out that further research is required on how to understand which micro-foundations of knowledge processes which influence higher-order capabilities are considered more critical (Foss, 2021). This article aims to fill this great gap. It is mainly intended to develop an overarching conceptual framework that carefully expounds the channels through which knowledge-sharing practices, enabled by enabling organizational environment, syntactically develop and replenish an organizational reservoir of human capital. The paper will synthesize the information on the knowledge management, strategic human resource management, intellectual capital theory, and the insights into the organizational behaviour and thus, will offer a valuable input to future scholarly research and actionable managerial insight.

1.1-Problem Statement

The issue that faces modern organizations may not be a lack of personal knowledge or ability, but a general failure to utilize, distribute and use the knowledge already available within their lines. One of the most troublesome and expensive issues is the spread of the so-called knowledge silos in which valuable knowledge is held by certain individuals, teams, or functional departments (Hislop, 2013; Tsai, 2002). The consequences of this siloing are numerous organizational inefficiencies such as duplication effort, recidivation of past errors and a major barrier to organizational learning and innovation (Argote & Ingram, 2000). The issue is also exacerbated by the very nature of knowledge. Much of the best information is tacit, highly personal, situation-specific, and hard to capture and describe (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka, 1994). This tacitness generates an innate resistance to its transmission in the sense that this knowledge cannot easily be stored in files or books, but on the contrary it must be disseminated through ecstatic and participatory mediums of communication and such mediums may be more or less personal.

The problem has never stopped being dependent on the paradigm of hybrid and remote work, which the global events have changed and oftentimes destroyed the informal and unintentional communication that constitutes the tacit knowledge exchange (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

It means that such organizations never make full utilization of the intellectual resources of most organizations. They are committing substantial funds in hiring people who have the right skills and formal training but they are not establishing the climate where the knowledge will organically access and flow as well as be applied on the new challenges and opportunities as an organ. This is one of the weaknesses of human capital development process. The following gap is a problem which is addressed or at least attempted to be addressed by the existing conceptual paper: the absence of an explicit, holistic, theoretically-founded model of the working mechanisms of knowledge sharing practices transferring directly out of personal to collective human capital under the conditions of the present digital and dispersed organizational environment.

Although it is confirmed that there is a positive correlation between knowledge management programs and firm performance (e.g., Gold et al., 2001; Zack et al., 2009) and that between human capital and many other positive results (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2007), the intermediary black box the process of capital creation based on social exchange and collaborative learning needs to be elaborated deeper. It is urgently necessary to supersede the determination of correlation and to draw the causal mechanisms and situational modifying factors that characterize this relationship. The purpose of this paper is to shed light onto this black box by incorporating various theoretical insights such as the latest research in trying to model the effects of knowledge sharing as the driver of human capital formation.

1.2-Objectives

The overall aim of this theoretical paper is to explain, conceptualize, and establish theoretical links between organizational knowledge sharing behavior patterns and the multi-faceted process of human capital formation. To achieve this general objective the paper will aim to achieve the following objectives:

First, to complete the systematic and integrative review of the existing literature that encompasses the areas of knowledge management, intellectual capital, organizational learning, and strategic HRM, with the emphasis made on the inclusion of the latest research (2020-2025), to construct a coherent body of existing information and identify appropriate gaps and overlaps. Second, to develop a viable conceptual framework that identifies, describes, and defines the

interrelations between the primary micro-level processes (e.g., socialization, externalization, combination, internalization based on the SECI model) and macro-level processes (e.g., organizational routines, communities of practice) where knowledge sharing contributes to the emergence, development, and renewal of individual and organizational competencies, and in which a digital platform is specifically considered (Ferraris et al., 2022). Thirdly, we must take into account the recent findings about virtual work environment by adding in our description the enabling factors (critically) that are prerequisite, i.e., the spanning organizational culture (e.g., trust, psychological safety), the leadership styles (e.g., transformational, servant leadership), the motivational structure (e.g., intrinsic and extrinsic rewards), and the technological systems (e.g., knowledge management system, enterprise social media), which help or are counterproductive of successful knowledge sharing and, consequently, of human capital formation. Fourth, to imply a testable conceptual framework which can be applied to future in order to establish offering empirical research, to propose definite propositions which are testable with a view of testing the hypothesis, to come up with easy implications of what is needed with respect to the creation of human capital based on knowledge as far as the development of human capital in the digital age is concerned which requires definite propositions and offer ready blueprints and guidelines on how to design interventions to design organizational environments that are naturally conducive to the development of the human capital which is knowledge based in the digital age.

2-Literature Survey

Nexus of knowledge sharing and human capital is an extremely interdisciplinary academic topic, which has a healthy array of researches that are beneficial both in theory and also in practice. The premise to which this nexus may be conceived is the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) of the firm. In addition to the Resource-Based View, the KBV also proposes that the primary cause of existence of the firm is that it is more efficient than the market in terms of the production and assimilation of knowledge (Grant, 1996; Kogut and Zander, 1992). This theory has a clear linkage of the type of knowledge possessed by individuals (human capital) to the competitive advantage at the organizational level thus knowledge sharing and knowledge integration are the most important managerial processes that bring the competitive advantage to reality. The most recent study also optimized the KBV, to explore how the digital transformation affects the knowledge-based potentials of a company and its dynamical ability to leverage human capital (Mikalef et al., 2020).

Even the human capital theory, as rooted in economics (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961), was originally concerned with investments in education and training at a personal level. When it became a part of the management scholarship, it brought about a change in the way human capital was perceived by the organization as a strategic resource (Boxall, 1996). Studies along these lines have revealed that human capital is a primary force behind firm performance and innovation (e.g., Hitt et al., 2001; Subramaniam and Youndt, 2005). Nevertheless, initial applications typically assumed the human capital is a fixed stock. Other more modern understandings, inspired by the KBV, are more dynamic and social. It is here that Social Capital Theory is very much needed (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Adler and Kwon, 2002). Knowledge exchange requires the pre-conditions created by social capital of the resources that are inherent in networks of relationships, are accessible through networks of relationships, and that networks of relationships create. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) proposed the following well-known argument: social capital enables the sharing and integration of knowledge and this is the process that results in the creation of new intellectual capital, as well as human capital. Social capital dimensions such as the structural dimension (e.g., network ties); the relational dimension (e.g., trust); and the cognitive dimension (e.g., shared language) directly affect the ease and effectiveness of knowledge exchange (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005; Levin and Cross, 2004). A recent study confirms that, and that virtual social capital is now essential to knowledge sharing in distributed teams (Zhang and Jiang, 2022).

The antecedents of knowledge sharing have been discussed in the literature at length, but they can be classified on various levels. On the individual level, knowledge self-efficacy, positive attitude towards sharing, prosocial or altruistic motivation play an important role (Bock et al., 2005; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). The conceived benefits and costs of sharing, which are often studied in terms of the social exchange theory, are also significant (Constant et al., 1994). New dimensions, like the role of mindfulness (Petrakou et al., 2021) or digital literacy (Lehner et al., 2023) in promoting sharing behaviors, have been researched lately. Culture is predominant at the team and organization level. The culture of trust is probably the most mentioned enabler, as it fosters fear of exploitation, as well as openness (Renzl, 2008; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). The notion of psychological safety closely correlates with it, as it is a shared belief in which team members believe that the team is psychologically safe to take interpersonal risks that are necessary to express potentially incomplete and even contentious ideas (Edmondson, 1999; Siemsen et al., 2009). Psychological safety remains crucial even in current research addressing the issue of hybrid work models, where the establishment of a safe working environment is the

key to virtual contribution (Wang et al., 2021). As well as supportive leadership, including transformational leadership which inspires and motivates and servant leadership which empowers and supports, supportive leadership has been found to support knowledge sharing environments (Srivastava et al., 2006; Van Wijk et al., 2008). The modern literature adds to this the e-leadership styles that are efficient in the management of remote knowledge employees (Borges et al., 2022).

There are also significant differences in literature between knowledge sharing in its various forms. The formal practices include mentoring and coaching programs, guided training, written best practices as well as officially defined communities of practices (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). These provide systematic and managed knowledge transfer processes. Conversely, informal practices are quite essential too, and they entail informal networking, informal storytelling, informal observations and casual conversations (Nonaka and Konno, 1998). Unofficial networks are most effective in transfer of tacit knowledge that is difficult to formalize. The enabling factor that is the power of technology is a big one. Knowledge sharing may be extremely accessible, expedited, and efficient owing to Knowledge Management Systems (KMS), intranets, wikis, enterprise social networking platforms (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams) etc. (Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Majchrzak et al., 2013). However, the research does show that the technology is not sufficient, and its functionality is determined by the correspondence with the social and cultural state of affairs (Hislop, 2013). The new findings related to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as knowledge management may assist in assuming that AI will be able to customize knowledge delivery and match professionals, but it also raises a variety of new concerns connected with the evaluation, partiality, and depreciation of knowledge sharing (Ferraris et al., 2022; Mikalef and Gupta, 2021).

The output of such a complex process is the human capital that is a multi-dimensional construct. It is also not limited to the enhancement of specific employee skills and competences (Bontis et al., 2002) but a superior problem-solving, innovative and creative capability (Wang and Noe, 2010). Additionally, it also includes the adaptive strength of the organization and its ability to gain experience and adapt to a changing environment (Zollo and winter, 2002). This is a critical lens through which the organizational learning literature views and introduces knowledge sharing as an important learning activity (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). In the process of sharing knowledge, it is never simply conveyed in a static way, on the contrary, it is usually the subject of a conversation, a discussion, and debate. New understanding and new solutions are generated through this process of social sense-making (Weick, 1995) and

knowledge combination (Nonaka and von Krogh, 2009). This is, at once and inseparable, a process of knowledge production, but also of human capital production, as individuals and groups broaden their possibilities, and acquire new forms of thought and behavior. Empirical studies have recently started to estimate that relationship which show that knowledge sharing practices play a big part in the relationship between high-performance work systems and human capital accumulation (Yao et al., 2020).

2.1-Conceptual Framework and Propositions

On the basis of the literatures review, we are going to suggest the following conceptual framework (Figure 1) that will trace the connection between knowledge sharing practices, their most significant facilitators, and the subsequent generation of human capital.

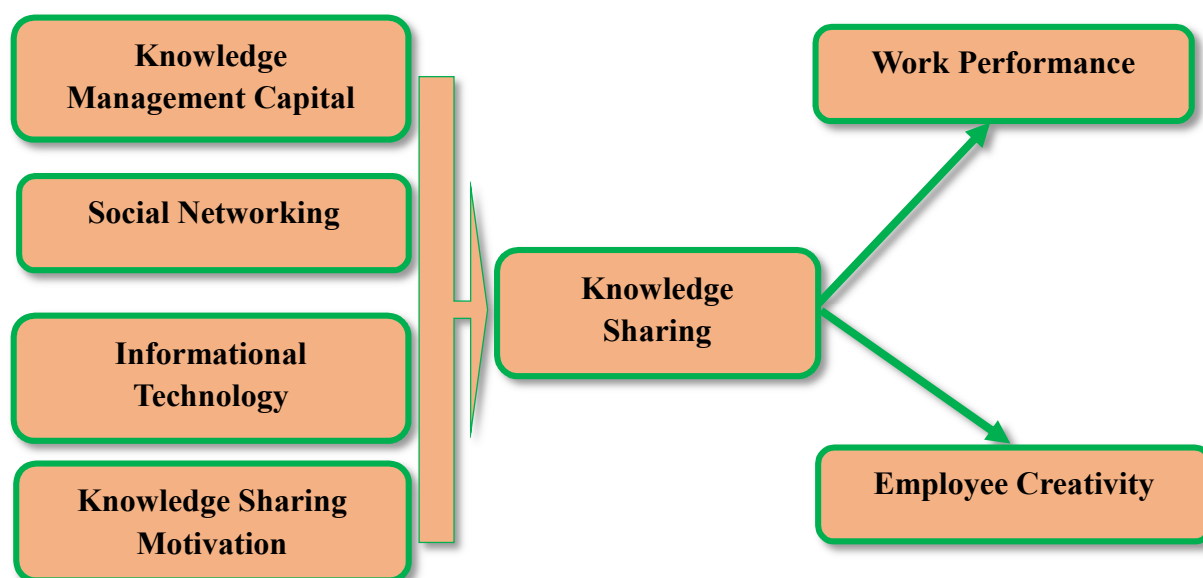


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Knowledge Sharing Impact on Human Capital Creation. (Source: Muqadas et al. 2016)

Based on the framework, knowledge sharing is made possible by the existence of a conducting ground of enabling factors. It is built on the basis of the trust-based culture of the organization, which is psychologically safe and has a learning orientation (Edmondson, 1999; Wang et al., 2021). Transformational, supportive and strategically aligned leaders that foster sharing by rewarding behaviors are in effect (Borges et al., 2022; Srivastava et al., 2006). The relevant technology, including not just the traditional KMS but also the more modern digital tools, such

as ESN, and AI tools, is necessary in the dispersed work environment and introduces technology needed to enhance the necessary knowledge capture, dissemination, and connection (Mikalef et al., 2020; Ferraris et al., 2022).

These enablers evoke a sequence of knowledge sharing practices, formal (ex: training, databases, formal communities of practice, informal e.g. water-cooler conversations, mentoring, social media interactions). A combination of these practices (particularly within the domain of digital-physical hybrid space) triggers the key mediating process: organizational learning. Nonaka (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, Internalization) explains it with reference to the SECI model of (1994) which states that tacit and explicit knowledge is constantly being transformed into new knowledge within the organization. This dynamic learning and knowledge conversion is actually the process of human capital formation and brings the following effects, 1) Enhanced Competencies (recombined knowledge creates new ideas and solutions); 2) Increased Innovation (recombined knowledge creates new ideas and solutions); and 3) Improved Adaptability (enhances the ability of the organization to learn and adapt). Finally, but not the least a feedback mechanism is developed, whereby the higher levels of human capital enable to increase the enabling factors i.e. smarter employees will be more prone to promotion to the top, more willing to utilize technology to their benefit and this will result in a knowledge-based benefit cycle.

Based on this framing, we could infer the following primary assumption:

P1: Organizational learning processes positively mediate knowledge sharing practices and human capital creation, which are improved by the presence of the enabling factors (supportive culture, leadership, and technology).

3.1-Methodological Approach

The present paper is a conceptual work and, hence, it does not employ any empirical methodology. However, the proposed framework is the framework which will be tested. This study could be conducted with mixed method in future. The constructs in figure 1 could be operationalized in a quantitative study (e.g., by the existing knowledge sharing, psychological safety, transformational leadership, and human capital scales) and tested in the whole model using the data of a large multi-industry sample of the organizations through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This would facilitate to test the mediating role of a learning in an

organization and the moderating roles of the enablers. In principle, a qualitative multiple-case study could be capable of digging deeper into the how and the why of these relationships. By conducting a series of detailed interviews and observations, in conjunction with several firms, would offer a profound understanding of the role of culture and leadership in facilitating sharing, the ways the processes of SECI may manifest in reality, how human capital can be literally improved, and how the context may be in a way richer than quantitative data can reflect.

3.2- Conclusion

In a very detailed and comprehensive manner, this theoretical paper has brought out arguments that knowledge sharing is the core and requisite process, based on which organizations build, develop and renew their human resource. The ability to tap and internalise intellectual capital of the workers to an acceptable extent is not only an operational advantage to the new knowledge-based economy, but also a strategic necessity. The literature review accomplished in the current case based on the recent publications has shown that this sort of process cannot be regarded as something absolutely easy and automatic. It is a social phenomenon implying extraordinarily complex social environments, which implies the following: an organizational culture of high level of interpersonal trust and psychological safety (in the virtual world, specifically), leadership style of promotion and learning, and an infrastructure of technology that connects people and makes it easier but not harder to share natural knowledge. The conceptual model postulates the way these enablers will trigger various knowledge-sharing behaviours that subsequently will trigger other individual and group-based learning processes which will directly result in the creation of a pool of human capital in the firm in the form of augmented skills, innovativeness, and flexibility.

3.3-Limitations

Nonetheless, due to the abstract nature, this study has a few shortcomings. Its main weakness is that the proposed relationships and mechanisms, though based on the synthesis of the existing accessible empirical evidence and significant theoretical arguments, are a set of hypothetical statements only. They should be experimentally confirmed substantially through the application of quantitative as well as qualitative research. The model in itself oversimplifies a vastly complex reality and might not reflect all the correct variables and feedback processes that transpire in a real organizational environment. In a longer way, it fails to put into

consideration industry specific contingencies due to the conceptualism of the work since it fails to put into consideration the fact that behaviors in knowledge sharing among cultures might vary considerably due to the strongly-rooted nature of the national culture (Hofstede, 2001; Ford and Chan, 2003).

Nevertheless, these restrictions are aimed at defining a highly dynamic and topical research agenda in a very radiant manner. To start with, there is need to present empirical research that will enable testing of the overall proposed model or portions of it in a quantitative manner. It may include the design and test-retest reliability of the main constructs as well as structural equation modeling (SEM) of the data gathered and using a very large sample of organizations functioning in various fields. Second, longitudinal research designs are the most called for to go beyond the cross section, above all to follow the flux of the human capital creation effectively, how certain knowledge-sharing activities might result in certain changes into capabilities and performance. Third, the disclosed hidden how and why of the relationships in the model, exploration of the circumstantial and situational issues, hindrances in implementation, and unforeseen outcome in the real world might be most useful in the qualitative case studies.

3.4-Future Research Directions

However, substantive new frontiers are numerous and should also be explored in the future research. Darker side of knowledge sharing like knowledge overload, sharing inaccurate or wrong information or knowledge hoarding within a competitive company culture should receive more attention and be included in a human capital development model. The other new interesting variable is the new technical solution, i.e., artificial intelligence (AI), and generative artificial intelligence, because it is a fast-evolving and popular new product. One can research how knowledge sharing with the help of AI in contrast to knowledge sharing with the help of human mediation (e.g. by employing intelligent recommender systems or generation tools) differs and how it influences human capital formation (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021). And the last, though certainly not the least, another important factor that should be taken into account is the impact of new remote and hybrid models of work, on informal and serendipitous knowledge sharing, which is so crucial when transferring tacit knowledge (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

Conclusively, the comprehensive research and synthesis of the interdependence between knowledge sharing behaviour and human capital formation imply that the article is contributing to more process and integrated knowledge on how organisations can effectively and

systematically build the most valuable asset. It is a useful framework for academics to test, nuance and challenge these proposals empirically, and for organisational leaders and knowledge managers to provide a conceptual map for framing policies, cultures and systems that will genuinely harness and develop workforce collective intelligence for sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly knowledge-based world.

4-References

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