

# Chapter 92

## Rethinking Knowledge Sharing Barriers: A Content Analysis of 103 Studies

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### ABSTRACT

*The current work force will not only lose 3.6 million “baby boomers” by 2020, but also a substantial organizational knowledge. Presently, there is a gap in understanding how to promote effective organizational knowledge sharing due to the limited awareness of factors that inhibit knowledge sharing behaviors. The focus of this article is to explore the most commonly noted barriers to employees’ knowledge seeking and knowledge contributing practices and extract potential factors that influence these barriers. A content analysis study is performed on 103 knowledge management articles from ten computer and information science databases. The results demonstrate a clear division between the barriers limiting each specific behavior: knowledge seeking behaviors depend largely on the time availability of knowledge seekers, while poor communication skills and lack of trust appear to be the major inhibitors to knowledge contribution. Three main factors were found to influence these barriers: role conflict, role ambiguity and locus of control. The findings are consistent with the information foraging and social exchange theories. Implications for future research are proposed.*

### INTRODUCTION

Estimates suggest that the current work force will lose 3.6 million “baby boomers” by 2020 (Toossi, 2012). While knowledge dissemination is a key component for the achievement and sustainability of competitive advantage for any firm (Davenport,

Prusak, & Wilson, 2003; Evermann, 2005; Foss & Pedersen, 2002), the departure of these individuals will result in the loss of substantial knowledge.

Extant literature suggests that successful knowledge transfer between experts and novices contributes to increased productivity and prolonged organizational survival (E. F. Cabrera &

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Cabrera, 2005; Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000; Wang & Noe, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a gap in the understanding on how to promote effective organizational knowledge sharing due to the limited awareness of factors that inhibit knowledge sharing behaviors (Connelly, Ford, Turel, Gallupe, & Zweig, 2013). Lack of time (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005; Santos, Soares, & Carvalho, 2012), poor communications skills (C. Lin, Wu, & Yen, 2012; Riege, 2005; Santos et al., 2012), and lack of trust (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003; Jarvenpaa & Majchrzak, 2008; Renzl, 2008) have been proposed as knowledge sharing barriers, and research suggests that technology alone is not capable of eliminating these barriers (Kelly & Jones, 2001). Gilmour (2003) found that US firms spent approximately \$4.5 billion on information and communication technologies (ICTs) without realizable benefits to the knowledge sharing processes. Similarly, a study among European and U.S. firms noted that knowledge transfer success rate was measured at only 13% from a sample of 431 organizations (Ruggles, 1998). It seems the problem is not rooted in the technology, but in the people that use that technology. Among the non-technology impediments to knowledge sharing are; poor understanding of the benefits to be derived from knowledge sharing; a lack of the necessary communication skills; time pressure; the incompatibility of knowledge sharing activities with current job requirements; and a lack of training on using the knowledge sharing system (Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006).

To truly understand the depth of the problem and add value to the knowledge management literature, it is necessary to examine the organizational and individual characteristics that influence knowledge sharing behavior. For this purpose, we deconstructed knowledge sharing into two separate practices - knowledge seeking and knowledge contributing (Van den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004). Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to examine the extant literature on barriers to knowledge contributing and knowledge

seeking behaviors with the goal of deriving a better understanding of the factors that impact willingness to engage in knowledge sharing. To achieve that goal, we conducted a content analysis study of 103 knowledge articles in order to adequately explore separately drivers that impact each practice (Carter & Scarbrough, 2001; Voelpel, Dous, & Davenport, 2005). Two theories were used to explain each knowledge sharing behavior and provide understanding about the limitation of the barriers: the information foraging theory (Pirulli & Card, 1999) and the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964).

This paper extends prior research on factors that impact knowledge sharing in organizations (Cleveland, 2014; Cleveland & Ellis, 2014; Cleveland & Ellis, 2015) by expanding the focus on specific factors that influence these barriers. The rest of this study is structured as follows. First, a review of the knowledge management literature is performed on the most commonly accepted barriers to knowledge seeking and knowledge contributing behaviors. This is followed by a detailed content analysis in order to extract constructs that influence the unique barriers. The article concludes with specific recommendations for future research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As outlined in Tables 1 through 5, a literature matrix summarizing the knowledge behavioral context and identified knowledge sharing barriers was prepared for each reviewed study.

## **KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

Knowledge sharing is considered an act of guiding someone through one's own thinking, making others aware of one's personal insights (McDermott, 1999) by capturing, organizing, transferring, and reusing an organization's experiential knowledge (Lin, 2006). According to Tiwana (2002) the

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