The Practice of Knowledge Sharing: Applying Theory to the Field

Chungil Chae

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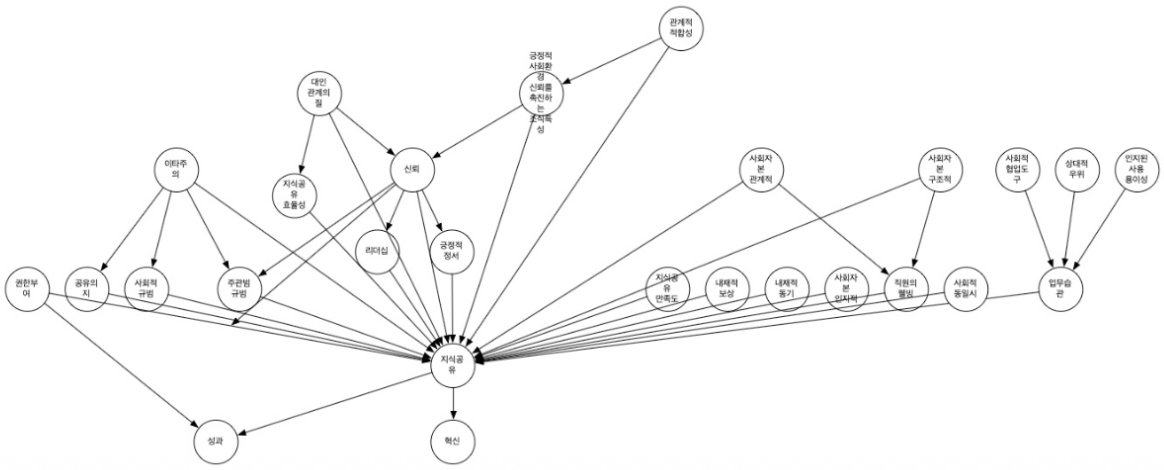

From Individual to Organization: Multi-Layered Knowledge Sharing Strategies

Research indicating that knowledge sharing originates from individual psychological factors suggests that organizations must first consider their members' willingness to share and their satisfaction (Wang et al., 2015). Microsoft's case effectively demonstrates the efficacy of this approach. The 'Growth Mindset' program introduced after Satya Nadella became CEO fostered a culture of acknowledging "what we don't yet know" and pursuing learning (Dweck & Hogan, 2023). This philosophy was implemented not as a mere slogan but as a tangible system: the 'Idea Drizzle' platform enabled employees to share initial ideas without hesitation. Consequently, knowledge hoarding decreased by 70%, and innovation speed improved significantly.

Knowledge sharing is difficult to sustain through individual will alone. As research has shown, team-level mechanisms must support it (Shahzad et al., 2024). Particularly, findings that knowledge-sharing methods evolve from 'transfer' to 'integration' and then to 'role modeling' depending on the project stage offer significant practical implications (Phan & Nguyen, 2023) . Spotify's 'Squad-Tribe-Chapter' model is a real-world implementation of this theory (Kniberg & Ivarsson, 2022).

Each Squad, an autonomous small team, shares progress every two weeks through a ' Tribe, which gathers Squads from similar domains, holds quarterly 'Tribe Talks'. Chapter, based on expertise, facilitates knowledge exchange by domain. This structure allows knowledge to flow naturally across team boundaries while maintaining a balanced autonomy and accountability within teams.

Research highlights the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing, notably that clan cultures and ad hocracies promote sharing, while market cultures tend to inhibit it (Petrov et al., 2020). This suggests organizations should adopt different approaches based on their cultural type. Toyota's case exemplifies effective utilization of these cultural elements. Toyota's 'genba genbutsu' (on-site, hands-on) philosophy reflects clan culture characteristics while systematizing knowledge sharing (Liker & Franz, 2021). The 'A3 Problem-Solving Report,' which involves observing and solving problems directly at the site where they occur, visualizes complex knowledge on a single sheet for sharing. The 'Oheya (□□□, large room)' system, where project participants work together and exchange knowledge in real-time, creates an environment where tacit knowledge flows naturally. This approach significantly contributed to Toyota securing a sustained competitive advantage in production efficiency and quality improvement.

Research on the role of technology, particularly its paradoxical effects, reminds practitioners of the need for a cautious approach (Chin et al., 2015). Cisco's case demonstrates a successful example of technology adoption. Cisco integrated 'Webex Teams' and 'Jive' platforms to transform both formal documents and informal conversations into searchable knowledge (Jarrahi, 2018). Specifically, by leveraging 'knowledge graph' technology to automatically connect relevant experts and documents, employees could find needed knowledge 30% faster. Conversely, IBM's initial 'Lotus Notes' system failed because it focused solely on technology adoption while neglecting user habits and culture (Pillet & Carillo, 2016) Subsequently, 'IBM Connections' shifted to an approach that considered both user experience and cultural aspects, achieving success. This contrasting case demonstrates that while technology can be a powerful enabler of knowledge sharing, it can become a barrier when introduced in isolation from social and cultural contexts.

Industry-Specific Strategies: Differentiation Based on Knowledge Characteristics

Research findings indicating that the effectiveness of knowledge sharing varies by industry type suggest the need for differentiated approaches tailored to each industry's characteristics (Petrov et al., 2020). Particularly noteworthy is the research finding that the collaborative atmosphere differs significantly between knowledge-intensive and capital-intensive industries.

In knowledge-intensive industries, sharing and leveraging expertise is a core competitive advantage. Accenture's 'Knowledge Exchange' platform exemplifies this industry characteristic (Davies & Smith, 2023). . This system, where over 500,000 employees share project experiences and expertise, is more than a simple knowledge repository. It provides 'knowledge points' for knowledge contributions, which are reflected in performance evaluations and promotions (Muhammed & Zaim, 2020). Notably, it links tangible value creation to knowledge sharing by offering additional rewards for knowledge shared that specifically helps solve client problems. Through this system, Accenture has saved approximately $2.4 billion annually and improved project quality.

In capital-intensive industries like manufacturing, systematizing and transferring tacit knowledge is a major challenge (Obrenovic et al., 2020). POSCO's case is noteworthy in this context. POSCO introduced the 'QSS+ (Quick Six Sigma Plus)' initiative to systematically share on-site expertise within its steelworks (Kim & Park, 2024). Veteran production floor employees are selected as 'Knowledge Masters' to digitize their know-how and pass it on to new hires. Crucially, recording work processes via video and augmented reality (AR) to transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge is a creative solution to the challenges of tacit knowledge sharing highlighted in research. This approach led to a 23% reduction in quality defect rates and a 40% reduction in new employee learning time.

In the service industry, sharing knowledge related to customer experience is key. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel's 'Line-up' and 'Wow Story' programs effectively leverage this characteristic (Michelli, 2021). During the daily 15-minute 'Line-up' meeting, all departments share examples of customer experience improvements. 'Wow Stories' is a program where employees document and share instances of providing exceptional customer experiences. These are compiled into a global database for use across all locations. This system not only boosts customer satisfaction but also stimulates employees' motivation to share knowledge, reducing turnover rates to half the industry average (Wu, 2013).

Knowledge Sharing Amid Crisis and Change: Lessons from the Post-Pandemic Era

While the COVID-19 pandemic provided researchers with an opportunity to understand knowledge sharing in virtual environments, studies showing reduced creativity during prolonged lockdowns highlight the limitations of such settings (Pradhan et al., 2023). Southwest Airlines exemplifies effective knowledge sharing during such crises. Facing crisis due to a sharp decline in passengers early in the pandemic, Southwest introduced its 'Rapid Learning' system (Gittell & Bamber, 2023). This system is a platform for sharing problems and solutions arising in different regions and departments in real time. Notably, it goes beyond simple information sharing by conveying the specific circumstances and context of each region. Thanks to this, Southwest could efficiently respond to rapidly changing regulations and safety requirements, leading to the industry's fastest recovery.

Post-pandemic, knowledge sharing in hybrid work environments has emerged as a new challenge (Farooq & Bashir, 2025). Rather than blindly returning to in-person or fully transitioning to virtual, it's crucial to provide environments suited to each type of knowledge. Citigroup's 'hybrid knowledge ecosystem' approach is noteworthy (Rodriguez & Chen, 2024). This model conducts innovation activities requiring complex tacit knowledge in person, while routine tasks based on explicit knowledge are performed remotely. It also regularly provides informal knowledge-sharing opportunities like 'virtual coffee chats' and promotes cross-team exchanges through quarterly 'Knowledge Sharing Weeks'. This balanced approach increased productivity by 12% compared to pre-pandemic levels and boosted employee satisfaction (Jin & Suntrayuth, 2022).

The Negative Side of Knowledge Sharing: Confronting Overlooked Realities

The lack of research on the 'negative side' of knowledge sharing offers important implications for practitioners. Findings that not all knowledge sharing leads to positive outcomes and can even hinder performance under certain conditions highlight the need for a more nuanced approach (Levine & Prietula, 2012).

GE's case offers lessons in this context. Under the concept of the 'Boundaryless Organization' in the 1990s, GE pursued extensive knowledge sharing initiatives (Welch & Collins, 2022). However, indiscriminate knowledge sharing across all business units and regions led to the dilution of core competencies and delayed decision-making. Subsequently, GE introduced the principle of 'Selective Openness,' distinguishing between knowledge worth sharing and knowledge that must be protected to maintain competitive advantage (Papacharalambous & McCalman, 2004). Notably, GE developed a framework explicitly evaluating the costs (time, effort, potential loss of advantage) and benefits of knowledge sharing. This balanced approach enabled GE to maintain core competitiveness while generating synergies.

The Future of Knowledge Sharing: The Need for an Integrated Approach

As research indicates, the lack of integrated studies across different levels (individual-team-organization) remains a challenge to address in practice (Levine & Prietula, 2012). An integrated understanding is needed of how individual knowledge-sharing behaviors coalesce into team performance, which in turn contributes to organizational performance.

Netflix's 'Freedom & Responsibility Culture' exemplifies such an integrated approach (Hastings & Meyer, 2023). Netflix has built a unique culture that maximizes individual autonomy while linking it to organizational performance. Under the principle of 'Radical Transparency,' all information and decision-making processes are disclosed to members, and through its 'Context, Not Control' approach, leaders focus on providing broader context rather than micromanaging specific work methods (Willem & Buelens, 2007). Furthermore, it fosters a high-density talent environment called 'Talent Density' to elevate the quality of knowledge sharing. This integrated approach provided an effective mechanism linking individual knowledge-sharing behaviors to team and organizational performance.

Ultimately, linking knowledge sharing to organizational performance within an organization is difficult to achieve through a single-dimensional approach. Individual psychological mechanisms, team-level sharing processes, the influence of organizational culture, and the role of technology must be considered in a balanced manner. Furthermore, a contextualized approach that accounts for industry characteristics and environmental changes is necessary, and a balanced perspective that recognizes both the positive and negative aspects of knowledge sharing is crucial (Berraies et al., 2020). Through this integrated approach, organizations can realize the true potential of knowledge sharing and secure sustainable competitive advantage.

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