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Revisiting knowledge sharing from the organizational change perspective
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Revisiting knowledge sharing from the organizational change perspective

Revisiting
knowledge
sharing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to identify how knowledge sharing literature has discussed task, structure, technology and people as elements of organizational change and to examine the interactions between the four elements of knowledge sharing.

Design/methodology/approach – The research questions guiding the study are: How do organizational change elements influence knowledge sharing? and What are the critical elements of organizational change in relation to knowledge sharing? Based on Leavitt's (1965) organizational change model, 133 articles published between 2000 and 2012 from 13 journals were reviewed and analyzed.

Findings – The total number of articles covering task, structure, technology and people in knowledge sharing was 49, 79, 49 and 97, respectively. Of all references, 97 articles (72 per cent) discussed the important aspects of people, and 79 articles (59 per cent) emphasized the influential role of organizational structure in knowledge sharing. The highest frequency of interactions (48 articles) was the interaction between structure and people (Interaction 5).

Research limitations/implications – To capture broader phenomena on knowledge sharing in organizational change, multiple data sources and a variety of journals with a longer timeframe should be collected and a more comprehensive review should be conducted. All perspectives of organizational change were not applied to this study. Theoretically, this study attempted to illuminate how knowledge sharing has been explored through the lens of four elements in organizational change and the interactions between the elements. This study attempted to expand the use of Leavitt's (1965) model by applying interactive relationships among the elements to knowledge sharing.

Practical implications – The findings can advance strategic and managerial practice by informing the planning and development of knowledge sharing associated with change in organizations. A key question is how to identify the major component of change which will trigger the other changes in the current architecture of knowledge sharing in their organizations. This study suggests that elements of structure and people, when organization face either planned or unplanned change, are critical for successful knowledge sharing by making the interactive connections with other components of change.

Originality/value – The contributions of this study are that it provides an integrative review in selected journals of knowledge sharing in terms of organizational change. By examining how knowledge sharing studies have addressed the four change factors and multi component changes, this study explains one change in knowledge sharing leads to multi-component changes. Additional contribution is that it makes connections between knowledge sharing and organizational change.

Keywords Technology, People, Knowledge sharing, Organizational change, Structure, Task

Paper type Research paper



Change is an ongoing and never-ending process of organizational life. To achieve and maintain an organization's competitive advantage, great and small changes must continuously occur in the organization. Given that knowledge is a critical resource for organizations' innovation and competitive advantage (Grant, 1996; Kogut and Zander, 1996), scholars and practitioners have attempted to uncover the constructs related to knowledge in organizations. Particularly considering that successful knowledge sharing is an important driving force in knowledge creation (Kang *et al.*, 2010), organizations strive to understand the dynamics and mechanisms of knowledge sharing in a changing environment.

A large body of literature on knowledge sharing already exists (Grover and Davenport, 2001; Wang *et al.*, 2014). With an emphasis on the importance of knowledge sharing for sustainable competitive advantage, scholars have addressed particular aspects of changes in organizations including the role of networks and information systems (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2002; Hansen, 2002; Powell *et al.*, 1996), the impact of task structures (Lam, 2000; Tsai, 2002) or strategic changes such as incentive systems (Osterloh and Frey, 2000; Szulanski and Jensen, 2006).

Research on organizational change has attempted to show the challenges inherent in both planned and unplanned changes, but it has not accounted systematically for how components of organizational change affect its adoption in organizations (Battilana and Casciaro, 2012), particularly with knowledge sharing. Given that all organizational changes are not equivalent, organizational change may converge with or diverge from an organizational status quo (Amis *et al.*, 2004). However, the literature on organizational change is fragmented, not systematically accounted for the institutional environment in which organizations are embedded, thus hindering an integrated view of organization change. Thus, the existing literature that provides insights into the relationship between organizational changes and knowledge sharing remains theoretically and empirically under-researched, at least compared to the number of studies concerning knowledge taxonomies and processes. In other words, the effects of organizational change on knowledge sharing have not been sufficiently explored despite the theoretical and practical importance of the effects. Therefore, by demonstrating that the components of organizational change and its dynamic relationship with knowledge sharing, the current study attempts to analyze the relationships of organizational change with knowledge sharing on the extent of organizational boundaries in the extant literature. In this study, we sought to answer the following research questions that focus on the relationship among organizational change contexts and knowledge sharing:

RQ1. How do organizational change elements influence knowledge sharing?

RQ2. What are the critical elements of organizational change in relation to knowledge sharing?

To respond to this question, an integrative literature review was conducted to compare, select, and synthesize the findings.

This study provides both theoretical and practical information about knowledge sharing and organizational change. By examining the link between elements of organizational change and knowledge sharing, organizations may facilitate the processes to varying degrees by providing interventions and strategies for organizational effectiveness. Specifically, we explored the most frequently studied

variables of organizational changes in the context of knowledge sharing: task, structure, technology and people. In this regard, the purpose of this study was to identify how knowledge sharing literature has discussed task, structure, technology and people as elements of organizational change and to examine the interactions between the elements of knowledge sharing.

Literature review

In this section, we provide the definitions of organizational change for this study, review the literature about organizational change and knowledge sharing and explain the conceptual framework based on [Leavitt's \(1965\)](#) organizational change model.

Organizational change

Researchers define organizational change in various ways according to their perspectives. Some definitions have focused on the features of organizational change. For example, organizational change is “an empirical observation of difference in form, quality, or state over time in an organizational entity” ([Van de Ven and Poole, 1995](#), p. 512). Another definition states that organizational change is “more broadly focused and can apply to any kind of change, including technical and managerial innovations, organization decline, or the evolution of a system over time” ([Cummings and Worley, 2005](#), p. 4).

Other definitions of organizational change have emphasized the components of organizations. For example, [Nadler and Tushman \(1989, p. 195\)](#) suggested that organizational change:

[...] may involve one or more elements of the organizational system, or it may involve a realignment of the whole system, affecting all of the key elements – strategy, work, people, and formal and informal processes and structures.

[Cawsey et al. \(2011, p. 2\)](#) viewed organizational change as:

[...] planned alterations of organizational components to improve the effectiveness of the organization. Organizational components are the organizational mission, and vision, strategy, goals, structure, processes or systems, technology, and people in an organization.

There are different models that explain organizational change: [Leavitt's \(1965\)](#) organizational change model; [Weisbord's \(1976\)](#) six-box model; [Nadler and Tushman's \(1977\)](#) congruence model; [Tichy's \(1983\)](#) technical, political and cultural (TPC) framework; and [Sastry's \(1997\)](#) model of punctuated organizational change. These models have emphasized critical elements and process influencing organizational change. For instance, [Weisbord \(1976\)](#) emphasized six components (organizational purpose, structure, rewards, helpful mechanism, relationships and leadership) to understand formal and informal aspects of organizational change. [Nadler and Tushman \(1977\)](#) developed a framework to explain interactions and dynamics between an organization and its external environment through inputs, strategy, transformational process, feedback and outputs. [Tichy \(1983\)](#) argued technical, political and cultural systems should be aligned with organizational components (mission, task, network, people and process) for effective organizational change to occur.

Considering the purpose of this study, we paid more attention to the organizational component oriented definitions. We regarded organizational change as an

organization-wide transformation influenced by components or interactions among key components of organizations which reflect the complex nature of organizational systems. In this regard, we adopted Leavitt's (1965) model as a framework for our analysis because his model embraces critical factors affecting organizational change mentioned in other models; presents the roles of tasks, structures, technology and people in organizational change in an integrative manner; and suggests that these four components need to be aligned for change to be successful, and his idea is a good match for our perspectives.

Conceptual framework

Leavitt's (1965) organizational change model was selected as a conceptual framework to understand and analyze the articles that have explored knowledge sharing in organizational change contexts. Leavitt (1965) identified four elements (task, structure, technology and people) to explain how to make organizational change more effective. Task refers to organizational services, products, mission and other works to accomplish organizational purposes, while structure includes both organizational structure (e.g. hierarchy and control) and operational structure (e.g. policy, reward and management) (Leavitt *et al.*, 1973). Technology provides the tools and means that enable employees to conduct their tasks and people refers to employees and organizational members (Leavitt *et al.*, 1973). The four elements interact and mutually work with each other (Figure 1). We added "Interactions 1-6" to the labels of Leavitt's original model to emphasize the interactive relationships between the elements. Interaction 1 refers to the interactions between task and structure, Interaction 2 refers to the interactions between task and people, and Interaction 3 refers to interactions between technology and people. Interaction 4 explains the interactions between structure and technology, Interaction 5 explains the interactions between structure and people, and Interaction 6 explains the interactions between task and technology. For example, if the technology changes in an organization, the other three components adjust to maximize the impact of the technology change (e.g. new technology adoption and innovation). Interactions 1-6 were used to explain multi-component changes influencing knowledge sharing in the findings.

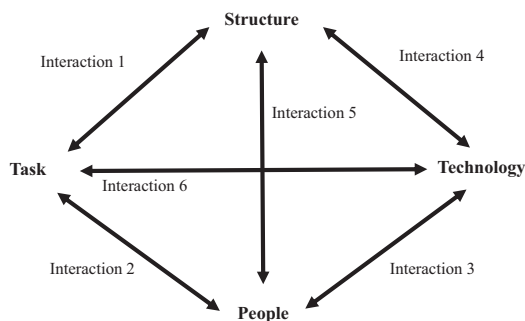


Figure 1.
Leavitt's
organizational
change model

Note: Interactions 1- 6 to the labels of Leavitt's original model was added

Organizational change and knowledge sharing

The knowledge literature is concerned with different types of knowledge processes (e.g. using, sharing, integrating and creating knowledge) in various contexts (e.g. intra/inter-organization, intra/inter-unit and inter-employee) (Foss *et al.*, 2009). Given the purpose of the current study, focusing on the examination of the intersection points of the knowledge sharing and organizational change literature, we limit our review, discussion and recommendations to knowledge sharing in the context of organizational change. In doing so, we analyzed how each of the classic organizational change elements relates to the concepts of knowledge sharing by building on the classic organization theory literature and more recent advances in knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is viewed here as the provision or receipt of task information, feedback and know-how to help others and to collaborate with others to solve problems, or develop new ideas, products or procedures (Cummings, 2004; Frank *et al.*, 2015; Hansen, 1999; Pulakos *et al.*, 2003). Knowledge sharing can occur through communications and networking with other experts, or documenting, organizing and capturing knowledge for others (Cummings, 2004; Pulakos *et al.*, 2003; Sousa *et al.*, 2015).

Based on Leavitt's (1965) model proposing that four factors of organizational change – task, structure, technology, and people – are interrelated and must be reasonably congruent for the organization to bring about change (Lyytinen *et al.*, 1988), we reviewed these elements to the extent to which knowledge sharing activities are performed in a variety of organizational change settings.

Among the four elements of the organizational change model, a task includes organizational services, products, mission and others which are supposed to be performed based on an organization's purposes, as well as its characteristics such as interdependency, complexity and significance. Other features of tasks such as size, type and ambiguity have been found to have relationships with knowledge sharing activities in organizations. For example, researchers have demonstrated a positive relationship between the characteristics of a task and the amount of information processing (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Wang and Ko, 2012). In workplaces where tasks are increasingly complex, employees need to solicit and obtain critical knowledge which helps them accomplish complicated tasks. Task complexity encourages employees and teams to share knowledge to enhance performance and accomplish goals (Wang and Ko, 2012). On the other hand, if task complexity is lower, it is likely to solicit more pro-social behaviors (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000) such as knowledge providing. In addition, given the task of new product development, task interdependency and knowledge complexity revealed an important interacting effect on knowledge sharing in some studies (Smith *et al.*, 2005; Wang and Ko, 2012). Thus, task infrastructure, as one of the elements of organizational change, can be postulated to influence knowledge sharing.

In Leavitt's (1965) model, structure which includes organizational structure (e.g. hierarchy and centralization) and operational structure (e.g. policy, reward and management) has been noted to have a significant effect on the extent of organizational knowledge activities (Gold *et al.*, 2001; Hall, 2001; Hall and Goody, 2007). In particular, in times of organizational change such as mergers and acquisitions or intra-unit collaborations, the structural infrastructure is more likely to serve either as an enabler or disabler of knowledge sharing. For example, coordination mechanisms based on centralization and formalization are less appropriate for knowledge sharing than mechanisms that are based on decentralization and low formalization (Chen and Huang,

2007). Because these types of coordination formally determine which and how much information and knowledge should be exchanged (Egelhoff, 1991; Nidumolu, 1996), both, in general, are considered to be negatively related to knowledge sharing.

Researchers have shown that knowledge sharing may be facilitated by having a less centralized organizational structure (Kim and Lee, 2006), creating a work environment that encourages interaction among employees such as through the use of open workspaces (Jones, 2005) and the use of fluid job descriptions and job rotation (Kubo *et al.*, 2001). However, a recent study reported that expected relationships such as the negative effects of centralization or the positive effects of lower formalization and their impact on inter-unit knowledge sharing were not found (Willem and Buelens, 2009). The mixed results of the structural impacts on knowledge sharing imply that the organization-specific context in which the coordination is applied influences the potential of this coordination for knowledge sharing. In addition, knowledge sharing occurs in a dynamic context where other organizational factors and elements interactively influence one another.

A technology includes access to comprehensive information and a communication system that supports knowledge activities (Gold *et al.*, 2001). Teece (2001, p. 130) notes that a “combination of IT and co-aligned organizational processes can significantly enhance learning and competitive advantage”. Access to relevant information technology and higher levels of technology use would be expected to contribute to a higher level of knowledge activity within the organization. Markus (2001) also notes that knowledge reuse depends, in part, on the availability of information technology and repositories of knowledge. Although generally taken for granted that information systems play a role as a vital part of the infrastructure that enables organizations to cultivate knowledge activities (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2005; Massey *et al.*, 2002), more recent studies suggest that this is often not the case (Huysman and Wulf, 2006; Wasko and Faraj, 2005).

Among the four elements of the organizational change model, the people component can be divided into individual and group levels including personality, motivation, trust and subjective norms. Among them, trust has been noted as a necessary ingredient in active knowledge sharing and creation, particularly in times of organizational change (Argote *et al.*, 2003; Lee and Choi, 2003; Levin *et al.*, 2002; Szulanski *et al.*, 2004). Other elements reported in the literature include subjective norms and social capital among a group of people in multinational companies (Tortoriello *et al.*, 2012; Widén-Wulff and Ginman, 2004).

Although these contextual elements represent distinct constructs, they are not assumed to be orthogonal. Consistent with Leavitt's (1965) model, interactions among the elements are expected. For example, norms encouraging technology use would be expected to have a positive effect on technology use for knowledge activities (Kelly and Green, 1998; Venkatesh and Morris, 2000), which, in turn, could result in higher levels of knowledge sharing activity. Development of an organizational culture that encourages knowledge management activity might, for example, lead to increased access to information technologies that support those activities. Similarly, investment in information technologies that support knowledge management might be accompanied by concerted efforts to develop an organizational culture and organizational structures that would encourage its use.

Methods

We conducted a narrative review of the literature rather than a meta-analysis because:

- the wide variety of disciplines contribute to knowledge sharing research;
- our purpose is not to correct error and bias in research finding by using a meta-analysis; and
- a narrative review is useful for comparing, contrasting and categorizing the findings of articles than meta-analysis.

To gain a systematic understanding of which organizational change components have been the focus of attention in the knowledge sharing literature, we included articles in the review that had been published in 13 top-tier academically refereed journals in management, organizational behavior, information systems and human resource development (HRD).

To select appropriate journals in the fields of management and organizational behavior, we considered the journal lists that were compiled and consistently utilized and cited in subsequent reviews (Baruch and Holtom, 2008; Foss *et al.*, 2010; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2002; Werner, 2002). Based on these lists, we selected the following journals: *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Information Technology*, *Journal of Information Science*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* and *Strategic Management Journal*.

For information systems, we selected *Expert Systems with Application* and *Information Systems Journal* which address knowledge sharing from the system and technological perspectives. In addition, we included two academic journals with a strong focus on HRD research and practice in relation to organizational change: *Advances in Developing Human Resources* and *Human Resource Development International*. These two journals, among representative HRD four journals, are frequently mentioned in research on HRD trends (Ghosh *et al.*, 2014; Jeung *et al.*, 2011; Jo *et al.*, 2009; Sun and Wang, 2013). The other two journals, *Human Resource Development Quarterly* and *Human Resource Development Review*, were reviewed, but a search against key terms did not result in any articles published in the considered period.

We considered articles published between 2000 and 2012 that included the keywords “knowledge sharing”, “knowledge exchange” and “knowledge transfer”. These terms are often used interchangeably. Sometimes authors refer to “knowledge transfer” while including “knowledge sharing” and/or “knowledge exchange” in their discussion (Levin and Cross, 2004) or treat “knowledge transfer” as the ultimate outcome of the “knowledge sharing” process (Reagans and McEvily, 2003; Tsai, 2002). Considering the scope of the study, we limited our review and only included articles that explicitly addressed the elements and contexts of organizational change. Our search resulted in 133 articles. Researchers independently reviewed the 133 articles in relation to the elements and interactions of organizational change (Figure 1). In other words, the focus was on whether the articles considered organizational change elements, conditions of knowledge sharing and knowledge sharing outcomes, as well as the four interactive links between these constructs. The framework we adopted, Leavitt's (1965) model of organizational change, proposed that the four factors, task, structure, technology and people, are interrelated and must be aligned to bring about change. We determined what

primary component of organizational change that the article was focusing on and also examined the interactive relationships among the four elements of organizational change in each article. Through the coding process, inter-coder agreements remained in the 80-85 per cent range. To ensure our claim, raters cross-checked each result, and, when there was disagreement between the raters, the raters discussed the issues until consensus was reached.

Findings

Based on the data collected from 133 articles in peer-reviewed journals, we mapped the literature summarized in Table I to identify to what extent each article examined knowledge sharing in the context of organizational change and whether four factors (task, structure, technology and people) in Leavitt's (1965) model influence knowledge sharing. Table I summarizes information about each factor and the interactions between the factors. Among the 133 articles, the articles addressing task, structure, technology and people in relation to knowledge sharing were 49, 79, 49 and 97, respectively.

Task

Of the 133 articles, 49 articles (37 per cent) named task as an influential factor for knowledge sharing. Task was found to be the most frequently covered topic in the articles from the *Strategic Management Journal* (81 per cent, 18 out of 22 articles). The *Strategic Management Journal* seeks to publish research that is relevant to strategic management with a diverse mix of topics, framing and methods. Of the characteristics of task in organizational change, the significance and interdependency of tasks were emphasized when doing complicated tasks. For example, several articles noted that knowledge sharing is critical to accomplish a specific important task (e.g. new product development and plan development activity) (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Schulze and Hoegl, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2005; Wang and Ko, 2012). Task complexity and task interdependency (Staples and Webster, 2008; Wang and Ko, 2012) were also found to be significant to facilitate knowledge sharing. For example, tasks in R&D are complicated and interdependent among units or teams, making people more active in knowledge sharing for final outcomes such as resource acquisition and new product development. Thus, different types, levels and task features appear to play a pivotal role in knowledge sharing activities in organizations.

Structure

Of the 133 articles, 79 articles (59 per cent) discussed structure in knowledge sharing as part of organizational structure, policy and management. In the literature, structural components for enhancing knowledge sharing included organizational structure characteristics (Argyres and Silverman, 2004; Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2002; Lin, 2008a), organizational culture and climate (Bennett, 2009; Hall and Goody, 2007; Lin, 2008b; Smith *et al.*, 2005; Tsai and Cheng, 2010), compensation (Fey and Furu, 2008), management strategy (Blankenship and Ruona, 2009) and knowledge sharing channels (Almeida *et al.*, 2002; Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004). For instance, a high level of complexity and formalization of an organizational structure, centralized decision-making process and unclear procedure of sharing were found to be barriers to active knowledge sharing (Ardichivili, 2009; Lin, 2008a, 2008b).

	Task (T)	Structure (S)	Technology (Te)	People (P)	T-S (1)	T-P (2)	Te-P (3)	S-Te (4)	S-P (5)	T-Te (6)
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>										
Heraclous and Barrett (2001)		×	×					×		
Lovelace <i>et al.</i> (2001)		×								
Malnight (2001)		×	×					×		
Sparrowe <i>et al.</i> (2001)		×	×					×		
Tasi (2001)			×	×			×			
Hansen <i>et al.</i> (2005)			×	×			×			
Smith <i>et al.</i> (2005)	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Collins and Smith (2006)		×		×					×	
Srivastava <i>et al.</i> (2006)				×						
Reinholt <i>et al.</i> (2011)			×	×			×			
Sub total	1	6	7	6	1	1	4	4	2	1
<i>Academy of Management Review</i>										
McEvily <i>et al.</i> (2000)				×						
Tallman <i>et al.</i> (2004)		×								
Inkpen and Tsang (2005)				×						
Nebus (2006)				×						
Turner and Makhija (2006)	×	×			×					
Sub Total	1	2	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Advances in Developing Human Resources</i>										
Ardichvili (2002)	×		×							×
Hernandez (2003)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Ardichvili, 2008			×	×			×			
Ahn (2009)		×	×					×		
Akdere (2009)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Ardichvili (2009)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Bennett (2009)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Blankenship and Ruona (2009)		×		×					×	
Conley and Zheng (2009)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Hung <i>et al.</i> (2009)		×		×					×	
Kongpichayanond (2009)	×	×			×					
Sub Total	5	9	5	8	4	3	3	3	7	1
<i>Expert Systems with Application</i>										
Ryu <i>et al.</i> (2003)				×						
Du <i>et al.</i> (2007)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Hsu (2008)		×		×					×	
Law and Ngai (2008)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Lin (2008a)		×		×					×	
Lin (2008b)		×		×					×	
Mansingh <i>et al.</i> (2009)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Ting <i>et al.</i> (2010)	×		×	×		×	×			×
Tsai and Cheng (2010)		×		×					×	
Hong <i>et al.</i> (2011)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Jeon <i>et al.</i> (2011)		×		×					×	

(continued)

Table I.
Articles on the
elements of
organizational
change in 13
journals, 2000-2012

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	Task (T)	Structure (S)	Technology (Te)	People (P)	T-S (1)	T-P (2)	Te-P (3)	S-Te (4)	S-P (5)	T-Te (6)
Lai <i>et al.</i> (2012)	×			×	×					
Tseng and Huang (2011)	×		×							×
Mearns (2012)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Wang and Wang (2012)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Sub total	6	11	5	14	3	5	4	3	11	2
<i>Human Resource Development International</i>										
Kubo (2001)		×								
Shelton (2001)		×								
Clark (2002)		×		×					×	
Iles and Yolles (2002)	×		×							×
Pedler (2002)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Iles (2003)		×								
Keursten and van der Klink (2003)				×						
Tillema (2005)		×		×					×	
Liu <i>et al.</i> (2006)		×								
Tillema (2006)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Johnson <i>et al.</i> (2007)	×		×	×		×	×			×
Wiessner (2008)				×						
Sub total	4	8	2	7	2	3	1	0	4	2
<i>Information Systems Journal</i>										
Braganza <i>et al.</i> (2009)			×							
Yoo <i>et al.</i> (2007)		×	×	×			×	×		
Bélanger and Allport (2008)			×	×			×			
Staples and Webster (2008)	×			×		×				
Mueller <i>et al.</i> (2011)			×	×						
Sub total	1	1	4	4	0	1	2	1	0	0
<i>Journal of Information Science</i>										
Mei <i>et al.</i> (2004)				×						
Widen-Wulff and Ginman (2004)				×						
Willem <i>et al.</i> (2006)		×		×					×	
Hall and Goody (2007)		×	×					×		
Liao <i>et al.</i> (2007)				×				×	×	
Lin (2007)		×		×					×	
Choi <i>et al.</i> (2008)			×	×			×			
Lin <i>et al.</i> (2009)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Suh and Shin (2010)				×						
Wang and Ko (2012)	×	×	×	×	×	×		×		×
Sub total	1	5	4	8	1	1	2	4	4	1
<i>Journal of Information Technology</i>										
Hislop (2002)			×							
Breu and Hemingway (2004)				×						
Huysman and Wulf (2006)			×	×			×			

Table I.

(continued)

	Task (T)	Structure (S)	Technology (Te)	People (P)	T-S (1)	T-P (2)	Te-P (3)	S-Te (4)	S-P (5)	T-Te (6)
Whelan (2007)		×	×					×		
Sub total	0	1	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	0
<i>Journal of Management</i>										
Fey and Birkinshaw (2005)	×	×			×					
Matusik and Heeley, 2005		×		×					×	
Schulze and Hoegl, 2006	×			×	×					
Wang <i>et al.</i> (2008)	×			×						
Wong <i>et al.</i> (2008)		×		×					×	
Yang <i>et al.</i> (2008)	×	×			×					
Zhang and Baden-Fuller (2010)	×			×		×				
Gong <i>et al.</i> (2012)				×						
Sub total	5	4	0	6	3	1	0	0	2	0
<i>MIS Quarterly</i>										
Majchrzak <i>et al.</i> (2000)		×	×					×		
Malhotra <i>et al.</i> (2005)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Markus <i>et al.</i> (2002)		×	×					×		
Massey <i>et al.</i> (2002)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Bock <i>et al.</i> (2005)				×						
Garud and Kumaraswamy (2005)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Kankanhalli <i>et al.</i> (2005)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Ko <i>et al.</i> (2005)			×	×			×			
Wasko and Faraj (2005)		×	×	×			×	×	×	
Choi <i>et al.</i> (2010)			×	×			×			
Sub total	0	7	9	8	0	0	7	7	5	0
<i>Organization Science</i>										
Osterloh and Frey (2000)				×						
Almeida <i>et al.</i> (2002)		×								
Birkinshaw <i>et al.</i> (2002)		×								
Hansen (2002)		×								
Tsai (2002)		×		×					×	
Bechky (2003)				×						
Owen-Smith and Powell (2004)		×	×					×		
Szulanski <i>et al.</i> (2004)				×						
Levine and Prietula (2012)				×						
Li <i>et al.</i> (2012)		×								
Tortoriello <i>et al.</i> (2012)				×						
Sub total	0	6	1	6	0	0	0	1	1	0
<i>Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes</i>										
Argote and Ingram (2000)	×		×	×		×	×			×
Darr and Kurtzberg (2000)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Szulanski (2000)	×	×		×					×	
Alge <i>et al.</i> (2003)	×		×	×		×	×			×

(continued)

Table I.

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	Task (T)	Structure (S)	Technology (Te)	People (P)	T-S (1)	T-P (2)	Te-P (3)	S-Te (4)	S-P (5)	T-Te (6)
Kane <i>et al.</i> (2005)	×			×		×				
Lewis <i>et al.</i> (2007)	×			×		×				
van Ginkel and van Knippenberg (2009)	×			×		×				
Steinel <i>et al.</i> (2010)				×						
Mesmer-Magnus <i>et al.</i> (2011)			×	×			×			
Sung and Choi (2012)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Sub total	7	3	3	10	2	7	3	0	3	2
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>										
Dyer and Nobeoka (2000)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Gupta and Govindaraja (2000)		×		×				×		
Subramaniam and Venkatraman (2001)	×			×		×				
Yli-Renko <i>et al.</i> (2001)				×						
Tsang (2002)		×		×					×	
Uzzi and Gillespie (2002)	×	×			×					
Kotabe <i>et al.</i> (2003)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Spencer (2003)	×	×	×		×			×	×	
Almeida and Phene (2004)	×	×	×		×			×		×
Argyres and Silverman (2004)	×	×	×		×			×		×
Feinberg and Gupta (2004)	×			×						×
Oxley and Sampson (2004)	×	×	×		×			×		×
Haas and Hansen (2005)	×			×		×				
Tanriverdi and Venkatraman (2005)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Dyer and Hatch (2006)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Szulanski and Jensen (2006)		×		×				×		
Haas and Hansen (2007)	×		×							×
Williams (2007)	×			×		×				
Fey and Furu (2008)	×	×			×					
Zhao and Anand (2009)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Li <i>et al.</i> (2010)	×	×		×	×	×			×	
Zhou and Li (2012)	×	×	×		×				×	×
Sub total	18	16	6	14	13	9	0	6	9	6
Total	49	79	49	97	30	31	27	30	48	15

Notes: T (task), S (structure), Te (technology) and P (people); the numbers in parentheses mean interactions in Figure 1; for example, T-S (1) is Interaction 1 between task and structure. Te-P (3) refers to Interaction 3 between technology and people

Table I.

Technology

Of the 133 articles, 49 articles (37 per cent) covered technology as a tool for knowledge sharing in terms of how to apply specific technologies to support diverse knowledge sharing activities. For instance, knowledge management systems (Ardichvili, 2009; Mei *et al.*, 2004; Ting *et al.*, 2010) and enterprise systems (Choi *et al.*, 2010) have been used as powerful tools to create environments for knowledge sharing. In addition, diverse types

of technology have been adopted to support knowledge sharing such as group ware, Web 2.0 and Wikipedia (Bélanger and Allport, 2008; Breu and Hemingway, 2004; Majchrzak *et al.*, 2000; Mesmer-Magnus *et al.*, 2011; Tseng and Huang, 2011).

People

The people factor is the most frequently covered topic in all of the articles (72 per cent, 97 out of 133 articles). In most cases, the researchers discussed the individual and team characteristics influencing knowledge sharing. For example, motivation is an important component in enhancing knowledge sharing (Lin, 2007; Osterloh and Frey, 2000; Reinholt *et al.*, 2011; Steinel *et al.*, 2010). Leadership and trust have also been found to have a positive influence on knowledge sharing between teams (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006; Staples and Webster, 2008; Szulanski *et al.*, 2004). Collaboration, decision-making, proactivity, team creativity and ties were people factors influencing knowledge sharing (Gong *et al.*, 2012; Mearns, 2012; Sung and Choi, 2012; Tortoriello *et al.*, 2012; van Ginkel and van Knippenberg, 2009).

We explored how articles about knowledge sharing have covered key factors influencing organizational change including task, structure, technology and people. Among 133 articles, 97 articles (72 per cent) discussed the important aspects of people, and 79 articles (59 per cent) emphasized the influential role of organizational structure, policy and management in knowledge sharing. Task and technology components were emphasized in 49 articles. The people element is the most important factor influencing knowledge sharing for organizational change, followed by structure, task and technology (Figure 2). This finding indicated that people and structure elements play an important role in knowledge sharing, which implies the influence of organizational culture (related to people and organizational structures) on knowledge sharing.

Interactions

In addition to the four elements of the organizational change model (Leavitt, 1965), we also reviewed the interactive relationships among them based on identified components in given contexts from each article. As we stated, interactions in this study means multi-component changes influencing knowledge sharing. For example, if the technology changes in an organization, the other three components adjust to maximize the impact of the technology change (e.g. new technology adoption and innovation).

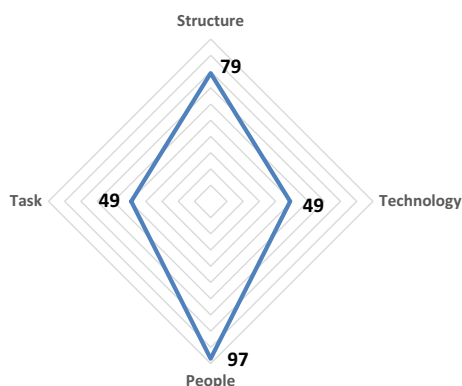


Figure 2.
Comparison of total
frequency of the four
components

Almost 82 per cent of the reviewed articles (110 articles) covered more than two factors, while only 18 per cent (24 articles) focused on only one factor (e.g. people or structure). As seen in Figures 1 and 3, the interactions between structure and people (Interaction 5) showed the highest frequency (48 articles) followed by interactions between task and people (Interaction 2; 31 articles), between task and structure (Interaction 1; 30 articles) and between structure and technology (Interaction 4; 30 articles). Interactions between task and technology (Interaction 6) presented the lowest frequency (15 articles) followed by interactions between technology and people (Interaction 3; 27 articles). For example, “27 articles addressed Interaction 3” means that 27 articles emphasized that both technology and people aspects are influential factors affecting knowledge and the arrow presenting technology-people relationships works in both directions for knowledge sharing (Figure 1).

As seen in Figure 3, interactions between structure and people (Interaction 5) have been emphasized in knowledge sharing throughout the years. Specifically, among 48 articles covered, Interactions 5, 17 articles published between 2009 and 2012 have a largest portion among other interactions. However, interactions between task and technology (Interaction 6) have not been discussed much, comparing other interactions in knowledge sharing for organizational change. Again, the findings confirmed the importance of people and structures in knowledge sharing and implied the role of organizational culture in knowledge sharing for organizational change.

In addition, journals in this study addressed the relationships between the four elements and knowledge sharing from their unique perspectives mostly reflecting the features of each journal. As expected, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* discussed focused on people in knowledge sharing. *MIS Quarterly* attempted to cover both technology and people in knowledge sharing, especially in the virtual team context. However, *Expert Systems with Application* focused less on technology than we expected and paid more attention to structure and people. *Strategic Management Journal* discussed task, but there has been little discussion about task in *Organization Science* and *MIS Quarterly*.

Change context

Our analysis revealed that of the 133 articles, 83 articles (62 per cent) explicitly addressed the contexts of organizational change. Given the variety of organizational

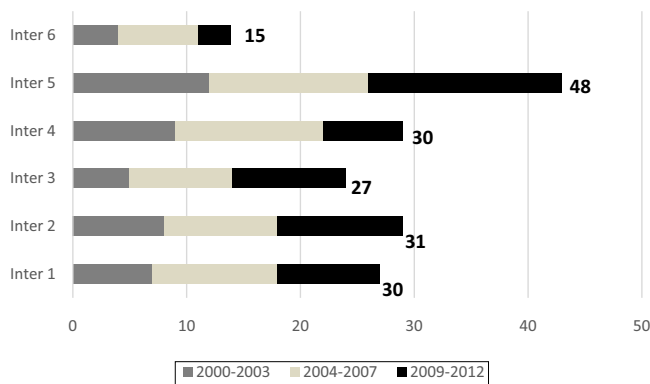


Figure 3.
Comparison of
Interactions 1-6

change, we attempted to differentiate them into several types. The types of organizational change addressed in the articles were grouped as follows:

- organizational structural change by inter organizational alliances and mergers and acquisitions;
- strategic changes for innovations;
- research and development initiatives, particularly followed by new product development; and
- new system and/or technology adoption and implementation.

Among the types of organizational change contexts in our review, technology was the most frequently covered organizational change topic in the articles (33), followed by R&D initiatives (21), inter-organizational alliances (16) and strategy innovation (13). In addition, most of the studies of new technology adoption and implementations were found to be major trends in articles published in the early 2000s, from 2000 to 2005, while most articles emphasizing strategic innovations were presented in the late 2000s. In addition, several organizational change contexts were found to have more than one change context in nature. For example, when intra-organizational alliances occurred, then other changes such as strategic changes and system changes followed accordingly.

To cope with and complete the changes in both parties, organizations implemented organizational restructuring such as re-arranging organizational units and integrating technological systems accompanied by alterations in the way work was done, communication patterns, norms of working together and problem-solving processes including knowledge sharing practices among people. (Almeida *et al.*, 2004; Li *et al.*, 2012; Oxley and Sampson, 2004).

This finding supports Nadler's (1981) assertion that major changes require not only changes in strategy and the nature of the work to be done but also alterations in structures, people, processes and others. Changes may be prompted by environmental variations, strategic shifts, the introduction of new technologies, changing employee characteristics and others. However, changes interact with other elements of organizations such as the people in them and result in diverse outcomes.

Discussion

This study attempted to increase our understanding of knowledge sharing within the context of organizational change by reviewing the extant literature based on an organizational change model including task, structure, technology and people (with a contingency approach).

First, the findings indicate that people factor is the most salient component for knowledge sharing followed by the structure factor, among other components of the organizational change model (Figure 2). For the people element, employees' proactive behaviors, relationships and networks with other people, motivation, leadership and trust play an important role in facilitating and fostering knowledge sharing (Gong *et al.*, 2012; Hansen, 2002; Reinholt *et al.*, 2011; Szulanski *et al.*, 2004; Tortoriello *et al.*, 2012). In particular, communication among colleagues, teams and different units is fundamental to establishing channels and networks for knowledge sharing (Bechky, 2003; Ko *et al.*, 2005; Mei *et al.*, 2004). These findings are in line with other studies, in that knowledge

sharing is a process of communication between the parties of knowledge seeking and providing entities (Cabrera *et al.*, 2006; Wang and Noe, 2010).

Second, the reviewed articles revealed that interactions between structure and people could have a synergy effect on knowledge sharing. In an organizational change context (e.g. innovation strategy adoption), structure (top management value) and people (employee competencies) are positively related to knowledge sharing which improves organizational performance (Hsu, 2008). Structure-related elements in the articles emphasized how to create supportive environments and policies for knowledge sharing. Organizational structure characteristics such as the level of formalization and centralization were also found to influence systemic work procedures and decision making that is related to knowledge sharing (Argyres and Silverman, 2004; Lin, 2008a). Given that structures for knowledge transfers and individual absorptive abilities contributed to knowledge creation resulting in company knowledge (Matusik and Heeley, 2005), we assert that people factors (e.g. ability, intention, motivation and trust) should be considered and structure factors (e.g. organizational system and management) should be designed to support people factors so that the two factors play an intertwined role in successful knowledge sharing.

Third, evidence from the research suggests that organizations need to cultivate an organizational culture that encourages knowledge-sharing practices in times of planned and unplanned changes in organizations. Given that organizational culture has been noted as a major factor that determines knowledge sharing practices in the literature (Park *et al.*, 2004; Wang *et al.*, 2014), we suggest that it is imperative to include organizational culture as another component of the model of organizational change, particularly associated with knowledge sharing. As shown in our review, technology and systems that capture, store and improve access to knowledge should be accompanied by a favorable environment to support, energize, mobilize and enable people at all levels to the best utilize the company's available resources (Evans, 2003). By implying the positive effects of organizational culture on knowledge sharing that leads to an improvement in organization performance, these findings draw the attention to organization theory and are especially concerned with the interplay between the creation and exchange of knowledge, and how to align the development of organizational forms with social relationships when knowledge sharing activities take place.

Finally, the results also reveal the implications for adopting a contingency approach of organizational change and knowledge sharing. The effects of changes on shaping and determining knowledge sharing practices in organizations are contingent upon the types or the degree of interplay of change components. Considering that the types of organizational changes and their impact on knowledge sharing were found to be complicated, it is reasonable to take a contingency framework for strategy formulation and other managerial practices for further studies.

These findings, with the contingency perspective of organizational change, advance current research on organizational change and knowledge sharing in several ways. First, the present study contributes to the organizational change literature by showing that the type to which organizational changes interact with others may have important implications for the factors that enable knowledge sharing. In doing so, this study bridges the organizational change and knowledge sharing literature that have tended to evolve on separate streams. The literature on organizational change has not accounted

for the knowledge sharing context in which organizations are embedded, and the knowledge sharing literature has tended to neglect planned and unplanned change dynamics. By demonstrating that the effect of interaction on change adoption is contingent on the type to which organizational change initiatives influence the phenomenon of knowledge sharing, this study paves the way for a new direction in research on organizational change.

Second, this study attempted to illuminate how knowledge sharing has been explored through the lens of four elements in organizational change and the interactions between the elements. By identifying distinctive factors influencing knowledge sharing based on the model, this study provides fundamental insights to understand the importance of the four elements in knowledge sharing (particularly the people and structure elements) and the roles and contribution of knowledge sharing with organizational change. The approach of this study can be compared with previous knowledge sharing literature which tended to collectively address an impressive number of potential organizational antecedents of knowledge sharing. Also, by examining how knowledge sharing studies have addressed the four change factors and multi-component changes, this study explains one change in knowledge sharing leads to multi-component changes.

Third, this study attempted to expand the use of [Leavitt's \(1965\)](#) model by applying interactive relationships among the elements to knowledge sharing. Leavitt's model has been widely used to explain the relationships between information systems and organizational change in the fields of information technology and management ([Keen, 1981](#); [Lyytinen and Newman, 2008](#); [Markus and Robey, 1988](#)). By comparing previous research and adopting a contingency perspective, this study demonstrated another application for Leavitt's model to emphasize elements and their interactions affecting knowledge sharing.

In addition to these theoretical contributions, our findings can advance strategic and managerial practice by informing the planning and development of knowledge sharing associated with change in organizations. A key question is how to identify the major component of change which will trigger the other changes in the current architecture of knowledge sharing in their organizations. Our study suggests that elements of structure and people, when organization face either planned or unplanned change, are critical for successful knowledge sharing by making the interactive connections with other components of change. For example, when organizations plan to promote innovation and organizational change, practitioners could consider people and structure elements for knowledge sharing as interventions to prepare for resistance and negative responses of the planned change. By emphasizing the dynamics and interactions between people and structures, top management can lead other departments and teams to work together before proceeding with the change to create a more conducive organizational climate for supporting employees.

Organizations can also leverage the matching of change components to change context by categorizing patterns of interactive relationship to recognize the flow of knowledge sharing in times of organizational changes. By becoming aware of facilitators of organizational changes such as adopting new technology and inter-organizational alliances, organizations may be better suited to the type of change they wish to introduce and thus further facilitating knowledge sharing in their organizations. For example, when organizations adopt new technologies by introducing

and promoting best practices of aligning with the work processes and successful knowledge sharing, organizations can support of creating an adaptive and contingent culture of knowledge sharing to meet diverse types of changes in organizations.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study has several limitations. First, the basis of the current research was 133 articles published between 2000 and 2012 from 13 journals. However, the authors did not identify the natures and the types of industries of the original research studies when analyzing the articles (i.e. SMEs, MNCs etc.). To capture broader phenomena on knowledge sharing in organizational change, multiple data sources and a variety of journals with a longer timeframe should be collected. Second, the study used Leavitt's organizational change model to understand the features of organizational change and analyze the articles covering knowledge sharing by adopting a contingency approach. However, this particular model is not exhaustive in identifying the dynamics of organizational change and its impact on knowledge sharing in diverse organizations. Accordingly, researchers could adopt different approaches to understand organizational change (e.g. a critical approach) and explore additional components influencing change in organizations (e.g. politics and societal change) in future studies. The articles addressing the four elements and their interactions in organizational change did not describe exactly what happens when one element changes. Considering that Leavitt's model emphasizes the interactions and mutual influence of all four elements in organizational change, future research should discuss how one changed element impacts other elements and how these changes influence knowledge sharing. Also, future studies should identify the types of organizational change in knowledge sharing and explain how much knowledge sharing contributes to different types of organizational change.

Third, the nature of knowledge (tacit and explicit) should be considered in an organizational change context. When people share their knowledge in different contexts, tacit and explicit knowledge could be identified and explained according to the purposes and sources. Finally, organizational culture could be included as a critical factor influencing knowledge sharing in change contexts. By adding an interactive relationship between culture and other factors (e.g. task, structure, technology and people), a new model for knowledge sharing could be proposed to explain different dynamics in organizational change. In addition, quantitative approaches could be adopted to examine the impact of the four change components on knowledge sharing. Based on reviewing empirical studies, effect sizes would be discussed to quantify and describe the strength, direction of the relationships between the four components and knowledge sharing.

The contributions of this study are that it provides an integrative review in selected journals of knowledge sharing in terms of organizational change. By examining how knowledge sharing studies have addressed the four change factors and multi-component changes, this study explains one change in knowledge sharing leads to multi-component changes. Additional contribution is that it makes connections between knowledge sharing and organizational change. Knowledge sharing can contribute to problem solving, development, innovation and improvement of ideas, products or procedures which may facilitate organizational change (Cummings, 2004). The processes and outcomes of knowledge sharing are influenced by task, structure, technology, people or different combinations of them, which are critical factors leading changes.

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