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Should knowledge be shared generously? Tracing insights from past to present and describing a model

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to attempt to answer the following questions: Are people generous at work places? How often do we see people willing to share, when someone seeks knowledge from them without any expectation? What's the point in having knowledge when somebody doesn't share it? Then again, why do firms, reward employees to share their knowledge?¬ ¬? Does sharing knowledge between people need a commercial acceptance or rewarding inspiration? In firms, people, who do not have relevant work-related knowledge, seek it from others. Thus, this implies that people can either share their knowledge or hoard knowledge or share partial knowledge. This research shows that sharing knowledge has existed for centuries and has been practised through generosity, with proof that the more you share the more you obtain in return. The authors analyse the role of generosity in sharing knowledge by tracing insights from literature, religion, science and modern day management scholarly views, and they show how it can lead firms to succeed. In this paper, the authors will propose a direction for future researchers on how developing generosity helps towards sharing knowledge. They also propose a model of generosity based on literature and its interpretation.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on extensive reviews of literature, articles and opinions from scholars. The authors use a keyword protocol to investigate articles from Google scholar and other sources on generosity and knowledge sharing.

Findings – This paper finds significant relationships and validated shreds of evidence on how generosity towards knowledge sharing has helped humanity in the past and how generosity can help firms to succeed.

Originality/value – This paper is the first of its kind in trying to explore how developing generosity among people can play a role in facilitating knowledge sharing for firms to succeed. This further suggests a new direction of research for scholars engaged in exploring the role of generosity with a proposed model.

Keywords Knowledge sharing, Generosity

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

People working in firms may have to depend on others as they do not possess all the work-related knowledge that they need. How often do we see people take an initiative to share what they know or do people inclined to manifest generous attitudes? And are people generous towards sharing knowledge? Why do people share their knowledge? These questions arise as the main focus of our paper investigating the phenomena of individuals who engage in knowledge sharing activities in firms. Sharing knowledge is essential to the functioning of every social system (Mergel *et al.*, 2008).

Knowledge sharing is a social situation in which one's emotions, attitudes and consequently, actions, are influenced by other people, both consciously and unconsciously (Krok, 2013). It is patently obvious that not everyone in every situation is willing to share their knowledge. The willingness of people to share their valuable personal knowledge with others who are often unknown to the potential sharer is of particular importance (King, 2006, 2008). According to Krok (2013), the willingness of any person to share knowledge is influenced by their expectations of something in return, by the power

of empathy, environmental limitations, behavioural emphasis and habits. For knowledge sharing to happen the exchange between actors is essential and need for exchange becomes vital. According to Homans (1961), one will exchange, if there is a need, the expectation of something valuable in return and favourable outcome or rewards.

Prusak (2001) suggests that "you cannot manage knowledge like you cannot manage love, patriotism, or your children, but you can set up an environment where knowledge evolves". This gives us a notion that knowledge sharing cannot be imposed or deliberated, but can only be facilitated or nurtured in firms. Thus, setting up an environment for effective sharing of knowledge among people has been a priority for firms. As a result, organizations are faced with the challenges on how to get people to share their knowledge (Obermayer-Kovacs and Wensley, 2012). Firms are often trapped in situations where they find people reluctant to share knowledge with others. One could question why people should share knowledge with others, while having invested energy and time in learning and acquiring it, which gives them an edge over others. Our research goes beyond this fact, and we assume that knowledge sharing is universally evident when people practice and have beliefs in religion, faith, spirituality, divine rituals, cultural practices, family principles and values. Also, people have often been advised and told to be kind and generous towards other people. Why don't all people possess the same inclination towards sharing their knowledge with others? Do people tend to manifest a generous attitude to share their knowledge with others without any expectations in return and/or do they reciprocate what they have received to complete strangers?

While prior research has mainly focused on processes and techniques of knowledge sharing (Hansen, 1999, 2002; Mergel et al., 2008), less research has been done so far on the individual behavioural pattern of being generous towards knowledge sharing activities. Generosity is an under-researched area in management science; it is a novel concept in knowledge sharing research and for scholars engaged in knowledge management. Little is known about people sharing knowledge generously or practicing generosity, and what conditions trigger them to do so. Our paper will explore the phenomena of generosity towards knowledge sharing by tracing insights from reviewing literature in the social, organizational and biological sciences. For our research, knowledge sharing is defined as an activity through which knowledge, i.e. information, skills or expertise, is exchanged among people, friends, families, communities or organizations (Jiacheng et al., 2010). Knowledge sharing in organizations has a very scarce theoretical background, and it has been studied through human and social capital theory, but other conceptualizations are hardly present (Morris et al., 2005).

2. Methodology

Our aim in this article is to bridge the link between generosity and knowledge sharing, and also the conceptual gap in the literature between these two concepts. As our research is more in line with social context and very little theory exists, we started our investigation based on an extensive literature search that we conducted using various types of sources. We searched all reputed journals, online news articles and books, interviews, scientific articles, etc. We used the following keywords search: generosity in firms, generosity in knowledge sharing, knowledge sharing philanthropy, pro-social behaviour in knowledge sharing. Then, we refined our search to include papers and articles that contained either

> "Yokoten, literally translates as 'across everywhere' and means the horizontal sharing of knowledge results in the spreading of knowledge across the organisation."

> **"It is unrealistic for the sharing of an asset like knowledge to be equated with free exchange or knowledge being 'given away'."**

empirical analyses, experiment designs, conceptual or view point papers. In a literature review like ours, it is difficult to articulate the arguments and offer justifications for findings and methods of the studies reviewed. However, our focus is to make sure that the conceptualization of our study gives the reader clear understanding of our aim.

To understand the insight of generosity and its link to knowledge sharing, we distinguish first the concept of knowledge sharing and its evolution, knowledge hoarding, generosity, how generosity can help in knowledge sharing and how it has to develop by looking into various sources that we give as evidences. We give examples from religion, culture and a few from corporations to better understand the concept of generosity. As generosity has been much researched and debated in social science and philosophy, we introduce this concept in management science and interpret it further in particular in relation to knowledge sharing. In the conclusion section, we introduce a direction for future research that will help researchers to further investigate the concept of generosity in knowledge sharing at personal level, group level and organization level. As knowledge is the key for human survival and firm's competitive advantage, we explain with validated evidences that being generous can make firms and people more successful.

3. Knowledge sharing – evolution

In today's economy, knowledge is the most critical asset for firms to oversee and influence towards being competitive. When we get into the historical backdrop of knowledge, it begins with Plato and Aristotle who initially concentrated on the nature of knowledge. Many decades after in the 1950s, psychological scholars like Polanyi and Wittgenstein explained through scientific examination knowledge as explicit, and something that can be coded, stored and exchanged. Various intellectual scholars lately, including (Quinn, Drucker, Nonaka and Takeuchi, Davenport & Prusak) highlight the significance of knowledge based work and knowledge based competitive advantage and the role of knowledge sharing within firms (Papoutsakis, 2007). Table I gives the evolution of information and knowledge sharing over the last 300 years.

3.1 Knowledge hoarding

> Sharing knowledge increases it; storing knowledge depletes it – The Upanishads.

Often seeking knowledge in well-structured way, is further challenged with movements like diversity, culture, races, religion etc. Knowledge can be seen as an asset that workers can use to raise their status in firms. Knowledge is power and it can command obedience. A man of knowledge can make people obey and follow him during his lifetime, and he is praised and venerated after his death. Knowledge is a ruler and wealth is its subject (Ali, 2016, Nahj Al-Balagha, saying 146). Davenport (1997) has stressed that concerns of power, rational gain and distrust lead people to hide or hoard knowledge. As people gain unique knowledge and obtain specific roles in the organization, they increase others dependency on them. In a relevant example, Pfeffer (1981) described machine experts who threw away their manuals to make sure they were the irreplaceable operators of their machines. Thus, people who are encountering job insecurity may attempt to make themselves indispensable to the firms by hiding knowledge. These are to some extent evidences of politically motivated behaviour (Webster et al., 2008).

Table I	The evolution of information and knowledge sharing
Year	**Emergence of knowledge**
15000 BC	Lascaux cave drawings use imagery to capture and depict hunting knowledge
3400 BC	Hieroglyphics emerged as a new way to document spoken language
300 BC	Library of Alexandria, significant library of ancient world to explore knowledge of past
77 AD	Romans wrote first encyclopaedia setting a model for organizing and archiving knowledge
1100s	Monks transcribing books called scriptorium are tasked with replicating and copying the knowledge of the era
1440	Johannes Gutenberg printing press allows for widespread production of print material. Thus, knowledge sharing was revolutionized.
1600	Newspaper started circulating and people accessed knowledge and events
1835	Morse code allows for knowledge transfer across large distance
1800s	Public libraries emerge as system of knowledge sharing
1912	Radio broadcasting started spreading knowledge and knowledge to public
1946	Television broadcast started spreading mass knowledge and knowledge
1960	Databases are introduced as repositories for large amount of structured data
1965	Invention of hyperlink
1971	Floppy disk allows portable data storage and transfer of knowledge documents
1985	America online company emerged as a leading internet company for the world
1993	Siebel system introduced CRM system to combine customer knowledge
1995	Altavista and Yahoo emerged leading search engine for searching knowledge and sharing
2001	Wikipedia emerged as an internet platform for a new generation collective knowledge
2003	Facebook becomes part of social networking thus sharing knowledge
2005	YouTube becomes a free platform to use knowledge through video observation
2011	Bigdata emerges as a technology platform to analyse contents in massive data and present in intelligent way for knowledge workers

Source: Simoneau (2013)

Researchers have emphasized that people usually resist sharing their knowledge with others and these people's conduct is guided by "Knowledge is power attitude". Knowledge for them is an advantage over other people who cannot make it or do not have the opportunity to rediscover it. The person, who is aware of the significance of his/her knowledge, will most likely hesitate to lose this strength by sharing. Perhaps, there is a barrier because we still assume that knowledge is power and when we give it away, we lose certain benefits (Favero, 2015). When employees hide knowledge, they trigger a reciprocal distrust loop in which co-workers are unwilling to share knowledge with them (Cerne *et al.*, 2014). Knowledge-hiding behaviour is more common in some kinds of offices than in others. Specifically, in workplaces that have a "performance climate", where employees are encouraged to compete in the belief that this enhances performance, workers have an incentive to hide knowledge (Brooks, 2014).

Kaye *et al.* (2011) explain that people often have feelings like "If I tell them what I know, they won't need me". This is why people do not share knowledge because of their fear of losing their position and feeling of insecurity. Favero (2015) argues, that people and societies have shared knowledge in global and historical terms, but this does not mean knowledge sharing can easily be promoted within organizations. The two features that drive this are explained by biologist, Pagel (2012). Groupishness, affiliation with people with whom you share a distinct identity and Xenophobia, demonizing those outside your group and holding parochial views towards them. People do not share knowledge without a strong personal motivation, and they would certainly not give it away without concern for what they may gain or lose by doing so (Stenmark, 2001).

Rather than management asking, how we could incentivize people to share their knowledge, it would be more valuable to ask, how we could make every individual develop generous behaviours to set the movement of sharing forward the knowledge (Dixon, 2009). Despite many initiatives to expand effectiveness towards encouraging knowledge sharing culture, firms are still caught with challenges like, cultural differences, social distinction, team spirit clashes, lack of motivation, etc. It is rare we see examples of people being generous enough to share knowledge in business, unless they get something in return. When we have knowledge, we should rather ask ourselves, should we share with others and expect something in return or should we expect that others share with us without our giving away something?

4. Literature review

If humans are the most intelligent, it is because of the thirst for knowledge. Current reviewing of the knowledge sharing literature highlights that there is no comprehensive definition of knowledge sharing (Alhalhouli, 2014). Knowledge lies in human minds and exists only if there is a human mind to do the knowing (Widen-Wulff and Suomi, 2007). It is deeply rooted in the actions and experiences of a person as well as their emotions, values or ideals. Tacit knowledge involves intangible factors, such as personal beliefs, culture, attitude, perspective and the value system (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1997; Sveiby, 1998; de Melo et al., 2013). Many practitioners assume that as knowledge sharing is so important, people will share all the required knowledge without problems because knowledge sharing is a fundamentally social phenomenon (Boer et al., 2002).

Gephart et al. (1996) observes that when an organization passes through each phase, knowledge sharing moves from being unintentional, individualistic and not integrated to being formalized, expanded and connected; until it is a collective, strongly integrated and daily part of the organization (van den Brink, 2001). Research has shown that knowledge sharing and combination are positively related to a reduction in production costs, faster completion of new product development projects, improvement of team performance, firm innovation capabilities and firm performance including sales growth and revenue from new products and services (Lin, 2007).

Chih-Chien (2004) has proven mathematically a model showing degree to which team performance improves with quality of knowledge sharing in situations where performance is determined partly by quality of knowledge possessed. Knowledge sharing is characterized by communication processes and information flows. In many social situations, knowledge sharing is a common activity, but knowledge sharing within an organization tends to be a complex and complicated issue and, as a result, needs to be actively managed (Obermayer-Kovacs and Wensley, 2012).

Davenport (1996) suggests that acquiring, and even more so sharing, knowledge is an "unnatural act" that is at the very least time-consuming and quite possibly, wrought with actual dangers to whoever attempts to engage in it. Chua (2003) argues that knowledge sharing has to be discussed with the idea of contexts in mind. In addition, these practices are highly sensitive to participant identities; individuals will share knowledge if and when they can be assured that others in their milieu will do the same. An important implication of this proposition is that while knowledge sharing is not natural, a knowledge sharing culture

> **"Generosity among individuals should not be associated with monetary benefits, gifts, but must include time, thought, graciousness and reassuring help that one needs, as well as with greater willingness to give rather than expect."**

is possible, feasible and can be cultivated or fostered by means that are not technological, but, rather, social or even grounded in a particular ideology (Koulikov, 2011).

Wasko and Faraj (2005) highlight the "intrinsic" motivation behind knowledge sharing. Something as simple as the statement that "it feels good to help other people" cannot be ignored. Yun and Allyn (2005) find that knowledge sharing behaviours can be related to individual needs and motives. In particular, the results of their empirical study support the hypothesis that when individuals have a direct moral or ideological investment in the success of the organization they are a part of, they will be more open to sharing knowledge. Exploring the social aspect of knowledge sharing, they validate the relationship between knowledge sharing and pro-social values (i.e. a concern for others' success and well-being).

Wang and Yang (2007) look at individual personality determinants that either foster or hinder knowledge sharing. They argue that particular traits of individuals positively affect knowledge sharing, with the implication that knowledge will be shared given a concentration of individuals with those traits. Specifically, they find "agreeableness" (the desire to support the success of colleagues), extraversion (knowledge sharing seen as a way of establishing a community, finding one's place in it and making friends) and conscientiousness (where both the creation and the propagation/dissemination of knowledge are seen as an inherent part of a job whether or not they are listed in the actual job description). A large proportion of knowledge sharing initiatives that are launched by organizations still fail (Storey and Barnett, 2000). Understanding why they do, and why knowledge sharing fails to occur when it is expected to, is a crucial step in figuring out how to ease the knowledge sharing process (Koulikov, 2011).

5. Knowledge sharing evidences in religions and cultures

We have shared knowledge in a myriad of ways, from primitive cave drawings to printed books, to computers and more advanced technology (Miller, 2013). However, there are evidences that knowledge sharing activities existed and were practised hundreds of years back in different religions and societies in which the transferring and sharing of indigenous knowledge were part of the culture. In the past, various individuals shared their knowledge generously and without any particular wish of anything in return, but yet many scholars emphasize the problem to be addressed in academia. Maybe, it is generally acknowledged that the act of managing knowledge began few decades ago. But it is part of our culture from a long time and existed in different religions and societies. One should not overlook that culture and human progress were driven by this hunger for knowledge.

Senge (1992) notes that the Greeks interpreted *dialogos* as a free flow of thoughts within a group of people, which created the possibility of enlightenment that could not be attained on an individual basis. Dialogue creates a shared context and atmosphere for knowledge sharing because people disclose beliefs and ideas that they normally keep to themselves. A saint Ramanujacharya, of Vishistadvaita philosophy from India, was once given a Mantra (peaceful chanting) by his guru with a strict instruction not to share it with others. But he shared Mantra with all the people of his place. When asked by the guru, he said if people get the benefit of chanting this mantra and thus get salvation from the worldly miseries, and if I have to go to hell for disobeying your instructions, I will happily accept the punishment. Thus, he demonstrated the importance/necessity of knowledge sharing through generosity (Naachimuthu, 2007).

According to Christianity, knowledge should not only be stored but also should be preached and information should be passed to others, and all those principles to apply on one's life. In the Bible, it is said that "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being my priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children"*(Hosea 4:6).* The importance of documenting the knowledge created for future use is also mentioned in the

Bible, when Isaiah noted down what God said "Now go and write these words. Write them in a book. They will stand until the end of time as a witness". This clearly indicated that people who follow Christianity have a responsibility towards sharing knowledge. Sharing knowledge thus becomes a duty of every individual who share with others when they know it.

Quran has also given many views on knowledge seeking and knowledge spreading, it gives the picture, where Allah speaks of the importance of knowledge, to seek it through systematic ways: reading, thinking and writing with the divine goals. *Whoever follows a path in pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise. No people gather in one of houses of Allah, reciting the Book of Allah and teaching it to one another, but the angels will surround them, tranquility will descend upon them, mercy will envelop them, and Allah will mention them to those who are with Him. And whoever is hindered because of his bad deeds, his lineage will be of no avail to him.* May Allah cause his face to shine, the man who hears what I say and conveys it (to others). Prophet Muhammad also said: "Whoever is asked about knowledge that he knows about and then hides it and keeps it away, he will be bridled on the day of judgement with a bridle of fire. This gives an idea of hoarding knowledge is sin and culture of sharing should be adopted by everyone if they want to meet a path of mercy and tranquillity in Islam" (Mababaya, 2005).

In Buddhism, the aspect of knowledge sharing is highlighted. Buddha's torching concentrate on one thing, the elimination of ignorance and the perfection of wisdom or knowledge. From this view, the practice of enlightenment becomes a process of knowing the causes and conditions of everything in the universe. Buddha, the perfect enlightened one, is said to have such perfect knowledge or wisdom. In this regard, Buddhism is pretty much a knowledge-based practice. Its emphasis on undivided attention to causes and conditions provides the impetus for continuous and relentless knowledge digging and discovery. Bodhisattva practice in which the practitioner gives up his/her cravings and grasping and opens his/her heart to embrace other's ideas or concerns. Such skill for "unlearning" one's conditioned beliefs or convictions is very powerful and can be easily practiced in an organizational setting. The main goal of Buddhist practice is to transform the deluded individual consciousness into this universal consciousness, to be awakened to this universal knowledge and to draw knowledge from this greatest source of wisdom and to apply it to daily life (Chang, 2003).

In the ancient Indian system of Education, the Gurukula was a place of knowledge sharing. The word Gu means Darkness and Ru means removal, kula means house or home. The gurukula system had a system of having a teacher and student spending nearly 14 years together where the guru imparts his skills, knowledge, experience and makes students to learn for life. The guru shares his wealth of knowledge in such a way that he expects the students to surpass him. Unlike today's mentoring and subject matter expert which have both formal and informal setting, ancient gurukula system in India was a place of knowledge sharing. Early medieval Irish monastery was a best example during forth century AD where despite being a place of retreat and strict disciplines, the monks in monasteries had a generous approach to share their secular knowledge. Monks created an environment where knowledge sharing was facilitated.

6. Knowledge sharing evidences from corporations – a step towards generosity

"Yokoten" in Toyota is an example of knowledge sharing practice. Yokoten, literally translates as "across everywhere" and means the horizontal sharing of knowledge results in the spreading of knowledge across the organization. Knowledge sharing is peer to peer. It is not a vertical (top-down). The role of the managers is to make people aware of the existence of knowledge that should be shared and learned from Milton (2015).

In Ford, the idea is that people to not blindly copy; they review the knowledge of others, learn from it, and add their own wisdom and context to the knowledge they gained. A key point to this is that it is not just the result that is shared, but the process that led to the result. It is the responsibility of the team that generated the knowledge to find others who could

benefit, and the responsibility of the others to make an effort to learn. They should not simply dismiss ideas that do not seem at first to be relevant (Milton, 2015).

Peer Assist program of British Petroleum and now used by many other organizations is one such example of the practice and promotion of knowledge sharing. In a Peer Assist, the team asking for the help invites others from around the company to look at a specific problem or issue the inviting team is facing. This gives the inviting team the opportunity to fully describe their unique situation and to ask for the knowledge of others that is specific to the context they have described. Others are not asked to come to lecture on what they have learned from their projects. Rather, they are asked to understand the problem or issue in enough depth that they can draw on their tacit knowledge (that Web of relationships) as it fits the problem at hand. In this way, it is the visitors who adapt and translate and not the receiver (Milton, 2015).

At Southwest Airlines, they have the "agent of the month" award, which recognizes employees who have helped others do great work. The airline proposes to gratitude as a tool to motivate other employees to help each other (Gavett, 2014). ConocoPhillips, the oil and gas company, built an online knowledge platform where employees ask questions and others give answers. Baker and Bulkley (2006) say that the company has saved US$100 m by this means of tapping employees' knowledge. Google has "a peer-to-peer bonus system that empowers employees to express gratitude and reward helpful behaviour with token payments". The policy basically has a pay-it-forward mechanism built in–"a recipient of a peer-to-peer bonus is given more funds that may only be paid forward to recognize a third employee" (Yakowicz, 2014).

Despite that the endeavours of innovation and databases of technology support like wikis, virtual network, CoP, expert centres, rewards, capability trainings and social engagement programs have been built up to support knowledge sharing, a large proportion of all knowledge management and knowledge sharing initiatives that are launched by organizations still fail (Koulikov, 2011 in Storey and Barnett, 2000).

6.1 Generosity and the link in knowledge sharing

There are two great forces of human nature – self-interest and caring for others (Gates, 2008).

In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, generosity is defined, according to the golden mean principle, as the balance between miserliness and prodigality (Sommerfeld, 2008). Human generosity is commonly understood as doing good to other people or contributing to the society's common good (Komter, 2010). Altruism, solidarity, voluntary engagement, philanthropy, pro-social behaviour, charity and gift giving are related terms that come to mind when thinking about generosity. We define, generosity as giving freely and unselfishly of your time, money and resources to help others (Smith and Davidson, 2014). This has not been the attention of scholars of different disciplinary interests especially in recent years. However, our analysis interprets that generosity is not about being generous with money or possessions, rather how we can be generous with our time, efforts, sharing knowledge and when someone is generous to us, it should make us to be generous in return not only to the same person but also to others.

Generosity, to be clear, is not identical to pure altruism, as people can be authentically generous in part for reasons that serve their own interests as well as those of others. When we talk about generosity, the question arises, why should an individual be interested in doing such costly acts that benefits other individuals? When people become recipients of generosity, their immediate response is always to give back. But, how about when people reciprocate the same generous behaviour towards others? And more specifically in relation to knowledge sharing?

Generosity is called as Daan in the Eastern Religious Scriptures. In Buddhism, generosity is one of the ten perfections and is the cure for the self-picked toxin called avarice. Generosity is known as Charity in the Bible. In Islam, Quran states that whatever we give

away generously, with the goal of satisfying God, He will supplant it (Quran 34:39). In Christianity, the Book of Acts expresses that Jesus said that giving is superior to anything accepting (Acts 20:35). Missionary Church of Kopimism says that all knowledge is for everybody and duplicating/sharing data is holy. As per the Bible, having all the knowledge on the planet is futile, without the want of charity (sharing): In the Bible, obstruction of the flow of knowledge is suggested to be the destruction of mankind. Vidya Daan translated as knowledge charity, a concept in Daan is a tenet of all Dharmic Religions that also values the sharing of knowledge. In the African society, old people were venerated and held in great esteem. They were the knowledge warehouse of their respective communities. By word of mouth, they passed on their wisdom to their progeny. This way the community knowledge was preserved and shared (Macharia, 2011).

Generosity is a closely researched phenomenon in the organizational behaviour, organizational psychology and economics. Several other expressions are closely related to generosity such as extra role behaviour (Flynn, 2003) off-task behaviour, non-task behaviour and organizational citizenship behaviour (Ilies et al., 2006). All these constructs have one attribute in common: they refer to a behaviour that goes beyond expected (or role specific) behaviour, as well as actions that are neither required by the job description nor by the organizational culture (Mergel et al., 2008).

Generosity is different from empathy or altruism. Empathy, in its many forms and uses, is commonly defined as the ability to identify and understand another person's situation and feelings (Preece and Ghozati, 2001). So empathy involves social interaction and feelings to imagine oneself "in somebody else's shoes". Since feelings and emotions are involved, actor's observation becomes important to understand them and initiate help. The same goes with Mauss's (1967) gift theory where one person initiates the relation with another through exchange of gifts: they give and, in turn, expect something in return someday. According to Mauss's Gift exchange theory, the way that we exchange objects within groups helps build social ties between humans. These ties do not build up without objects. In social exchange, one person does another a favour, and there is a general expectation of some future return in any form or anyway (Blau, 1964, p. 93, 2005). Exchange should happen two ways with an object involved. However, a generous person neither "sees" the person to whom they give to nor expects anything in return: their end purpose is just to give and share, and this develops an open loop that motivates the receiver to share it forward to others.

According to Grant (2013), generous people fall under three categories:

1. *Givers*, who help others unconditionally, demanding nothing in return.

2. *Matchers*, who usually only help those who have helped them.

3. *Takers,* those who demand help but never offer.

When people act as givers (sharers), they might offer help, share knowledge or make valuable introductions. When they act like takers, they try to get other people to serve their ends while carefully guarding their own ability and time (Grant, 2013). Grant quotes, a work of Nathan Podsakoff, of the University of Arizona, when his team examined 38 studies of organizational behaviour, representing more than 3,500 business units and many industries, when employees act like givers, they facilitate efficient problem solving and coordination and build cohesive, supportive cultures that appeal to customers, suppliers and top talent alike. Link between employee giving and desirable business outcomes was surprisingly robust. Higher rates of giving were predictive of higher unit profitability, productivity, efficiency and customer satisfaction, along with lower costs and turnover rates.

According to Smith and Davidson (2014), generosity is a paradox because the more we give away, the more we get in return. They further suggest that "Those who give their resources away, receive back in turn. In offering our time, money, and energy in service

of others' well-being, we enhance our own well-being as well. In letting go of some of what we own for the good of others, we better secure our own lives, too". Generosity, then, is good for the giver and the receiver. Although work products are shared as part of a contractual obligation, what an employee "knows" is shared more as an act of generosity (Dixon, 2012).

Flynn (2014), when he examined patterns of favour exchange among the engineers in one company, found that the least-productive engineers were givers. Workers who had done many more favours for others than they had received. He made a similar discovery in a study of salespeople: The ones who generated the least revenue reported a particularly strong concern for helping others. Plotkin and Stweart (2013), biologists from University of Pennsylvania, explained mathematically that no selfish strategies will succeed in evolution; the only strategies that are evolutionarily robust are generous ones. When people act generously, they feel it is almost instinctual, and indeed a large literature in evolutionary psychology shows that people derive happiness from being generous, it's not just in humans. Of course social insects behave this way, but even bacteria and viruses share gene products and behave in ways that can't be described as anything but generous. We find that in evolution, a population that encourages cooperation does well, to keep up cooperation over the long term, it is best to be generous (Baillie, 2013).

Research says that companies that encourage generosity between employees score wins by generating ideas, sharing knowledge and creating a better culture (Yakowicz, 2014).Baker and Bulkly (2014) experiment on students of Harvard gave two interesting results. "The more help a person receives from others, the more likely that person is to help someone else" and "That helping others will make it more likely that they will receive help". Pay it forward, where someone helps another person and that person assists a third, and reputation rewarding, where a person who is known to pitch in receives more from co-workers than less helpful colleagues.

Knowledge sharing is innate to our human nature of wanting to connect and collaborate with others. We, human beings, are social beings and as such have been bound to share what we know with others, so that our learning curve never becomes flat (Suarez, 2012). Often, generous people are those who share some part of their wealth, providing for philanthropy, buying gifts and so on. In business, we consider generous people are those who give a path to their employee to share tangibly in the organization's achievement through raises, benefit sharing, or a reward framework. There are some challenges about generosity in organization like problems in conceptualization, methods and measurement, sampling and response rate that should be considered by interested scholars (Irani, 2012; Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007; Vaidyanathan 2008).

6.2 Proposed theoretical model for sharing knowledge through generosity

Consider a situation, where A seeks help from B. B helps A, and thus A will help B in return as a courtesy or gratitude for the help received. In this process, A develops a strong affinity towards B and a social bond is formed. As a consequence A feels honoured to have received help from B and creates a positive feeling for A, and A forwards the same help to C without any expectations (Paying it forward model of Baker and Bulkley, 2014). In some situations, A might only help B in return and might not feel to help C, as A did not receive any help from C. If A helps C, then it is due to perceived reciprocity that A received from B and with positive feelings, A forwards the help to C (Figure 1).

The role of the first generous giver in firm and in the network of sharing is very important, e.g. if B becomes the first mover to share, then if its stops at C and then C becomes the knowledge hoarder and the cycle of sharing stops. If C feels the same feelings like A, C continues to help D and the cycle thus continues further with D helping E and E helping others and so on. As generosity is a social phenomenon which is self-driven, our theory in terms of knowledge sharing conveys that if and only if a person is willing to give away or share something valuable like knowledge with another person without any expectation in return, the receiver will be inclined to share it forward to others thus

Figure 1 Model explaining the generosity of sharing forward
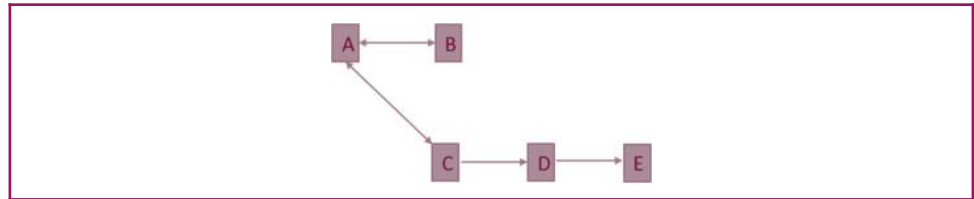
creating a generosity loop. On the contrary to generosity, reciprocity implies a social rule that says we should repay, in kind or by different means, what another person has provided us. Thus, reciprocity implies paying back to the giver, which is very different to sharing it forward to others, as proposed by our model.

Campbell (1998) proposes that helping others is inseparable from positive emotions/feelings. Indeed, pleasant feelings often accompany altruistic behaviours (Eisenberg, 1986). We are likely to feel good about ourselves after giving money to charity, donating blood or taking care of an injured animal. The nature and purpose of such emotions is of high theoretical interest, as is their compatibility with the concept of altruism. "The person who engages in (altruistic behaviour) anticipates no other satisfaction or gain than the pleasure of contributing to the welfare of others" Cohen (1972, p. 41). However, according to Bandura's theory, helping is influenced by the environment in which actors evolve. We propose that generosity is not identical to pure altruism, as people can be authentically generous in part for reasons that serve their own interests as well as those of others (Smith, 2007).

Our model leads to what could be termed *generalized reciprocity* (Yamagishi and Kiyonari, 2000).

6.3 Limitations

In our model, the role of the *primum movens*, the first giver/sharer, is essential and must be investigated. The model holds well if the generous action is favoured with positive intention and without any direct expectations in return. With respect to knowledge sharing within firms, such a model has positive effects, as it opens up Mauss's gift loop toward sharing forward. Careful analysis of the various constituents of this model and empirical investigations/experiments can help better understand our proposed theoretical statements, which complement existing theories.

7. Conclusions and further research

What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal (Albert Pine).

Knowledge gains value when it is shared (Wilke and Krück, 2001). Research thus suggests that sharing will be constrained by underlying motives. It is unrealistic for the sharing of an asset like knowledge to be equated with free exchange or knowledge being "given away". Generosity has been practiced for centuries, but in today's firms, with the advent of competition, patents, greed for power, cultural myths and individual expectations, people have a reason and a purpose to share their knowledge rather than sharing it generously. Generosity can drive social engagement and create a strong affinity among people in firms. Generosity among individuals should not be associated with monetary benefits, gifts, but, must include time, thought, graciousness and reassuring help that one needs, as well as with greater willingness to give rather than expect in return. One needs to remember the good school days when our teachers took time and effort in letting us learn and become valuable; the same goes with being generous with other employees.

One should constantly look for opportunities to add value to others and in sharing what one knows is the best way to do it. If one possess high level of knowledge and expertise, we might

sometimes be hesitant to offer or share with others due to power, autonomy, prestige or many other issues, but we should also assume that we would also be on receiving end sometime when we expect the same from others, thus taking a self-driven initiative to share knowledge as it is vital for individual and organizational success.

Through our investigation, we can infer that diverse religions, scholars and cultures shared knowledge generously hundreds of years ago and even in evolutionary biology and organizational model explained by researchers suggest that generous behaviours tend to yield more satisfaction and success for individuals. However, firms still have difficulties to promote a generous knowledge sharing organizational culture in a very effective way. We propose the following accompanying thoughts that can help researchers to focus on the view to study the role of generosity among firms and further investigate whether the willingness to share depends on generosity:

- Knowledge should not become an instrument of power or authority among the people or organization; knowledge sharing should rather become a social and charity initiative. As mentioned by Dalkir (2005), organization and individuals should move from "knowledge is power" to "sharing is more powerful". A study on understanding the role of power in knowledge sharing and the moderating effect of generosity can help in understanding how generosity could be developed.

- Knowledge sharing should turn into a share it forward culture rather than pay it back culture among people in firms. An empirical analysis to investigate the sharing it forward culture could be studied starting from the first giver. For example, individuals who are pro-socially motivated might be more oriented toward others' needs and likely to experience joy and satisfaction in helping others. But individuals who are more self-centered and concerned with their own needs and deprivations might be more ambivalent about helping and might construe acts of generosity as sacrifices or instances of exploitation (Sommerfeld, 2008).

- Knowledge sharing can help in enhancing one's feelings, abilities and skills. Knowledge sharing can help build stronger networks, which help other knowledge to connect. For example, Mikulincer et al. (2006) conducted a phenomenological study of the experience of gratitude and revealed that when people feel grateful toward someone, they experience a multifaceted blend of happiness, love and security, together with self-focused fears, feelings of vulnerability and of obligation and distrust of the benefactor's intentions. An investigation towards the role of generosity in affinity between actors and network can be investigated.

- People in firms should share knowledge irrespective of ethnicity, position, culture, etc., and spend time to share new ideas and information with others. This depends on the organizational climate, culture and leadership influence. The possible influence of organizational climate and culture on generosity could be investigated. The role of whether developing generosity in gaining potential advancement in career and position of individual in firms could be studied.

- When someone shares knowledge with their peers or colleagues, they should be praised. Praise and commendation from managers were rated as top motivators for performance, beating out other noncash and financial incentives, by a majority of workers (McKinsey, 2009). Organizations with the most sophisticated recognition practices are 12 times more likely to have strong business outcomes (Deloitte, 2012). Praising does not only encourage people in their work but also makes them do their job more effectively. Knowledge sharing should turn into a recognition highlight in firms. Recognition helps individuals to feel craved to share a greater amount of their knowledge. Praising and recognizing generous behaviours in firms should be investigated; this can help in new direction of how this can help develop generous behaviours among others.

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