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Between silence and flow: a critical essay on knowledge transfer and sharing in 21st-century organisations

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Abstract

Knowledge sharing and transfer are now recognised as strategic cornerstones of organisational innovation, collective learning, and institutional sustainability. However, despite the theoretical consensus regarding their importance, cultural, structural, and symbolic barriers continue to hinder the effective circulation of knowledge in business contexts. This article offers a critical and integrative reflection on the dynamics of knowledge sharing, discussing its epistemological foundations, emerging theoretical models, implementation barriers, and possible strategies for creating organisational ecosystems conducive to knowledge dissemination. It is argued that only hybrid approaches—culturally sensitive and oriented towards symbolic co-creation—can overcome the limitations of technocratic solutions and foster truly transformative knowledge management.

Keywords
Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing, Organisational Culture, Hybrid Models, Organisational Innovation

1. Introduction

In an age when knowledge has ceased to be merely an operational tool and has become a strategic asset, the way it is managed, shared, and transferred within organisations assumes critical centrality. It is no longer merely a matter of knowing more, but of knowing better, more swiftly, and above all, of knowing together. Collective efficacy increasingly hinges on the ability to transform scattered, tacit, and often silent knowledge into articulated flows of meaning, learning, and innovation.

This article aims to critically and thoroughly analyse the direct and indirect mechanisms through which climate change impacts human health. Drawing on a multidisciplinary approach, scientific evidence is examined to underscore the urgent need to integrate public health into climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Despite the diffuse rhetoric surrounding the "knowledge economy," many organisations remain entangled in dynamics of tacit retention, departmental silos, and internal competitive cultures that impede the effective circulation of knowledge. The paradox is striking: even with access to advanced technologies, digital repositories, and formal communication processes, organisations frequently fail to create environments conducive to genuine sharing.

It is in this context that the present article positions itself, proposing an expanded reading of the

knowledge-sharing phenomenon that moves beyond instrumental models to recognise its symbolic, cultural, and relational complexity. More than a function, sharing is a culturally situated gesture that requires trust, reciprocity, and recognition.

2. Conceptual development

Epistemological foundations: from tacit to explicit

Any reflection on knowledge sharing must begin with the classic distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, introduced by Polanyi (1966). Tacit knowledge is embedded in embodied experience, daily practices, and intuitions that resist verbalisation. Explicit knowledge, by contrast, is systematisable, transferable, and documentable. This distinction was operationalised by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) through the SECI model (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, and Internalisation), which describes organisational knowledge creation as a dynamic process of conversion between tacit and explicit knowledge.

The SECI model's major innovation lies in its proposition of a continuous knowledge cycle, where knowledge is perpetually reworked through the interaction between individuals and contexts. However, as noted by Gao, Chai, and Liu (2018), this model tends to overlook the symbolic, emotional, and contextual dimensions embedded in the act of sharing. It is not enough to convert tacit knowledge into codified information: it is essential to understand what motivates someone to share what they know.

Authors such as Wenger (1998) and Castaneda and Cuellar (2020) offer an alternative reading, centred on communities of practice and informal learning networks. In these contexts, knowledge is built and shared within relationships of belonging, where meaning arises both from practice and from interaction. Belonging precedes sharing: one only shares with those recognised as part of the same symbolic "we." And perhaps it is in sharing that knowledge renews itself most profoundly.

Contemporary models: multidimensional integration

Contemporary research on knowledge management seeks to overcome rigid dichotomies between the individual and the collective, the formal and the informal, the technical and the symbolic. Integrative models aim to map the multiple dimensions that affect knowledge sharing, recognising it as a phenomenon entangled in organisational structures, belief systems, technologies, and affects.

Wang and Neo (2023) propose a framework based on five interactive axes: individual characteristics, technological support, cultural context, organisational structure, and the nature of knowledge. This approach acknowledges that sharing behaviour results from the complex interaction between internal dispositions and external factors, and is strongly shaped by culture and leadership.

Another relevant contribution is offered by Fattah, Lee, and Kim (2022), who draw on social exchange theory to explain knowledge sharing. According to this perspective, individuals share knowledge when they perceive reciprocity, recognition, and symbolic safety. Sharing involves risk: the risk of losing power, of being criticised, of becoming invisible. One only assumes that risk when there is trust.

Recent studies (Israilidis et al., 2021) further confirm that the mere presence of technological platforms is insufficient to ensure sharing. Without a culture of learning and collaboration, tools remain underused or are strategically and defensively appropriated.

Barriers to sharing: between power and fear

The literature identifies a typology of knowledge-sharing barriers that unfold across four major dimensions: individual, organisational, cultural, and technological (Chua, Thinakaran & Vasudevan, 2023).

At the individual level, fear of losing relevance, fear of judgement, cognitive overload, and lack of intrinsic motivation are recurrent factors. Epistemic insecurity—namely, doubt about the validity or usefulness of one's knowledge—often leads to inhibited sharing.

Organisationally, rigid hierarchical structures, lack of horizontal communication channels, authoritarian or distant leadership, and evaluation systems focused on individual metrics create adverse conditions for collaboration. Internal competition and exaggerated meritocratic logics foster strategic knowledge retention.

Culturally, sharing depends on symbolic norms. In organisational cultures dominated by a scarcity mindset, knowledge is appropriated as a capital of distinction. To share is to relinquish an advantage. Conversely, in cultures of abundance and trust, knowledge circulates as a common good, perceived as a collective strength.

Technological barriers, finally, are not limited to the absence of platforms. They include poor usability, system fragmentation, lack of interoperability, and insufficient digital training. Technology only acts as an enabler when embedded within an ecosystem of collaborative values and practices (Castaneda & Cuellar, 2020).

Possible strategies: towards ecosystems of co-creation

Overcoming these barriers requires more than implementing tools: it demands a profound cultural shift. It is about creating organisational ecosystems where knowledge sharing is not merely desirable, but natural, recognised, and rewarded.

Emerging strategies include:

- Establishing organisational sharing rituals, such as internal seminars, peer-learning sessions, organisational storytelling, and knowledge coffees;
- Developing reverse mentoring programmes that value the knowledge of younger professionals and foster intergenerational cross-learning;
- Gamifying sharing processes, using symbolic reward mechanisms to recognise collective contributions (Tachyan, Choi & Kang, 2019);
- Promoting servant leadership that acts as a facilitator of trust-based contexts, active listening, and the valuing of epistemic vulnerability (Ayestarán et al., 2022);
- Building epistemic communities that transcend departmental and organisational boundaries, enabling knowledge circulation across networks, sectors, and territories.

Investing in hybrid models—which combine structure and fluidity, formalisation and improvisation—is essential. As Duarte (2017) argues, only an organisational architecture attuned to the complexity of human bonds can sustain living, dynamic knowledge management.

To consolidate the arguments developed, an integrative framework is presented below (Figure 1), synthesising the main factors influencing knowledge sharing. The model aims to clearly represent the levels structuring this dynamic: epistemological foundations, barriers and enablers, organisational practices, and resulting impacts.
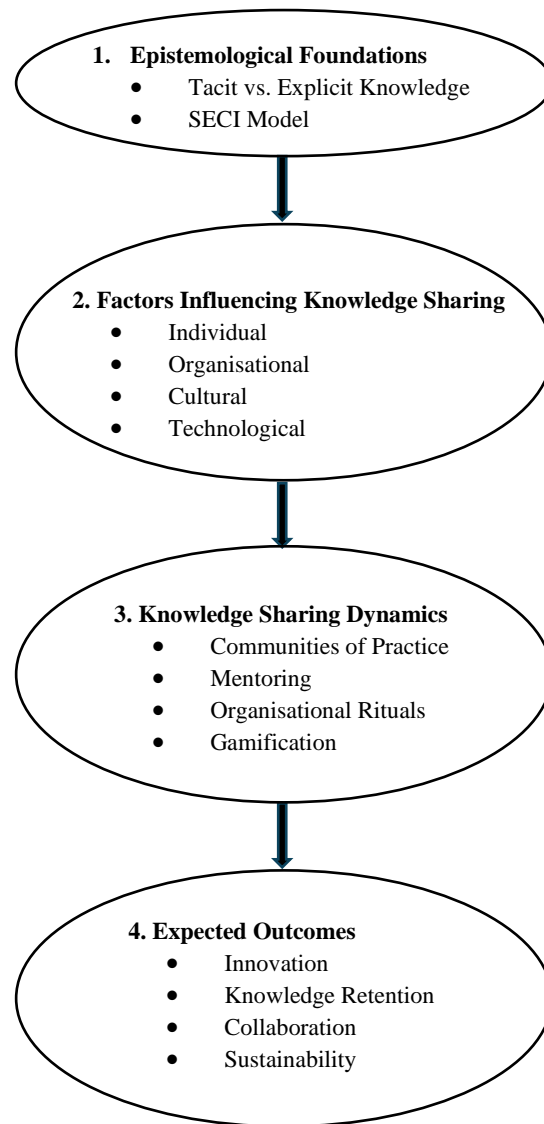
Figure 1 – Integrative framework on the theme

More than a sequential structure, the model seeks to represent a networked system, where each element influences the others. Its value lies in its capacity to guide diagnoses and strategic interventions that enhance knowledge circulation within organisations.

3. Conclusion

In a world of constant acceleration, knowledge sharing also becomes a form of resistance to organisational entropy. It is through shared words, repeated gestures, and attentive listening that knowledge is transformed into bond, and bond into collective creation.

Sharing is, above all, an act of cognitive hospitality. It requires making space for the other, recognising their epistemic legitimacy, and welcoming difference. In times of hyperspecialisation and fragmentation, creating spaces where different knowledges can dialogue becomes a condition for organisational survival.

This article has sought to show that knowledge sharing cannot be reduced to technical processes or performance indicators. It is a dense, situated, symbolic, and affective phenomenon. Ultimately, knowledge management is about managing human relationships. And it is there, in that fragile interval between silence and flow, that the future of organisations is being shaped.

As Senge (1990) reminded us, "learning organisations are places where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire." And none of this is achieved alone.

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