

# Barriers and Facilitators to Sharing Knowledge at a Fast-Food Chain at Private Hospitals in Bangkok, Thailand

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to help consolidate and understand the barriers and facilitators to sharing knowledge behaviour at a fast-food chain at a hospital. The method adopted uses a quantitative approach and examines the knowledge sharing factors which contribute to the establishment and strengthening of knowledge relationships between personnel in eight small, consumer interacted working facilities at Thai private hospitals. The paper develops a model that attempts to conceptualise the findings from a diverse range of quantitative personnel opinion into a unified framework. Outcomes from this inquiry suggests that personnel have established views about what constitutes effective knowledge sharing practices and explores the derived topics of staff performance, product/service process knowledge, service evaluation, service cost, personnel characteristics and client needs. Highlights the increasing importance of the engaged knowledge sharer in Thailand's fast food industry. This study provides insights of a franchise food service provider in Thailand by helping to understand more effectively food service quality environments, subsequent service provision and the reactions of established personnel in contributing useful approaches to mediating a fast-food chain barriers and enhancing facilitators to sharing knowledge in the workplace connected to Thai private hospitals.

## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management has a variety of definitions and perspectives (1). Currently, knowledge management has become a crucial element in service organisations such as private hospitals wishing to collaborate for the purpose of achieving a common goal (2). At present many organisations implement knowledge management (3), in order to increase their performance (4) because each organisation has specific technical and cultural resources that have to be managed in order to be available for easy search, development and application (5). In order to gain a competitive edge (1), service organisations should manage and develop a collaborative climate of intellectual capital (6), organizational creativity (7) and to make it simpler to spread by sharing across boundaries, but still needs to be used selectively (8).

In a fast-food chains, personnel are obliged to follow strict rules and regulations in their actions (9). This increases probability of "learning by doing" which makes knowledge sharing between different departments and work sections more complicated and unclear. Thus, it is vital in this kind of business to give enough freedom for knowledge sharing to employees so that experience will flow from one person to

another generating true organisational knowledge capital through small, focused communities of practice (10).

In order to survive and succeed in the fast-food competitive market (11) every organization should develop, explore and manage its knowledge assets effectively through appropriate referrals and enhanced social interactions (12). This raises the first research question - How does the working relationships among employees in a fast-food outlet at a private hospital affect the knowledge sharing process?

Recently, many scholars have started paying close attention to the process of knowledge sharing in organizations (13). The success of any organisation now depends not only on acquiring knowledge but also on ability to understand, manage and successfully transfer it from one individual to another (14, 15). An organisation's core competency (1) is mostly based on the 'know-how' process type of knowledge which is tacit by definition and inclination. Tacit knowledge transfer is worth about ninety per cent of knowledge sharing of the whole organization (1). The assets of the organisation (1) are essentially damaged each time an employee retires or leaves the organisation for some other reasons, because useful and irreplaceable knowledge is lost to the organisation

or operating community. Thus, it becomes vital for all organisations to create a productive knowledge management system which will promote knowledge sharing inside the organisation and to help motivate employees to share their experiences with their colleagues (16). This raises the second research question - What internal/external factors affect fast-food outlet employees' desire to share their knowledge with their co-workers?

There are different ways of motivating knowledge sharing processes (11); whilst there are also various factors that may prevent individuals from engaging in such activities (17). Thus, in order to become a "knowledge enterprise" it's very important for any organisation to figure out and cultivate those practices that actually help their employees to share knowledge and also to try to eliminate those ones that negatively affect these processes.

When the knowledge sharing process is engaged appropriately it becomes indispensable (18) as it is possible to find solutions to some tasks that could never be solved without applying this process. The knowledge sharing process occurs when one individual spreads created or acquired knowledge to others by conceptualising work-related knowledge through a deliberate personal learning and sharing process (19). In addition this process can involve different levels of participants (2): from individual to individual, between group and individual, among groups and between the group and the organisation.

Comparing knowledge sharing with "synergism" (20), simply defined as some effect caused by a collaboration of two or more entities, can never be achieved by an individual as the effective cooperation between employees (21) can increase the productivity of the organisation. Working and sharing practices in a team helps with collaboration on a personal level and also to speak in a 'full voice' (22). However, there are claims that despite the apparent benefits and positive effects of knowledge sharing, the process can be severely restrained (23). This raises the third research question - What motivational factors can increase employees' interest in the knowledge sharing process?

## **METHODOLOGY**

To gain a broad insight into the issues and questions developed earlier, this work utilised a quantitative approach (24) that attempts to increase the validity and reliability of the research.

The population of the research consisted of sixty nine outlets of a fast-food chain in Bangkok of varying sizes which consisted of approximately 575 personnel. However, for the purposes of convenience sampling only those connected to private hospitals were selected, the methodological approaches of (25) and (1) were used, and eight (8) outlets were chosen using random numbers (26) - which also reflected a "pragmatic approach" (27). The total number of personnel for these chosen outlets were fifty-nine (59). After discussions with the human resources (HR) manager of a fast-food chain, the survey was translated into Thai as this was the personnel's only language. A TRAPD Team Translation Model (28) and back translation (29) was used to underpin increased pilot and survey rigour (30). The company distributed the revised survey among the rest of the targeted population that was not involved in the pilot survey. Excluding the eight employees who participated in the pilot test, the size of the population was thus fifty-one (51) personnel and fifty-one questionnaires were sent out. Thus, the analytical survey method was used to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables in particular circumstances in order to test the context of a particular environment (31). The response rate was 92% (47/51), as the survey was distributed by management this may have contributed to a higher than expected response which was based on (32) who indicated that 65% and (33) who stated that 70%, was a more realistic response outcome.

## **RESULTS**

The results are presented below using the research questions as pointers and supportive evidence through each facilitator and barrier. Tables depicting data are presented at the end. First research question - How does the working relationships among employees in a fast-food outlet at a private hospital affect the knowledge sharing process?

### **FACILITATORS**

Work Atmosphere - Several distinct patterns and orientations were recognised. The work atmosphere in this research paper comprises several dimensions, such as relationships among employees, attitude of the employees towards new staff and their overall satisfaction with the atmosphere in the shop and the quality and quantity of the information they are given in the start of their career at the fast-food chain. The work atmosphere is seen by employees (80%) as acceptable or better than expected and this maybe attributed to employees views regarding teamwork needs as some 83% agree or strongly agree (Table 4) that teamwork

enhances their desire to share knowledge with co-workers. Nevertheless, 20% of the respondents stated that they are either dissatisfied with the atmosphere in the shop or have very little satisfaction. Consequently, most employees (80%) (mean 4.02 - Table 1) are willing to share their experiences with a new staff member.

**Friendliness** - This follows on from the shop atmosphere as it would appear that friendliness is a major individual trait that leads to more positive engagements and knowledge sharing opportunities. For example, the correlation analysis (from Table 6) suggests strongly that there is a positive relationship between friendliness of the workers and their on-going sharing behaviour. Further, (from Table 7) when co-workers show higher levels of acceptance this appears to be a strong predictor that they will also show higher levels of sharing behaviour.

## **BARRIERS**

**Knowledge Demand** - The correlation analysis showed (Table 2) that the amount of knowledge the new employee acquired when he/she first started working would positively affect the experience he/she has when sharing with a consequent newer employee. Further, 55.3% of co-workers indicated that they sought advice from senior staff (Table 2). However, 43.7% (Table 3) of newcomers experienced a lack of advice from their more experienced peers and this leads to them not sharing knowledge with those who come after them. The level of the employees sharing knowledge with a newcomer (mean 4.02 - Table 1) and the extent to which the new employees are eager to obtain more knowledge (mean 3.55 - Table 1), appear to situate unrealistic and unintentional behavioural resistance (mean 3.51 - Table 1).

**Work Relationship** - The correlation analysis (Table 6/7) shows that the more friendly the workers are with others, the more eager they will be in sharing their experiences with new staff.

The second research question - What internal/external factors affect fast-food outlet employees' desire to share their knowledge with their co-workers at a private hospital?

## **FACILITATORS**

**Individual Position or Seniority** - This was signalled by most respondents as a non-issue as 93.6% indicated that they would undertake knowledge sharing with newer co-workers (mean 4.02 - Table 1). Consequently, organisational status in the shops was not seen as a large barrier to knowledge

sharing (mean 1.49 - Table 1) and therefore was considered as an enhancer or facilitator. New staff to a shop, either as inexperienced staff or a member who moved from another branch was treated in similar ways as a newcomer (mean 3.87 - Table 1).

## **BARRIERS**

**Individual Pay** - This was an issue raised by most sales people. It would appear that shared knowledge was perceived as dependent upon more pay as indicated by 85.1% (table 5) responses. For example, it would appear that sales-personnel would share knowledge only if they were given extra pay and that this was signalled as a reason underpinning that extra pay. However, employees' appeared not to need any special place for purposeful knowledge sharing, but 29.3% preferred the sharing to be done after work and at the shop and this may be related to privacy issues that were raised by the staff (30.14% - Table 8).

The third research question - What motivational factors can increase employees' interest in the knowledge sharing process in a fast-food outlet at a private hospital?

## **FACILITATORS**

**Personal Motivation** - Several factors appeared to support an individual's motivation to help others. For example, workers perceived that there would be an increased opportunity for promotion (mean 4.06 - Table 5); getting an award (mean 4.04 - Table 5); and payments (mean 4.09 - Table 5).

## **BARRIERS**

**Group Teamwork** - It would appear that the most important factor for the employees was teamwork (83% agree or better - Table 4; and mean 4.17 - Table 5).

The following tables reflect the specific outcomes of the research:

**Barriers and Facilitators to Sharing Knowledge at a Fast-Food Chain at Private Hospitals in Bangkok, Thailand**

**Figure 1**

Table 1: Mean analysis. Overall co-operation questions

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are you satisfied with the overall atmosphere in your store?	47	1	5	3.30	1.020
Are you in a friendly relationship with all the employees working at your store?	47	2	5	3.87	.824
Did you feel accepted by the co-workers when you first start working for the chain?	47	2	5	3.72	.800
Did you get all the necessary information on your job description and job specification when you first started working for the chain?	47	2	5	3.60	.925
Where you seeking for your co-workers' advice when you first started working for the chain?	47	2	5	3.55	.974
Did the co-workers share their experience and give you advices when you first started working for the chain?	47	2	5	3.51	.906
If a new employee comes to the store you are currently working with are you going to share your experience?	47	2	5	4.02	.897
Valid N (listwise)	47				

**Figure 2**

Table 2: Seeking your co-workers' advice

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Some	8	17.0	17.0	17.0
Moderately	13	27.7	27.7	44.7
Average	18	38.3	38.3	83.0
Many Times	8	17.0	17.0	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 3**

Table 3: Co-workers share their experience and give you advice

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Some	5	10.6	10.6	10.6
moderately	21	44.7	44.7	55.3
Average	13	27.7	27.7	83.0
Many Times	8	17.0	17.0	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 4**

Table 4: Teamwork

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
disagree	5	10.6	10.6	10.6
not sure	3	6.4	6.4	17.0
agree	18	38.3	38.3	55.3
strongly agree	21	44.7	44.7	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 5**

Table 5: Factors that can increase sharing with a new employee

	Increased chance of getting promoted	Increased chance of getting the "Employee of the Month" award	Money bonus	Getting supervisor's feedback on how much you've helped the new employee	Visible increase in productivity of all the employees in your shift	Specially given time for the experience sharing	Convenient place for the experience sharing	Private atmosphere	Employees teamwork
N	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
Valid	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.13	4.00	3.89	3.96	3.96	4.17
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
Minimum	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

**Figure 6**

Table 6: Friendly relationship and willingness to share knowledge

		Are you in a friendly relationship with all the employees working at your store?	If a new employee comes to the store you are currently working with are you going to share
Are you in a friendly relationship with all the employees working at your store?	Pearson Correlation	1	.416**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	47	47
If a new employee comes to the store you are currently working with are you going to share	Pearson Correlation	.416**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	47	47

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure 7**

Table 7: Acceptance and willingness to share knowledge

		Did the co-workers share their experience and give you advices when you first started	If a new employee comes to the store you are currently working with are you going to share
Did the co-workers share their experience and give you advices when you first started	Pearson Correlation	1	.602**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	47	47
If a new employee comes to the store you are currently working with are you going to share	Pearson Correlation	.602**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	47	47

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure 8**

Table 8: Appropriate time and place for knowledge sharing

Place and Time	Response
Private room at lunch break	7
Private room after work	17
At the shop at lunch break	16
At the shop after work	22
Informal place at lunch break	3
Informal place after work	9
Specially selected day off work in some informal place	1

**DISCUSSION**

This discussion follows the format of stating the appropriate research question and then facilitators and barriers to sharing knowledge. The first research question - How does the working relationships among employees in a fast-food outlet at a private hospital affect the knowledge sharing process?

Facilitators – In terms of Work Atmosphere the outcomes shows in Table 6/7 (see above) where 80% of employees state that this is seen as acceptable or better than expected. This supports the notion of co-workers who willingly involve themselves in the knowledge sharing process enhance the work environment (3). The correlation analysis (from Table 6) strongly suggests that there is a positive relationship between Friendliness of the workers and their on-going sharing behaviour. Further, (from Table 7) when co-workers show higher levels of acceptance this appears to be a strong predictor that they will also show higher levels of knowledge sharing behaviour probably related to their beliefs about learning (34) and openness (35).

Barriers – When considering Knowledge Demand it is in the interests of management to reinforce this aspect, in order to create an on-going knowledge sharing culture resulting in new re-combinations and future adaptations (36) of what currently exists. Few informants considered themselves to be in a challenging or neutral Work Relationships with their co-workers and this would have considerable impacts on future demand for knowledge sharing (3). This is seen as very

positive to reducing the barriers (17).

The second research question - What internal/external factors affect fast-food outlet employees' desire to share their knowledge with their co-workers at a private hospital?

Facilitators – Individual Position or Seniority relating to organisational status in the shops was not seen as a large barrier to knowledge sharing (mean 1.49 - Table 1) and therefore was considered as an enhancer or facilitator. In many organisations in Thailand this would appear to be a significant digress away from the norm, as seniority often results not only in a socioeconomic gap but also a technical-knowledge gap (37); but in this case may be related more to the developed service ethic of a hospital setting.

Barriers – Personal motivation and sharing knowledge patterns based on Individual Pay or awards, may reflect the notion of value (38). Payments for knowledge sharing appeared from the literature to be a value related to organisational culture (37). In this way, extra effort and time spent sharing knowledge was also equally valued. Reducing the barrier of targeted pay could lead to more effective opportunities for knowledge sharing thus reinforcing the culture of actors as equals. This may also underpin the need for sharing after work and outside the public domain. This could also be a worker related reason for creating additional time for payment, as knowledge sharing carried out during shop opening time would be difficult to manage consistently, and lead to difficulties in determining the extra levels of pay – especially in different social contexts (39).

The third research question - What motivational factors can increase employees' interest in the knowledge sharing process in a fast-food outlet at a private hospital?

Facilitators – enhancing Personal Motivation is an opportunity to develop both people and the organisational culture through individual coaching and learning (34). Thus, personal motivation reflected a complex series of on-going relationships (40) between staff and between staff and customers and leads to greater personal learning (41), by reconfiguring the knowledge sharing processes affecting shop design and it's management and organisation.

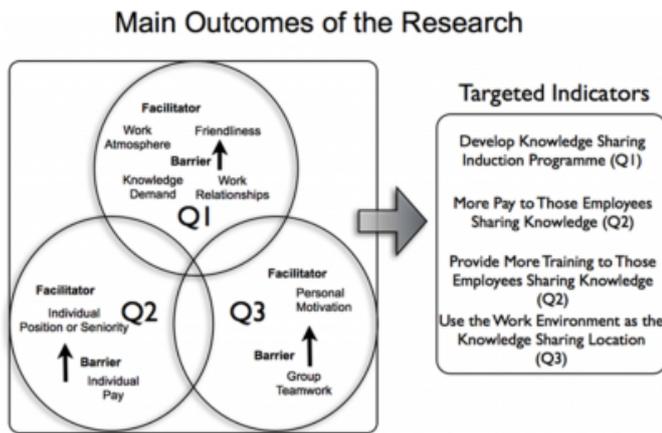
Barriers – Inadequate operations knowledge, work-related skills of staff and lack of Group Teamwork was highlighted as another important barrier (42). This also follows the outcomes of (43) as the most effective knowledge sharing process will always be conducted by a team of determined

and motivated employees and further supports the insistence on the knowledge community orientation (44).

The main outcomes of this research are further summarised in Figure 1, below:

**Figure 9**

Figure 1: Main Outcomes of the Research



In terms of staff performance and product/service process knowledge, with increased motivation to share knowledge, the data suggests that this has a mutual and positive effect on providing more effective service provision (Table 4, 6, and 7) - thereby helping to meet hospital client needs (45). Further, a way of reducing the effects of barriers would be to introduce a more effective induction programme (46) and knowledge sharing during the introductory stage for new sales staff. In a less differentiated working environment, staff would be able to meet targeted goals more easily and therefore reduce operating and service costs. However, personal characteristics - especially motivation (34) - appear to affect the overall development of knowledge sharing within the shop environment. The targeted outcomes of Figure 1, above illustrates how the fast-food chain could develop a work environment that will establish a design to engineer a more knowledgeable workforce within the organisation who consistently work together to meet hospital client needs.

**LIMITATIONS**

Knowledge sharing does little if all the small communities of knowledge sharing (each shop) do not share openly with others. The research has not ventured this far and may be considered one of the limitations to this research. Knowledge sharing can often become a way to reduce work

barriers and also to support personal development. Consequently, further research is needed to establish how this could be orchestrated and in what ways knowledge sharing could be made more effective through the use of ICT and other research methodologies such as qualitative research methods.

**CONCLUSION**

The overall knowledge sharing environment in fast-foods shops seems to be positively directed at helping new and older employees obtain as much articulated experience from their peers as they can. However, there are a number of issues that prevent the process of knowledge sharing from expanding throughout the organisation. The research underpins several useful indicators that have been developed to increase the level and the expansion of the sharing processes within this fast-food organisation through four targeted outcomes (Figure 1).

Consequently, it be useful for the organisation to conduct more introductory activities such as a specialist knowledge sharing induction programme, when each new employee is hired for any shop. This will enhance the employees relationships more effectively with each other. Assigning team projects or team goals may also increase cooperation and trust among employees and thus lead to more effective knowledge sharing approaches. Monetary bonuses for those who engage with knowledge sharing processes appear to help the circulation of knowledge among staff and may also stimulate greater cooperation among them leading to an increased level of friendliness - which could be a strong indicator of further knowledge sharing process expansion. Management have a responsibility to engage in conducting more targeted training leading to positive knowledge sharing practices throughout the organisation and especially when affecting private hospital clientele.

This study provides insights of an fast-food service provider in a private hospital in Thailand by helping to understand more effectively food service quality environments, subsequent service provision and the reactions of established personnel in contributing useful approaches to mediating a fast-food chain barriers and enhancing facilitators to sharing knowledge in the workplace.

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