

# RECEIVER INFLUENCES ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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## Abstract

*Sharer consideration of receiver knowledge needs and behaviours may improve the quality and results of knowledge sharing. This paper examines how sharers may be influenced by perceived receiver knowledge needs and behaviours when making knowledge sharing choices. Such a consideration adopts an emancipatory approach aimed at acknowledging the rights of those employees who need knowledge to receive it, despite the conflicting goals, agendas or efficiency pressures of sharers. Based on a literature review, a receiver-based theory of knowledge sharing is proposed. Empirical data from two case studies highlight the key role played by perceived receiver knowledge needs and behaviours as motivators and inhibitors in sharer choices. A set of key receiver influences on knowledge sharing is provided. This study concludes that companies should develop better ways to connect potential sharers with the real knowledge needs of receivers, particularly when knowledge technologies mediate sharing. Further, the findings suggest that sharing on a need-to-know basis impedes change in organisational power structures and prevents the integration of isolated pockets of knowledge that may yield new value.*

*Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Receiver, Sharer, Knowledge management*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Experts suggest a need to identify and understand the deeper individual issues that shape sharer beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours in knowledge sharing (Andrews & Delahaye 2000; Hinds & Pfeffer 2003). One important, yet frequently overlooked facet of knowledge sharing concerns the role of receiver knowledge needs and behaviours in sharer beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours (Dixon 2002; Hendriks 1999; 2004). For receivers to access, retrieve, comprehend, and assimilate knowledge, sharers must possess and activate corresponding awareness, motivation, behaviour, and skills. Hendriks argues that “knowledge sharing is not seen as pushing packages of existing knowledge back and forth, but as a process that requires not only knowledge of the bringing party but also of the obtaining party” (Hendriks 2004, p. 6). So far, it is not well-understood whether and how sharers take note of receiver knowledge needs and behaviours when making knowledge sharing choices in organisational settings, particularly when knowledge technologies are available.

It is well-known that conflicting sharer-receiver needs may constrain knowledge sharing. Easterby-Smith et al. wrote recently, “... the time is ripe to start addressing learning and knowing in the light of inherent conflicts between shareholders’ goals, economic pressure, institutionalised professional interest and political agendas” (Easterby-Smith, Crossan & Nicolini 2000, p. 793). An emancipatory research approach (Habermas 1972) is needed to reveal understandings that are structured within power relations, paving the way for liberating transformations (Freire 1985; 2000). In this paper, we report some of the key findings from the first stage of a large socio-technical study of intra-organisational knowledge sharing. Earlier findings are reported in (Hunter 2003; Lichtenstein et al 2004; Lichtenstein and Hunter 2005). This paper aims to understand how perceived receiver knowledge needs and behaviour may influence sharer beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour in knowledge sharing, in an organisational setting.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review four key perspectives on knowledge sharing, highlighting limitations from the viewpoint of receiver knowledge needs. We propose a receiver-based theory of knowledge sharing that addresses the dynamic relationship between sharers and receivers, and attempts to liberate receivers from dependence on sharer agendas and misperceptions. Next, we summarise the research methodology and present findings from two case studies, providing a set of key receiver-based influences on knowledge sharing. Finally, implications are discussed, conclusions drawn, limitations outlined and further research proposed.

## 2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this section, we review four contemporary perspectives on knowledge sharing and discuss their limitations from a receiver perspective. A receiver-based theory of knowledge sharing is then developed.

### 2.1 Contemporary perspectives on knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is a complex process involving the contribution of knowledge by the organisation or its people, and the collection, assimilation, and application of knowledge by the organisation or its people (Hendriks 2004; Huysman & De Wit 2002). Four key perspectives on knowledge sharing are codification, personalisation, community, and power.

*Codification* proposes that certain types of knowledge (explicit knowledge) can be codified and stored, and later retrieved, reconstructed, and assimilated by receivers (Hansen et al. 1999). Critics argue, however, that explicit knowledge cannot represent the valuable tacit knowledge that receivers often

need (Tsoukas 2003) and reduces learning opportunities (Swan et al. 2002). Receiver needs may be unmet due to poor findability or low quality content (Kautz & Mahnke 2003). Due to network effects where content and critical mass of users deteriorate, receivers may find little value in such repositories (Bansler & Havn 2004). In *personalisation*, knowledge sharing is interactive (Hansen et al. 1999), facilitating meaning negotiation and stimulating knowledge creation, knowledge integration, and learning (Koschmann 1999; Swan et al. 2002). Issues for receivers include sharer motivation, difficulties locating experts, and cognitive problems in interpretation (Hinds & Pfeffer 2003). In the *community* perspective, knowledge exists only in terms of the community which produces, shares, and applies it (Wenger et al. 2002). Knowledge is formative, socially constructed, and comprises a shared understanding that can be translated by receivers into action and enhanced performance. Receiver concerns include information overload, time commitment, and domination by individuals (Wenger et al. 2002). A fourth perspective conceives knowledge sharing in terms of the *power* thus transferred. Sharers may hoard knowledge in order to preserve status and position (cf. Husted & Michailova 2002; Hall 2004). Plato's view was that power should be shared according to the prevailing hierarchy so as to maintain the most apt leaders (Quinn 1998). However, Freire advocates non-discriminatory sharing in pursuit of social equality (Freire 1985). In organisations, management of power issues can reduce such filters and enable more democratic distribution of knowledge.

A range of ICTs is available to support knowledge sharing – for example, portals, intranets, email, and groupware. Such technologies can provide access to stored knowledge, connect sharers and receivers for sharing and collaboration (e.g. communities of practice), and support business process improvement. An intranet is an example of a popular knowledge technology, with receiver difficulties including search and navigation, low quality content, information/knowledge overload, knowledge silos, and insufficient context (Edwards & Shaw 2004; Kautz & Mahnke 2003; Stenmark & Lindgren 2004).

## **2.2 Receiver-based perspective of knowledge sharing**

Receiver knowledge needs and behaviours may deeply impact the effectiveness of knowledge sharing (Dixon 2002). We argue that sharers form beliefs and attitudes about receiver knowledge needs and behaviours, based on perceptions, and act accordingly (c.f. Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). Illustrating this effect, the knowledge sharing behaviour of individuals was predicted from beliefs and attitudes in a recent study (Bock & Kim 2002). We next describe a processual model of knowledge sharing that highlights individual sharer and receiver actions and interactions, and that presupposes receiver feedback of knowledge-related needs and behaviours to the sharer. Sharer perceptions of such feedback influence sharer choices. Hendriks (2004) offers a structured processual model of knowledge sharing that facilitates an examination of the potential role of a receiver in sharer choices. The model assumes a person in possession of knowledge (sharer), and includes five steps. In (Lichtenstein & Hunter 2005), we adapted Hendriks' model and added a sixth step representing the receiver perspective, as shown in Figure 1 and described below.

Step 1 – *awareness of value of knowledge to others* – recognises that sharers must initially become aware that they possess knowledge of value to others. For example, sharers may be influenced by a receiver's specialised job role or team function. They may also be alerted by an inquiry (Neve 2003) or by an information architecture designed from a knowledge audit (White 2003).

In Step 2 – *brings knowledge* – a sharer offers knowledge after making a decision to share it with one or more receivers. Motivation is needed to interest a sharer in the offering of knowledge. Rewards and incentives, and cooperative goals and cultures, may prove helpful (Cabrera & Cabrera 2002; Hall 2001; Hinds & Pfeffer 2003). However, motivation can be hindered by a competitive culture or hierarchical organisational structure (Huysman & De Wit 2002; Husted & Michailova 2002). Receiver knowledge needs and behaviour can affect sharer motivation. For example, receiver use of shared knowledge can motivate a sharer to share more of that type of knowledge (Hall 2001). Good relationships and trust can also stimulate sharing (Andrews & Delahaye 2000; Hall 2001; Husted & Michailova 2002). Asking

questions may motivate sharing (Neve 2003) as may a knowledge exchange (Kilduff & Tsai 2003). Perceived receiver access privileges influences the sharing of sensitive knowledge (Hall 2001).

Step 3 – *transfer of knowledge* – involves sharer channel choice and receiver access, location, and retrieval of knowledge. Yeung and colleagues (1999) highlight how a sharer with good teaching skills and awareness of the cognitive capacity of receivers can structure knowledge during interaction, facilitating learning. Sharers may choose to transmit knowledge by channels known to be attended by receivers (Straub & Karahanna 1998). Affecting this choice are emerging organisational environments of resource shortages, information overload, shrinking employee attention, and self-managing teams. In such settings, worker commitments are increasingly negotiated, rather than directed (Church & Burke 1993). Such changes influence the time available to share or receive, and the channels chosen for knowledge sharing. For example, email was identified in a recent study as the most popular organisational communication tool (Edwards & Shaw 2004). Sharers may observe that they can reach their target audience by email, and so choose that medium.

In Step 4 – *receiver acquires knowledge* – a receiver internalises shared knowledge by understanding, adapting, and re-creating knowledge for use in local contexts. According to the theory of dialogical communication (Freire 2000), knowledge is the result of individual inquiry, and thus receiver needs and behaviour are the focus of knowledge sharing, rather than sharer needs. The sharer (teacher) must step into the receiver’s (learner) world, transcending the traditional perspective that she knows everything while the receiver knows nothing and that her view must be imposed on the receiver in order for knowledge to be transferred. A key point is that the sharer must focus on what the receiver needs and does, for effective learning to take place. There can be a clash of perspectives and cognition. This lack of related knowledge can lead a receiver to experience difficulties comprehending and assimilating shared knowledge (Dixon 2002). In the event of a gap, a dialogical process (such as Freire’s dialogical communication theory) may be able to negotiate the distance.

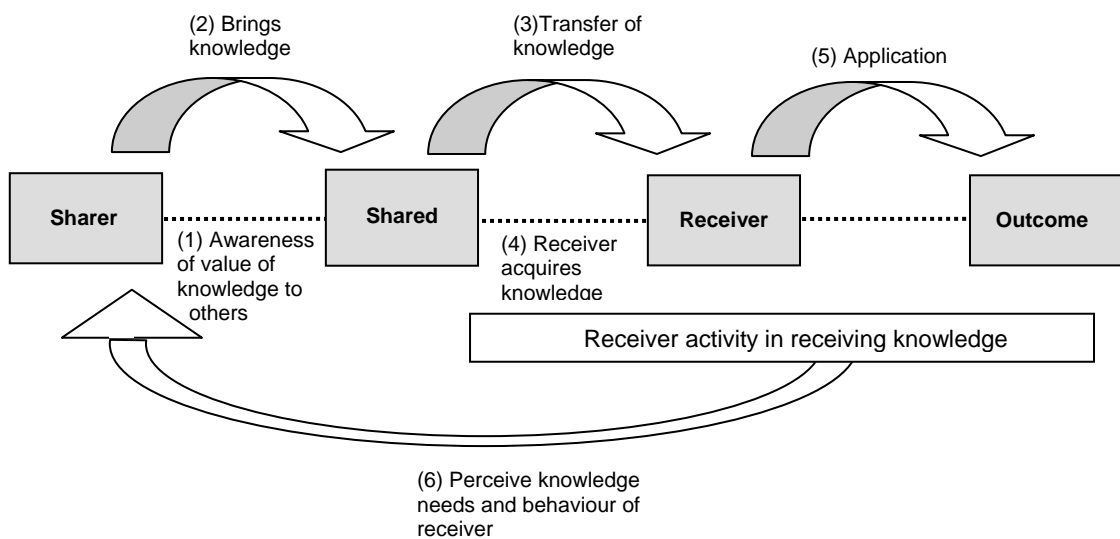


Figure 1: A simplified receiver-based model of knowledge sharing (Lichtenstein & Hunter, 2005)

In Step 5 – *application* – internalised knowledge increases in value when applied usefully in a work context. Knowing or believing that the knowledge has been usefully applied has been found to motivate sharers to share further (Hall 2001). Sharers may wish to improve team and individual performance (Clemmer 1995). On the other hand, sharers may be wary of giving away power as transferred knowledge may be applied to harm them (Husted & Michailova 2002).

In Step 6 – *perceive receiver knowledge needs and behaviours* – receiver knowledge needs and behaviours are perceived by sharers whose beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours are shaped, accordingly. To illustrate how Step 6 integrates with the other steps, four examples follow that revisit the discussion

above. First, a sharer may become aware of the value of her knowledge to others via questions and other displays of interest. Second, a sharer may consider whether a receiver needs to know something, or desires to know something, based on perceptions of that receiver's specialised job role or team function, or through an inquiry. Third, shared knowledge may be aligned with receivers' knowledge needs according to the design of the information architecture of a codified repository if that design was based on a knowledge audit of receiver needs. Fourth, a sharer may receive feedback in the form of a knowledge exchange that leads to a decision to share. Many more examples of influential feedback available from receivers can be found in the discussions of Step 1 to 5, above.

In practice, there is likely to be a range of ways that sharers develop beliefs and attitudes about receiver knowledge needs and behaviours. We explore these ways empirically, however first we introduce the research methodology for the study.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

This study used a qualitative exploratory case study design. Two case studies were conducted in the first stage of the research project as there was a scarcity of in depth empirical studies or recognised theories at the time this project commenced (Galliers 1992). In the ensuing description, all names are fictitious. The research was carried out at a large Australian retail organisation, OzRetail, and at the Australian headquarters of a large multinational information technology corporation, GloTech. At the time of study, GloTech had a large formal knowledge management initiative globally while OzRetail's knowledge sharing ventures were local responses to emerging needs. This difference provided an opportunity to identify and explore related issues.

The units studied at each company comprised the Web services and marketing teams at GloTech; the change control, production, development and testing teams at OzRetail; and relevant team leaders and managers. Thus the views of people with a very good understanding of ICTs and related issues were tapped. By mainly interviewing people with strong technical backgrounds, we were better able to focus on a range of interacting issues, capturing technical, socio-technical and non-technical influences.

The main data collected and analysed comprised seventeen audio-taped, semi-structured, single interviews of an hour's duration in July 2003 – October 2003. We also observed several meetings, conducted observations of knowledge sharing venues and knowledge technology use, and collected relevant documents. The interview questions were based on five main areas: knowledge sharing practices; ICT utilisation for knowledge sharing, motivators and inhibitors in knowledge sharing; knowledge sharing choices, and organisational culture. Key questions probed the decision to share (or not share) knowledge with receivers (including codified and personalised strategies), individual rationale for the selection of channels for sharing knowledge, and issues that motivated or limited knowledge sharing. While technical and organisational issues were identified (Hunter 2003; Lichtenstein et al. 2004), more than seventy per cent of responses that addressed motivational and behavioural factors involved receivers. This discovery led to a more focused study of the receiver-based issues in the data. An example of a question that revealed the impact of receivers on sharer choices was: "When do you share knowledge with others? What are the triggers?" Responses involving receivers enabled us to identify strong connections between sharer beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and perceived receiver knowledge needs and behaviours.

Coded categories and concepts discovered in the interview transcripts were inductively developed from a content analysis (Mayring 2000) of the interview transcripts that focused on identifying receiver-based issues in knowledge sharing, as suggested by the receiver-based model of knowledge sharing (Figure 1) and related theoretical concepts from the literature. Concepts evolved to conclusive states over iterative readings, and were grouped into themes at the end of analysis. Additional insights gained from observations and documents were used for validation and enhancement of the themes identified.

## 4 KNOWLEDGE SHARING AT GLOTECH AND OZRETAIL

In this section, background on knowledge sharing in the two case study organisations is provided. At GloTech's Australian head office, the knowledge sharing culture was team-based, with many teams owning and publishing to intranets that shared business processes or corporate news, sometimes with the assistance of the Web services team. The intranets studied were non-interactive, and most people did not read other teams' intranets, finding them irrelevant, and difficult to navigate or understand. Personalised knowledge sharing mainly took place within teams or units, either face-to-face, by email, or in meetings. Given high employee mobility and the use of contractors, relationships were relatively undeveloped and there was reduced interaction with part-time or short term contractors and people in apparently unrelated teams. No incentives were offered for sharing knowledge. Overall, the organisational culture was not particularly positive towards knowledge-sharing.

OzRetail was relatively inexperienced with knowledge technologies, having deployed intranets for only two years. There were no formal knowledge management initiatives. Most intranets had evolved from team motivation and were team-oriented. The three technical teams studied worked closely together to develop and maintain applications, yet maintained separate intranets storing and reusing business processes. Intranets were non-interactive, with personalised knowledge sharing mainly taking place within teams or units, either face-to-face, by email, or in meetings. No incentives were offered for knowledge sharing. Many study participants had worked at OzRetail for five to twenty years and thus had established social relationships with others both within and across teams. While most knowledge was still shared within teams, there was greater inter-team sharing than at GloTech because of these relationships. However, the organisational culture had been affected by a number of recent restructures over the previous decade, which had instilled some guardedness in knowledge sharing.

## 5 RECEIVER INFLUENCES ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING

An empirical study of the concepts represented by the receiver-based model of knowledge sharing (Figure 1) led to the emergence of a set of key receiver-based influences on knowledge sharing, comprising receiver issues influencing sharer beliefs and behaviour (Table 1) and sharer issues influencing sharer beliefs and behaviour (Table 2). As mentioned earlier, attitudes are good predictors of intentions and behaviour, and sharers often reported their behaviour as well as their attitudes in interviews, with consistency observed. In the discussions of receiver influences that follow, we highlight the issues by providing the voices of participants. We commence by discussing the receiver-based influences on knowledge sharing, arising from receiver issues (Table 1).

### 5.1 Need to know (*signal need to know; specialised job role; inquiry*)

The main receiver-based reason given for sharing knowledge was the sharer's perception of a receiver's need-to-know. A default position for most sharers was that colleagues did not need their knowledge unless a *signal* was given. For example, participants mentioned that they had stored various idiosyncratic tips, guidelines, and solutions of potential use to others, on their personal computers. No interest had been shown in these by others, who also had no knowledge of their existence. Sharer perception of receiver need-to-know was mostly founded on *specialised job role*:

This content should not be shared with any other team such as Marketing as it not relevant to their work. [Web developer]

However, if a receiver made an *inquiry*, this signalled a need to know:

Unless there was a specific question, I would not normally share. [Developer]

Importantly, sharers indicated that although they would certainly share by management directive, it was other colleagues' needs that provided the greater stimulus:

I would rather share knowledge with people when there is a need for them to know, whereas if my manager tells me to document things [for reuse], I might not agree with what she perceives as being important. [Web developer]

## 5.2 Desire to know (*attitude, prior relationship, exchange*)

A sign of a receiver's desire to know was important to sharer choices. A receiver's attitude of enjoyment, enthusiasm or interest signalled such desire, as did any interest shown in learning.

A person's enthusiasm to learn affects how much knowledge I will share with them.  
[Systems Engineer]

A *prior relationship* enabled a sharer to show that she was interested in receiver knowledge.

I would tell colleagues, or whoever I thought would be interested (about my knowledge).  
[Tester]

An *exchange* with receivers for something of value such as recognition was motivational:

I would share my knowledge more if I did receive more recognition. [Tester]

Need Receiver Issue	Sub-issue	Description
Need to know	Signal need-to-know	- Receiver gives signal when she needs knowledge
	Specialised job role	- Receiver specialised job role indicates need-to- know
	Inquiry	- Receiver asks questions
Desire to know	Attitude	- Receiver shows interest in sharer knowledge - Receiver shows interest in learning
	Prior relationship	- Good relationship exists between sharer and receiver
	Exchange	- Receiver shared knowledge previously - Previous recognition given by receiver to sharer
Accessibility	Cognitive capacity	- Receiver lacks relative absorptive capacity - Receiver cannot absorb unlimited knowledge
	Channel access	- Receiver channel attendance
	Resources	- Receiver lacks time to listen to or learn knowledge
Anticipated use	Performance	- Receiver / team performance needs improvement
	Altruism	- Receiver deserves compassion and help
	Power	- Receiver competes through knowledge acquisition

Table 1: Receiver issues influencing sharer beliefs and behaviour (Case study findings)

## 5.3 Accessibility (*cognitive capacity, channel access, resources*)

Sharers cared about whether others could access their shared knowledge. *Cognitive capacity* was an important inhibitor - for example, when prerequisites were missing:

... if they don't know the basics, then it is pointless for me to share my more advanced knowledge with them. [Systems Engineer]

The absence of context was also a cognitive barrier:

"Any information that I keep for myself in my own notes, would probably only be interpretable by me, because I wrote them down and I know the context in which they were written." [Intranet developer]

Sharers generally heeded the *channel access* where receiver attendance was expected:

If you send an email to a group with a new idea, most people seem to dismiss it as spam, so if you put the knowledge on the intranet and provide a link in an email, that would be more effective. [Web developer]

However, time-sensitivity and audience size were also influential in sharer channel choices:

If there is something that is urgent that the group needs to know about, it's either sent through emails, or basically, we just turn around and talk to our team. [Web developer]

and

The intranet is really only for very high level information or information that is important to a lot of different people [Marketing publisher]

Importantly, email had been appropriated to secure receiver accountability and commitment:  
 I can go back and follow up if nothing is done with the arrangements made in email.  
 [Marketing publisher]

Whether receivers possessed the *resources* to access sharer knowledge mattered in choices:  
 If everybody is really busy and there are too many projects being worked on, I will hold back my knowledge until the time is right. [Team leader]

#### 5.4 Anticipated use (*Performance, altruism, power*)

Whether the receiver could use the sharer's knowledge to good effect was motivational, while any perceived harmful use of the knowledge had the opposite effect. Team, individual, and company *performance* were often considered by sharers:

... all the members of the team should have a common knowledge base so that the team can progress faster and improve their skills. [Intranet developer]

Many sharers were compassionate and *altruistic* towards receivers:

I share my knowledge with people because people need help, and if I can help them, then I will help them because it seems like the right thing to do. [Team leader]

Some sharers thought that receivers may abuse the *power* gained through shared knowledge:  
 Others want to get involved early if you let them know things beforehand.  
 [Web developer]

We now discuss receiver-based influences on knowledge sharing, arising from sharer issues (Table 2).

Sharer Issue	Sub-issue	Description
Interruption	Interruptive receiver	- Sharer does not wish to be disturbed by a receiver who needs knowledge
Resources	Lack of resources	- Sharer lacks resources to accommodate demanding receivers
Altruism	Self-actualisation	- Sharer feels self-actualised when receiver is helped
Security	Confidentiality	- Receiver should not have certain knowledge as it is confidential
Power	Hierarchy	- Sharer hoards knowledge to retain position

Table 2: Sharer issues influencing sharer beliefs and behaviour (Case study findings)

#### 5.5 Interruption (*interruptive receiver*)

A few sharers shared knowledge in order to avoid future interruptions:

If I am constantly being asked the same information regularly, I will publish it to the intranet to get people to leave me alone to complete my more pending daily tasks.  
 [Intranet developer]

#### 5.6 Resources (*lack of resources*)

Receivers did not wish to disturb busy sharers, thus limiting sharing:

If everyone is really busy and does not have the time to help me, then I will look up the instructions site. [Developer]

#### 5.7 Altruism (*self-actualisation*)

Sharers shared as a form of self-actualisation:

I do feel a sense of intrinsic reward, I guess, when Joe is using Secure Copy. [Developer]

#### 5.8 Security (*confidentiality*)

Perceived confidentiality of selected knowledge inhibited knowledge sharing:

.. if the information I am telling them might infringe on GloTech's security or privacy policy, then I will not share that knowledge [Web developer]

### **5.9 Power (*hierarchy*)**

Sharers shared knowledge mainly in line with their job positions, demonstrating a desire to maintain the status quo and reinforce the prevailing hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, sharers were also aware of potential power issues if knowledge was shared when projects or details were not yet finalised.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

We discuss in this section four key findings and their implications for companies aiming for more effective internal knowledge sharing. First, it was interesting to discover that sharers, in the course of their workday, were making quite complex sharing decisions on their own, when so many important factors weighed into these decisions. Apparently, the issues were quickly and perhaps even subconsciously considered in practice, and their consideration and outcome had more or less become routine. There was little evidence of managerial direction in any of the influences identified, other than the security influence, where participants referred to formal access restrictions placed on some categories of knowledge such as activities occurring behind the scenes at higher levels in restructure decision-making processes at OzRetail. The personal decision-making that was found corresponds to the high levels of self-management and autonomy in the teams studied. Given that companies see advantages in continuing to empower employees, solutions to similar situations elsewhere would not seem to lie in providing greater direction through management, but rather through other measures such as education and awareness, improved communication, and attention to different use of technologies to more effectively connect sharers with receiver needs.

Second, the emergence of two subsets of influences – one stemming from receiver needs and the other stemming from sharer issues – presents an interesting picture. Apart from altruistic feelings when helping others, sharers' main concerns appeared to be about controlling knowledge flow in order to preserve personal resources (notably, time) and the status quo. However, these concerns were tempered under certain conditions, discussed next.

A third key finding was that a sharer appears to rely on her belief about whether a receiver needs or wants her knowledge, before choosing to share. To form this belief, a sharer will rely to a significant extent on personal perceptions of receiver job roles, specialisation, and specific cues such as inquiries. The default sharer belief is that receivers do not need or want her knowledge, and thus the default attitude and behaviour is not to share. A related finding is that power can be manifested through such beliefs and attitudes, as existing hierarchies and power structures tend to be preserved (as was found in the two case studies). Workers possessing an integrated understanding can maintain the status quo, keeping those workers with only fragmented knowledge in positions where they are unable to progress. Clearly, this unnecessary restriction of knowledge needs to change, as we take up again in the final section of this paper.

In a fourth key finding, this study suggests that currently, a sharer develops a belief about whether a receiver is interested in her knowledge or is able to learn and apply it, prior to choosing to share it, using receiver cues such as enthusiasm and interest in learning. Moreover, many sharers are interested in actively participating in a receiver's learning processes. Thus, when a codified medium such as an intranet is present and applied in a static way, an important reason that it is under-utilised for knowledge sharing is the absence of a feedback loop from receiver to sharer and sharer to receiver. Implications from this finding are that new ways are needed to enable receivers and sharers to engage more effectively in dialogue and other collaborative learning processes in which the sharer catalyses receiver learning, using approaches such as communities of practice.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Understanding the influences that receivers have on the entire knowledge sharing process is an important consideration for knowledge sharing theory and practice. This paper has attempted to understand these influences and has described a new theoretical approach – receiver-based theory of knowledge sharing. A model of receiver-based knowledge sharing (Figure 1) based on existing literature was presented and demonstrated through an empirical study of knowledge sharing for several teams in two large companies. The findings include a set of key receiver influences on knowledge sharing (Table 1 and Table 2). These findings suggest that perceived receiver knowledge needs and behaviour are important motivators and inhibitors in intra-organisational knowledge sharing. The receiver influences have illuminated specific areas that can be addressed by companies to improve knowledge sharing so that receiver knowledge needs may be better met.

This paper suggests that for companies to obtain more effective knowledge sharing, they must move away from a sharing paradigm of “need-to-know” (see findings of 9/11Comm 2004). As the 9/11 Commission recently discovered, it is not enough to share only with people who need to know. Organisations must share more freely so that valuable isolated knowledge can be integrated and synthesised, highlighting patterns suggesting important issues and potential solutions, and developing more empowered employees. This shift may lead to sharers proactively seeking out key receivers with the capacity to integrate and legitimately leverage available knowledge.

Clearly, the theory presented in this paper has limitations and requires further exploration. Receiver theory is currently a preliminary theory and should be further explored. The receiver-based knowledge sharing model (Figure 1) can be compared with other knowledge sharing models in order to determine its advantages and disadvantages, and can be explored further through empirical study. Research to explore how this model relates to other theories may prove useful. The set of receiver influences on knowledge sharing (Table 1 and Table 2) is also limited, having been developed from only two case studies set in a wider study of knowledge sharing. Thus, while excellent context was provided for this study, the data sets used were limited. Richer data sets could be captured through more focused empirical studies of receiver influences on sharer choices, while the individual issues in Tables 1 and 2 can be separately explored and re-integrated into receiver theory.

To conclude, this study suggests that sharers tend to share knowledge based on their perceptions of receiver job role, cues, channels used, performance, and other indicators. However, such perceptions may well be misperceptions and not consistent with the facts. Moreover, sharers have their own agendas which may conflict with those of receivers. It is suggested that companies develop better ways to connect potential sharers to *real* receiver knowledge needs, while paying careful attention to the political, cultural, strategic, technical, and social issues identified in this paper.

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