Exploring Tacit Knowledge Sharing Among Employees in Public Organizations in Vietnam

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore how tacit knowledge sharing is shared among employees in public sector in Vietnam context.

Design/Methodology/Approach - Interpretivism philosophy and qualitative research approach were adopted. Semi-structured interviews and document review were used for data collection.

Findings – The results reveal that due to the importance of non-verbal communication and personal interaction in Vietnamese culture, employees prefer sharing tacit knowledge through face-to-face interaction. Additionally, as trust and relationship are highly valued, tacit knowledge sharing requires two-way trust relationship from both knowledge sharer and knowledge receiver.

Research limitations/implications – As this study involves participants from Danang public sector, the findings might be influenced by unique characteristics of this particular context. However, this research has an important practical implication for both public organizations looking for improving knowledge-sharing capabilities of their employees, and international business planning to expand operations in Vietnam.

Originality/Value – Given the predominance of knowledge sharing literature in western countries and private companies, this study contributes to fill the gap in literature by providing empirical evidence of the influence of national culture on knowledge sharing behaviors in Vietnamese public sector. This study will also bring attention to tacit knowledge in Vietnamese culture.

Keywords: *Knowledge sharing, tacit knowledge, communication, cultural values.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Background and Statement of the problem

Nowadays, knowledge has been widely recognized as a valuable asset, not only for individuals but also for organization and society (Tangaraja et al., 2015). The growth of an organization strongly depends on its people's ability to learn new knowledge, exchange value insights and utilize its collective asset. For this reason, knowledge sharing become the central focus of knowledge management cycle and gain significant attention from both researchers and practitioners (Yesil and Dereli, 2013).

Knowledge sharing (KS) is defined as the dissemination and exchange of information, insights, practical intelligence with others (Jackson et al., 2006). At individual level, frequent KS activities enable employees to access to the right information at the right

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time. Moreover, it enhances their performance by avoiding repetitive mistakes and generating creative solutions. At organization level, the outcome of efficient knowledge sharing is even greater. It improves the speed of service delivery, team collaboration and innovation capability (Yusof et al., 2012), therefore contributes to organizational competitive advantage and sustainable development. Accordingly, organizations have continuously put effort in improving information systems, KS programs and building supportive culture to foster regular knowledge exchange (Tangaraja et al., 2015).

It is undeniable that KS is necessary for both private sector and public sector. Unfortunately, past studies focus mainly on private organizations, while the interest in investigating KS practices in public sector is limited. In fact, public sector has experienced great change over the last decades. Today, public-sector organizations are perceived as knowledge-intensive organizations that act on the behalf of central government and decide impactful social policies (Yusof et al., 2012). It is significantly essential for public sector employees to capture valuable experience with regular knowledge flows within organizations, especially when their competent employees leave. Additionally, public sector and private sector are different in management modes, structure, political influence and budget (Luen and Al-Hawamdeh, 2001), thus knowledge sharing in public sector requires sufficient attention from researchers. For above reasons, more empirical evidence in this area is essential to enable insights into KS practices and strategies to foster KS culture in public organizations.

Despite the importance of knowledge sharing, understanding and facilitating knowledge sharing behaviors within organizations has never been an easy job (Tangaraja et al., 2015). As knowledge is commonly viewed as individual's unique competence, employees might be reluctant to participate into open discussion and even hide what they know (Chen and Mohamed, 2010). Without efficient and regular knowledge sharing, organizations will consequently suffer knowledge loss and reduced capability for innovation (Yusof et al., 2012). Therefore, organizations are required to acknowledge how different factors influencing knowledge sharing behaviors in order to minimize negative effects and foster the right behaviours. While this issue has been commonly examined in western societies, it is still under-researched in Asian context, particularly in emerging economies such as Vietnam. Moreover, as Cohen (1998) clarified, the east and the west have different knowledge perspectives that affect their ways of thinking and behaving. While the western countries emphasized the value of explicit knowledge, eastern countries focus on the creation and exchange of tacit knowledge (Cohen, 1998). Therefore, it is particularly essential to explore tacit knowledge sharing behaviors in Vietnam context.

Research purpose and research questions

This study aims to investigate knowledge sharing behaviours in Vietnamese public sector.

1. What are the preferred methods of sharing tacit knowledge among employees in the public sector in Vietnam context?

2. How do cultural values and trust affect the willingness of employees in the public sector in Vietnam to share tacit knowledge?

Significance of this study

This study addresses a significant research gap by examining how tacit knowledge is shared among employees in public organizations in Vietnam. It contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of the influence of cultural values and trust on tacit knowledge sharing behaviors in the public sector of Vietnam, a developing country. By focusing on non-Western knowledge sharing behaviors, the study enhances our understanding beyond existing research that primarily focuses on Western countries and the private sector. Additionally, this study emphasizes the importance of tacit knowledge, particularly within Asian culture, and specifically focuses on tacit knowledge sharing. By

differentiating tacit knowledge from explicit knowledge, the study offers valuable insights into the unique dynamics of knowledge sharing behaviors in the public sector in Vietnam. Practically, the findings of this study can inform public organizations in Vietnam and similar contexts, helping them improve their knowledge sharing strategies and foster a culture of knowledge exchange. Consequently, it offers valuable insights to reduce knowledge hiding behaviors, capture employees' competencies, and contribute to both Knowledge Management and human resource management practices. Furthermore, it assists international businesses operating in Vietnam by fostering a better understanding of the cultural context and promoting a supportive knowledge-sharing climate.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge sharing

Many researchers and practitioners have paid significant attention to this concept over the last decades and viewed KS as an indispensable part of knowledge management cycle (Yesil and Dereli, 2013; Chen and Mohamed, 2010, Yi, 2009). According to Jackson et al. (2006), KS is a process of communication that individuals contribute to knowledge generation and application. Although the concept of knowledge sharing and information sharing are sometimes used interchangeably, these concepts are actually different (Savolainen, 2017). While information is related to hard data that requires individual interpretation for meaningful application, knowledge is related to experience, insights and skills (Argote and Ingram, 2000, Lucas, 2005). Knowledge sharing requires more than just conveying information to another party. It involves collaboration from both parties to gain insightful meaning on what is said before jointly generating new set of skills or competencies (Senge, 1997). In fact, it is suggested by literature that knowledge sharing can be unidirectional, bidirectional or multidirectional (Tangaraja et al, 2016). Knowledge is shared unidirectionally when the knowledge flows in one single direction from the knowledge provider to knowledge receiver (Tangaraja et al, 2016). Meanwhile, bidirectional and multidirectional knowledge sharing involves a process of mutual exchange of experience and ideas among different parties, thus facilitates mutual contribution and development of new capabilities (van den Hooff and de Ridder, 2004).

Tacit knowledge sharing

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), there are two types of knowledge including explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. While the former referred as know-what which exists in symbolic or written form such as documents, reports, databases, the latter is the internal knowledge of the mind (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). For example, tacit knowledge involves know-how, personal experiences, professional insights or practical intelligence which are rooted deeply in the worldview of individuals (Koskinen et al., 2003). Haldin-Herrgard (2000) and Serrat (2017) used an iceberg as an interesting metaph or to explain those types of knowledge. The top visible part of the iceberg is explicit knowledge which is easily recognized, codified and disseminated. Meanwhile, the invisible "below the surface" part of this iceberg is difficult to see, measure and express but highly valuable (Serrat, 2017). Even though both types benefit organizations, researchers considered tacit knowledge to be more strategically important (Chen and Mohamed, 2010). As revealed by Brockman and Anthony (1998), although explicit type provides employees with clear instructions and resource to perform their tasks well, intangible tacit knowledge is the key to innovation, collaboration and competitive advantage.

There are several additional features of tacit knowledge revealed by prior researchers. Firstly, people obtain it through personal effort, experiences, observation and learning by doing, thus it is subjective and highly context-specific (McAdam et al., 2007). Secondly, it resides in people' head, thus requires more time and resources to be communicated with

others, compared to explicit knowledge (Nonaka et al., 2000). Thirdly, it might be subconsciously understood and acquired (Polanyi, 1966). It was further suggested by Polanyi (1966) that individuals must first be conscious of their practical intelligence or experience-based knowledge before seeking the ways to communicate it. In other words, without knowledge holder's recognition, tacit knowledge cannot be shared. Several ways of sharing this type of knowledge were mentioned by researchers such as conversation, storytelling, community of practice, mentoring, networking, suggestion schemes and so on (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Haldin-Herrgard 2000). Since major knowledge within organization is tacit. This implies that a great amount of intelligent capitals of organizations are in hidden storehouse.

Factors affecting knowledge sharing behaviours

In fact, sharing and capturing tacit knowledge within organization is a complex issue. As many employees might not be willing to share their rules of thumb or practical intelligence, they might involve in knowledge hiding and knowledge hoarding behaviors, which result in low performance efficiency and time waste for recreating information (Tangaraja et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to examine various factors contributing to knowledge sharing behaviours within organizations.

Prior researches suggested several factors that might affect knowledge sharing behaviours or create barrier for broadening the scope of existing knowledge. These factors vary from individual level such as communication skill, self-esteem, background to organizational level such as leadership support, performance management system, organizational resources (Noaman and Fouad, 2014). Besides, Riege (2005) further suggested technological factors such as the rejection of application's usage, difficulty in establishing IT system, availability of technical support. Although there are proliferated empirical evidence on how KS is impacted by individual's characteristics, communication technologies, and organization culture, there is much less on national culture, especially in Asian context (Riege, 2005). Investigating how tacit knowledge is shared and how cutlural values, trust impact its practice will help to have derive people's behaviors' meaning from cultural perspective and improve knowledge management with better cultural awareness. Therefore, this research will aim to examine this issue relation to Vietnam cultural context.

National Culture

Although national culture has great influence on individual's attitudes and behaviors in a country, it remains a complicated concept with many invisible aspects. According to Ting-Toomey (1999), culture is a complex set of norms, behaviors, beliefs, and standards shared by a group of people. It consists of a shared perceptions and values which can be expressed through symbols, language, rituals (Matsumoto, 1996). In other words, national culture is perceived to strongly influence individuals' feelings, attitudes, ways of thinking and doing, as well as acts as guiding principles in people's lives (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961). Accordingly, how people process information, communicate, react to different issues is impacted by their cultural attributes (Hall, 1987).

Hofstede was among the first scholars who developed cultural dimensions in quantifiable terms (Fang, 2006). His model was well-documented in the literature and contributed to understand value differences in various societies. It also explained how these values impact people's work and lives. There are six dimensions in this study including (1) Power distance; (2) Individualism – Collectivism; (3) Uncertainty avoidance; (4) Masculinity – Femininity; (5) Long-term – Short term orientation; (6) Indulgence. Each dimension is viewed at the opposite ends of a scale ranging from low to high (Hofstede, 1997). Noticeably, they are not used as a tool to evaluate which group of people is better or superior. Instead, these dimensions are used to demonstrate how different cultural values are in term of people's preference, attitudes, behavioural patterns (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Despite its popularity, Hofstede's cultural dimensions reveal several gaps and shortcomings. Firstly, it seems to oversimplify cultural values by using only six dimensions to compare and contrast different countries (Minkov et al., 2017). In fact, culture is a broader and complex concept, thus six dimensions are insufficient to provide a complete view of cultural aspects (Jones, 2007). Therefore, additional dimensions should be considered to allow a more comprehensive interpretation of cultural values. Secondly, the use of survey as the only method in researching cultural dimensions is not reliable and appropriate. According to prior researchers, cultural value is subjective, intangible, thus cannot be measured by numeric scales (McSweeney, 2002). Furthermore, the data was collected from individuals in a single organization but the findings was generalized into cultural values of nations (McSweeney, 2002). As a result, the findings from Hofstede's study might not be reliable, particularly when it could be affected by factors unique to organizational culture and policies (Olie, 1995). More importantly, the culture does not remain constant over time. In fact, it can change and evolve in accordance with global changing environment (Minkov et al., 2017). Therefore, his dimensions and associated scores for different countries might not be updated and relevant anymore (Jones, 2007).

Hall's cultural theory

Hall's theory, which distinguishes high-context and low-context culture, is one of the most important theories in cross-cultural literature (Nardon and Steers, 2009). With a focus on communication pattern, this theory differentiates national cultures based on the way people communicate and process information. The high-context culture involves following communication characteristics: high emphasis on context, extensive use of non-verbal cues, tendency for indirect and implicit communication (Kittler et al., 2011). For example, high-context communicators tend to use a range of facial expressions, gestures, silences, body languages, voice, to convey the real message to others. As their intention and feelings are commonly expressed indirectly, listeners are required to read between lines to fully acquire the meaning of unspoken messages (Tung and Verbeke, 2010). In other words, communicators in this culture need to have regular face-to-face interaction and interpret the context surrounding the information, in order to decode the unspoken message and exchange thoughts. Particularly, high context culture is considered to have strong connection with collectivistic societies where members highly value relationship, group harmony (Hall, 1976). As a result, respectful ways of expression and interpersonal sensitivity are focused in communication (Hall, 1976). Example of this culture are Vietnam and Japan (Hall, 1976).

On the other hand, low-context culture involves linear communication, explicit and clear communication with less emphasis on non-verbal elements (Hall, 1976). Instead of considering the context significantly, people mainly rely on the content of explicit information conveyed through verbal communication or written documents (Tung and Verbeke, 2010). Therefore, explicit, simple, and task-related language are preferred. In this case, non-verbal aspects are not significant. According to Gudykunst (1993), low context culture can be seen to be more individualized because most of inner feelings and intentions are expressed explicitly and clearly. They are also less likely to use analogy and metaphor in communication. Particularly, they avoid exchanging message in implicit ways, compared to high-context members. Examples of this culture are America, Scandinavians (Hall and Hall, 1990).

Justification for the choice of Hall's theory

For the purpose of this study, Hall's theory will be useful to better understand how knowledge sharing behaviors are in Vietnam context. According to this theory, culture not only has significant impact on communication tendency and preference of people in daily lives, but also influence the way of processing, generating and transferring information to others (Hall and Hall, 1987). Because communication is an integral part of KS

behaviours, Hall's theory will help to explain knowledge sharing behaviours are impacted by culture. According to Hall (1976), Vietnam is viewed as a high-context culture, thus communication styles of high-context communicator will help to interpret how sharing behaviours in Vietnamese culture. Unlike other theories, Hall's cultural model directed his main attention to both verbal and non-verbal elements of communication. Therefore, it allows deeper understanding on why people expressed and interacted in certain ways.

Vietnamese cultural values

Over the past last decades, Vietnam has experienced significant transformation from a centrally planned to a market-driven economy (Fforde, and S. de Vylder, 1996). Particularly, after the broad economic reform in 1986, Vietnam has attracted more foreign investment, caught up with rapid changing technology and become one of the most dynamic emerging countries in East Asia (Clay, 2003). Similar to Japan, Korea, China, it is still strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy and considered to be a part of East Asian cultural sphere (Choi, 2010) with following characteristics.

A Vietnamese saying "the egg cannot be more clever than the duck" helped to illustrate the value of age in this society (Truong et al., 2017). In other words, the older people are respected for their wisdom, experience regardless of their job and situation (Truong et al., 2017). Secondly, Vietnam is regarded as a collectivist culture with a strong emphasis on collective values over individual interests (Whitmore, 1984). According to Nguyen (2016), Vietnamese people believe they are inter-dependent and a part of a larger community, thus they value the group harmony and well-being. Particularly, relationship, solidarity, trust and loyalty are nourished within their closer circles such as family, neighbours, work group, and nation, while conflicts are avoided and sensitive topic are preferred to be discussed in an indirect way. Additionally, concern for "face" plays a significant role in Vietnamese people's thinking and behaviors (McHale, 2002; Pham, 2014). Individuals gain face if they behave in the ways that are admired and appreciated by others. In a collectivist culture like Vietnam, people strive to have a good "face" not only for themselves but also for their families and other members of the community (Wescott, 2003). Actually, giving face to others can help to build long-term relationship in working environment (Hwang et al., 2003; Nguyen, 2002).

Limitation of existing literature & Contribution of this study

Unfortunately, there are still several gaps and limitations in the current literature that requires more attention from researchers and practitioners. Firstly, majority of studies on the link between cultural values and knowledge management heavily relied on Hofstede's work. When Hofstede assumed culture as a static phenomenon, the globalization and convergence actually influence the cultural values gradually over time (Minkov et al., 2017), making Hofstede's associated scores outdated. Additionally, as culture is complicated, subjective and consists of many invisible aspects of human lives, its values cannot be condensed into only six dimensions (Jones, 2007). For the purpose of this study, cultural values and its impact on KS behaviours would be investigated with exploratory approach to gain the insight into people's perceptions, experiences and interpretation in relation to their specific situations. Hall's cultural theory (1976) with a focus on communication pattern would be more beneficial to help researcher understand the ways of communicating and exchanging ideas.

Secondly, even though past literature emphasized KS importance, most studies were conducted in private sector organizations. Little attention given to public sector in KS literature can possibly be explained by its non-profit nature. However, it is undeniable that KS today is vital not only in private sector organizations but also in public organizations (Willem and Buelens, 2007) due to following reasons. Nowadays, public-sector organizations have been widely recognized as knowledge-intensive organizations where knowledge becomes the most valuable asset to overcome competition for resources, and deliver excellent service (Willem and Buelens, 2007). Additionally, public

sector plays a key role in proposing and determining social policies that affect people's living and economic development (Yusof et al., 2012). Therefore, it is significantly important to understand how employees in the public sector to exchange their valuable knowledge and transfer their competencies (McAdam and Reid, 2000). Moreover, public sector is different from private sector in political influence, hierarchy, authority, funding and policies (Luen and Al-Hawamdeh, 2001); thus the ways of sharing knowledge and the impact of various factors on KS behaviours within these contexts are different from private sector. Therefore, there is a great need for empirical research in this area.

Thirdly, it is noticeable that many studies investigated national culture and knowledge management by comparing practices in different national cultures such as China and Russia (Hutchings and Michailova, 2004;); USA and China (Chow et al., 2000; Siau et al., 2010); Russia, China and Brazil (Ardichvili et al., 2006). Meanwhile, the number of studies with the focus on the particularities of knowledge sharing practices in a single nation is limited. Instead of aiming for comparative purpose, this study would provide an insight into Vietnamese culture with a comprehensive picture of the context, the connection between different values in one national culture and its impact on people's behavours.

Finally, while researchers commonly study knowledge management and knowledge sharing in western countries (Cohen, 1998), the impact of national culture on KS has been under-investigated in the east side of the world. Due to Asia's significance in the global market and the demand for globalization, it is essential to examine knowledge sharing behaviours in Asia context, such as in Vietnam. Therefore, this study will contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of knowledge sharing in public sector in developing country suffering from mobility of high-competent employees, with a focus on tacit knowledge. It will help to derive the meaning of people's behaviors from cultural perspective.

Two research questions will be addressed in this study as follows:

1.   What are the preferred methods of sharing tacit knowledge among employees in the public sector in Vietnam context?

2.   How do cultural values and trust affect the willingness of employees in the public sector in Vietnam to share tacit knowledge.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

For this research, the interpretivism philosophy is chosen over positivism. Positivism aims for an objective social reality through quantifiable facts and generalization to a wider population (Bryman and Bell, 2003). However, this research focuses on human aspects that cannot be easily measured, such as inner thoughts, subjective experiences in Vietnamese context and the influence of cultural values on knowledge sharing behaviors. Therefore, adopting interpretivism allows capturing participants' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives within Vietnamese public sector organizations.

Qualitative approach

Due to the complexity and exploratory nature of the research problem, a qualitative approach is more appropriate. Unlike quantitative methods that rely on closed-end questions and numerical data, qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, motivations, and cultural values from different perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Culture and knowledge sharing are intricate phenomena that cannot be easily measured quantitatively. Thus, a qualitative approach enables the researcher to uncover rich and meaningful insights into people's experiences of

knowledge sharing. Although qualitative findings may be subjective and challenging to generalize, they provide valuable insights for exploring the issue in-depth (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Research context - Danang public sector organizations

Danang city, which is located at the central of Vietnam, is one of the five biggest cities under direct administration of Vietnamese government (General Statistics Office, 2021). It consists of many Departments and Governmental Agencies that focus on enactment of social policies, governments' service quality and political programs, such as Department of Home Affairs, Department of Labour, War invalids and social affairs, Department of Tourism, etc. Over the last decades, Danang government has committed to socio-economic development, implemented various social policies to restructure the economy and attract foreign investment (Danang Institute for Socio-Economic Development, 2016). Particularly, Danang government pays significant attention to human resource attraction and development with various HRD policies to attract and retain high-qualified officials and experts in public sector (Bui & Chang, 2018). While the government continuously improves e-government administration and communication between citizens and authorities, it is unclear how collaboration and knowledge sharing among public-sector employees are facilitated in public organizations. Very few researches conducted empirical research in Vietnam government context, particularly in Danang city.

Participants from Danang public sector have been chosen for the interviews for following reasons: Firstly, Danang is one of the biggest cities in Vietnam, plays important role in administrative reform and the development process of the country. Since the implementation of open-door policy in 1986, Danang government has become the leading in the process of industrialization and modernization of Vietnam (Do, 2018). Due to its strategic importance and representative management mode, examining Danang public sector allows a closer look into public-sector context and employees' behaviors. Secondly, the city government is striving to make Danang become a hub city for technology, tourism and knowledge (Danang Institute for Socio-Economic Development, 2016). This strategic vision requires government to not only leverage the full potential of their workforce, but also utilize and optimize its knowledge assets. Therefore, it is essential to uncover its possible challenges of knowledge management, issues in KS affecting collaboration. Thirdly, Danang government is facing workforce shortage (Acuna-Alfaro, 2009; Do, 2018), thus it is significant to understand KS behaviors in this context to uncover strategies to capture collective intelligence and cope with the skills deficits.

Sampling

The purposive sampling method was used to select the participants. According to Sekaran (2003), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that allows the selection of information-rich sample. Several selection criteria were set up in advance to find the most appropriate participants. Firstly, 16 employees from public-sector organizations in Danang were selected to investigate further the knowledge sharing's behaviors in the local context. All of participants have at least three years of experience of working in Danang local public sector, thus have a sufficient knowledge and experience in this working environment. They have different qualifications, age range and experience, thereby researcher would be able to obtain diverse perspectives on KS practices. They were contacted initially by email and online video call to explain the objectives of the research and ask for their participation in the research. To ensure greater validity of the research, the participants were selected from 6 different public organizations in Danang to maximize the discovery of different perspectives.

Data collection: Semi-structured interviews & Document review

Consistent with the chosen methodology, the qualitative data collection instrument is semi-structured interview that enables focused, open-ended approach and two-way communication (Silverman, 2004). The semi-structured interview was chosen instead of structured interview because it allows researchers to have more flexibility to expand the participants' responses (Kvale, 1996). While structured interview involves a pre-written set of questions that the interviewer has to heavily rely on, semi-structured interview allows more room for variation (Silverman, 2004). Depending on the flow of the conversation, interviewer can adjust the questions and explore unexpected issues raised during the interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Additionally, this type of interview is more appropriate to achieve this study's objective than unstructured type. It allows researcher to have more control over the topics by relying on a pre-determined questions, therefore, all aspects of the research questions will be covered (Kvale, 1996). In addition to this, the study also used secondary data from existing peer-reviewed journals, official website, articles to obtain more information of public sector in Vietnam. This method allows to have a rich picture of the context of public sector in Vietnam.

16 employees from Danang public sector were invited to participate the interview. Due to confidentiality requirement, the name of their departments is not disclosed. Participants were asked to describe and explain their experience of knowledge sharing in relation to their cultural values. The participants include 10 females and 6 males. They all have at least 3 years of working experience in public sector. Each interview took one hour. In interviews, the participants were asked various open-ended questions, which were intended to obtain rich descriptions of KS in Vietnamese local government and national culture's influence. The interview guide consists of the core questions and associated questions that had been improved through pilot interview. All interviews were recorded with the consent of participants.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Name code	Position	Gender	Years of experience
Participant A	Researcher	Female	4
Participant B	Employee	Female	4
Participant C	Employee	Female	4
Participant D	Employee	Male	4
Participant E	Employee	Female	3
Participant F	Employee	Female	3
Participant G	Employee	Male	5
Participant H	Employee	Female	5
Participant I	Employee	Female	5
Participant J	Supervisor	Female	8
Participant K	Supervisor	Male	8
Participant L	Line manager	Female	12
Participant M	Line manager	Male	13
Participant N	Line manager	Female	10
Participant O	Employee	Male	6
Participant P	Employee	Male	8

Pilot study

Two Vietnamese employees working in public sector were contacted to conduct pilot study prior the major interviews. Pilot study allows researcher to gain more experience in conducting semi-structured interviews and learn how to facilitate better answers (Majid et al., 2017; Dikko, 2016). During the pilot study, it was recognized that the concept of "Knowledge Sharing" and "Tacit Knowledge" are very new to many Vietnamese employees. Although they might discuss their lessons-learned and share what they know

at workplace, they are not aware of what knowledge sharing involves and how tacit knowledge is different from knowledge in general. Therefore, they tended to be confused and took a while to answer the interview questions without giving any clear examples. In order to improve the quality of the latter interviews, I learned to spend more time on explaining and giving examples of these terms before asking any further questions. Additionally, as the pilot study was conducted in Vietnamese language, several interview questions were revised and modified to acquire better answers from participants and achieve the study's objectives. After the pilot study, the participants provided immediate feedback on their interview experience. Accordingly, more time were given to interviewees to elicit meaningful responses. The right probing questions were used to facilitate the flow of the conversation.

Data analysis

This study adopted a thematic analysis to investigate tacit knowledge sharing's behaviors and how national culture influences these behaviors. Unlike many qualitative analytic methods, thematic analysis provides a more flexible and useful research tool that does not tie to any theoretical or epistemological assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It involves the process of analyzing the whole complex data from multiple participants, examining the ideas, identifying the patterns in the data and connect them into different key themes (Boyatzis, 1998). In fact, it is widely used as a research tool to explore under-researched topics in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Its advantages are the opportunities to identify the new predominant themes and the provision of rich description of the data set.

The data collected from interviews was transcribed and the initial thoughts were noted down. The data analysis process was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006)'s phases of thematic analysis. Firstly, the transcripts were read for many times; simultaneously, common concepts and initial ideas were written down for the purpose of familiarization. Initial codes were generated before being classified into different groups that help to answer the research questions. During this stage, the whole data was given equal attention to provide the holistic view of the data. I frequently compared and contrasted the data to have detailed examination of participants' behaviors and perceptions in the context of Vietnamese public organizations. Afterwards, repetitive categories and themes were identified. I stared to consider how these themes were related to each other and how significant they were in answering the research questions. Meaningful themes were decided based on their relevance and ability to capture diverse aspects from the data (Braun and Clarke's 2006). After being reviewed and re-defined many times, the final themes were named and used to generate themes table. At this stage, the original transcripts were reviewed again to make sure the final themes were consistent and were supported by the original data.

Ethical considerations

In this study, three main ethical issues have been considered carefully. Firstly, it is important to keep participants' identities anonymous (Silverman, 2004). During semi-structured interviews, detailed information regarding personal stories and rich description of contextual setting would be disclosed (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Therefore, participants' name and other identifiable information were kept confidential throughout the research. The collection of personal information is limited to demographic information, such as age, gender, working position. In this way, potential risks affecting their work relationship or career prospects can be eliminated. Secondly, their participation in semi-structured interview was totally voluntary. Before the interview, participants were informed clearly about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw from this research before or during the interview and no more than 2 weeks after the interview. Therefore, participants had opportunities to consider their participation and are fully aware of interview-recording process. Informed consent was obtained before conducting the

interview. Thirdly, during data analysis, the transcripts and recording were kept on safe folder which was password-protected. In this way, only researcher can access into the data.

IV. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this section is to present and analyze the findings from data collected. Main themes will be discussed in relation to the current literature. Hall's cultural theory will also be applied to interpret people's knowledge sharing behaviors from cultural perspective. Three main themes emerged from this study (Table 1) are inter-related and help to address the impact of national culture on knowledge sharing behaviors.

- Preference for face-to-face knowledge sharing

- Importance of relationship and trust

- Indirect knowledge sharing
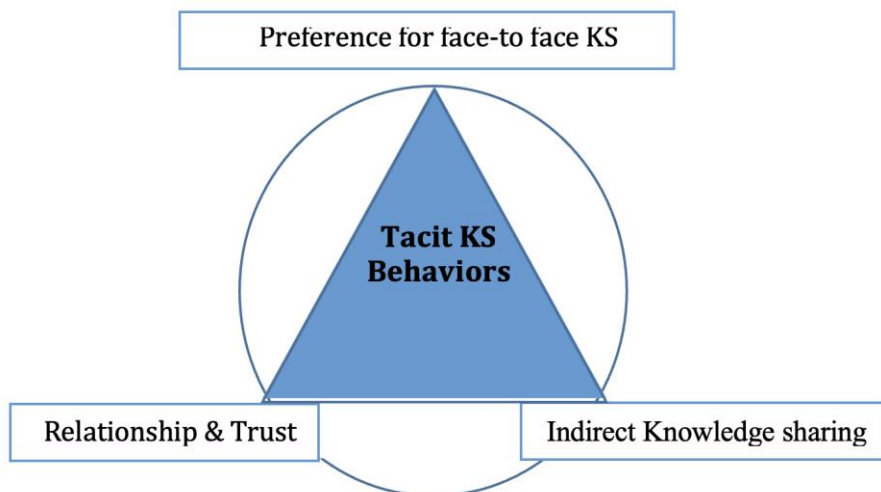
Preference for face-to-face knowledge sharing

The value of non-verbal communication and personal interaction in high-context culture make personal engagement essential.

One of the most striking finding from the interviews was that participants viewed face-to-face communication as the most effective way to share tacit knowledge in public sector. They commonly involve in direct interaction, peer assisting, one on one discussion to exchange tacit knowledge instead of using email, intranet or online chat. One interviewee even admitted that he learned mostly everything at work by "talking and observing". At a general analysis, face-to-face engagement with the advantage of non-verbal cues facilitates a more effective sharing behaviors in public organizations. It was explained by participant C:

"I find it is easier to share my experience when I can see them in person. Because nonverbal cues speak the loudest… During conversations, we continuously exchange wordless signals to help another understand unspoken words and see the full picture of the story. I use the tone of voice to emphasize particular ideas, or pause to give my colleague time to reflect his thinking".

Table 2. Themes, Categories, Codes

Main themes	Categories	Code	Example of transcribed text
Preference for face-to-face KS	**Non-verbal communication role**	Transmit implicit, personal experience	*"There will be many information related to your personal stories and experience, so I believe my colleagues will fully understand those if we exchange non-verbal elements such as hand gestures"*
		Immediate feedback	*I can check whether they understand my metaphor or stories quickly*
		Avoid misunderstanding	*Using online chat or email is not convenient due to limited icon options and the inability to express emotions. Sometimes, listeners will be unsure if the knowledge holder is joking or not.*
	Value of personal interaction	Respect	*When you want to learn something new from your colleagues, you should get out of your chair and speak to them face to face to show that you value them and value their experience. That's the way to show appreciation and respect.*
		Opportunity for further discussion	*During our conversation, we always explore new perspectives and involve in more discussion to clarify unknown parts*
		Enhance trust and relationship	*Only when we see each other in person, we establish a sense of belonging.*
Importance of relationship and trust	**Trust facilitates KS**	Risk of KS to untrusted party	*I'm not sure which "boat" my colleague is on. Being friend with a wrong person can negatively affect my professional identity.*
		Safe environment for sharing	*I don't need to consider carefully my verbal words when I discuss with my peers. They kinda understand my real intentions and know that I will honestly help them.*
		Willingness to share back	*There is no reason to share with someone who just want to 'take" and never want to 'give'. I will feel being taken advantage if I share knowledge with someone trying to hide their knowledge*
	Insider-orientation (Informal group)	Limited commitment to formal group	*I will try my best to help my immediate colleagues, however time doesn't allow insightful sharing and meaningful discussion. We are all under supervision of the line manager, and sometimes, we need to prioritize our work before spending time supporting others.*
		Collective goals and benefits	*In informal group, we protect each other, learn from each other's mistakes. We know that we are on the same 'boat' and thus, we can trust each other.*
		Frequency and level of KS	*I usually rely on my informal network to ask for help. I believe that even when they don't know how to solve my problems, they will look for the one who can help me.*

	Informal KS	Benefits of informal channel	*I find it easy to ask for advice or experience from my colleague after working hours. I guess gathering after work is the best opportunity for discussing any work-related issues. We can talk about family, children, housework, work-relationship or complain about any issues And I also have opportunity to listen to another's stories and work-related experience. Informal meeting makes everything easier to be expressed and transferred*
		Limitation of formal channel	*"We only use intranet system for sharing official documents and work procedures"* *"Formal meeting is arranged monthly but knowledge flow is restricted to top-down. Directors will inform us important change or the direction for the next month instead of asking for ideas' contribution. "*
	Modesty value as a barrier	Risks of KS in public	*"Being humble gave me opportunities to have more good relationship at work. I can also learn more from others' experience. In this way, I will not be sized up as a threat by others".*
Indirect expression of personal opinions	**Value of seniority**		*"Never teach the fish how to swim, they are always more experienced than you".*
			"It is silly to show how knowledgeable you are in front of your directors. Seniors always need to be appreciated and respected regardless of how smart their subordinates are".
	Face concern		*"I usually do not discuss issues regularly with my manager because he might not want others to prove to be better or more experienced"*
	Proper behaviors and language		*"I will share my knowledge with my boss but in a 'soft' and indirect way. All of the body language and spoken words need to be considered to avoid make other "lose face"*
	Avoid conflict and competition		*"You might have a different views with your colleague, but trying to prove that you are more 'right' than your colleague will damage your relationship and lead to conflict".*

"There was a time that I used online chat to suggest my peer some tricks on how to get the work done smoothly. I did not realize until a week later that she was totally confused and even misinterpreted my message. I find it quite inconvenient and waste of time when sharing knowledge without face-to-face engagement"

It can be seen from above response that online platform can build up a wall between employees and their colleagues. Opportunities for more personal interaction are clearly preferred by interviewees because it facilitates effective knowledge sharing without missing a hint of the message. Especially, it allows opportunities for clarification, reflection to trigger internal thinking.

The above findings are consistent with Hall's (1976) cultural theory. According to Hall (1976), high-context cultures, such as Vietnam, place a greater importance in non-verbal communication, compared to low-context societies. While low-context communicators focus on explicit meanings of words, high-context members emphasize more on nonverbal elements, because their communication usually involve a great amount of implicit and ambiguous messages (Hall and Hall, 1990). In such a culture, members are more likely to rely on environmental setting and non-verbal elements to disseminate information as well as make sense of another's thoughts (Kitayama and Ishii, 2002). Therefore, without observing and paying attention to these facial expressions, body gestures, voice tone or eye movements, it is impossible for them to read between the lines and comprehend each other's intentions (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986). Especially, as tacit knowledge is subjective and contextual-specific, it requires ongoing interaction between knowledge seeker and knowledge holder (Mohajan, 2016). Therefore, as members of high-context society, Vietnamese employees prefer face-to-face approach to exchange tacit knowledge because physical presence is the key for effective communication. The important role of non-verbal communication also further confirmed by Graham (1991) that it contributes more than ninety percent of the meaning of the message. Due to its ability to carry extensive contextual elements, face-to-face discussion is viewed as the richest medium of communication that is preferred in high-context culture (Richardson and Smith, 2007).

Personal interaction's value

Interestingly, participants seem to hold a strong belief that knowledge sharing via face-to-face communication will benefit their working relationships because they value personal interaction. Participants explained that Vietnam is a relationship-oriented society, hence personal engagement is highly appreciated.

"When you want to learn something new from your colleagues, you should get out of your chair and speak to them face to face to show that you value them and value their experience".

In Vietnamese public organizations, only when knowledge seekers are willing to put effort in meeting another in person, they show sufficient respect to another and right attitude for learning. This form of knowledge sharing allows knowledge sharer to "gain face" and feel being highly appreciated. Some participants revealed that they only shared their valuable insight in-person because "If they really want to learn from me, they must come and find me". In this way, employees are willing to to share additional information and valuable insight if knowledge receivers give full attention and show appreciation to learn from them.

Additionally, the opportunity to hear the voice and see the visual cues of other parties over conversation facilitates an interconnection and emotional exchange. Interviewees believed that they could feel other's emotion and inner thought through their ways of expression. For example, the level of friendliness, sincerity can be demonstrated through smiles, eye movements, hand gestures and voice. While these inner feelings cannot be felt over phone calls or online message, physical presence during lunch time or coffee break would provide opportunity for deeper conversation, enhance trust and credibility (Ardichvili et al., 2006). When they feel pleasant communicating what they know with each other, a real sense of belonging and long-term relationship are established (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000).

The findings come in agreement with Saifi et al., (2016)'s emphasis for personalization strategy in knowledge sharing. According to the author, personalization strategy, which involves face-to-face interaction between parties, facilitates two-way flow of knowledge and relationship building. This form of sharing tacit knowledge is particularly preferred in high-context culture. Since high-context members are highly concerned with relationship development, they commonly choose physical meeting over online communication (Hall,

1976). In this way, a sense of familiarity and connection will be created through continuous turn-taking behaviors among knowledge sharers and knowledge receivers (Koskinen et al., 2003). In other words, it facilitates both parties to ask probing questions, actively listen to each other's perspectives, and build relationship in long-term (Koskinen et al., 2003; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Therefore, this warm and personal form of sharing tacit knowledge is preferred.

Trust in knowledge sharing

Trust was one of the recurring themes during the interviews. All respondents believe that knowledge sharing is essential, however, they rely on the level of trust to determine who to share, what to share and to what extent. Most participants felt that trust was a precondition for them to involve in a deeper conversation, regular questioning and collaboration with their colleagues.

"I won't share my valuable knowledge with those I don't trust. They might misuse the knowledge I provided or never appreciate it. At the end of the day, my experiences are valuable assets that I gain over many years of hard work. It is such a waste if I share them with someone can work to my disadvantage".

The possible risks, which occurred when another party misinterprets or misuses the knowledge provided, prevented them from contributing to discussion. In other words, they would engage in meaningful conversation if they were in a safe environment. Otherwise, they would involve in knowledge hiding behaviors when they felt their colleagues were untrustworthy. Moreover, one participant highlighted that they were more likely to provide meaningful insights and advice to those who show respect and trust to their competencies. In other words, tacit knowledge sharing requires two-way trust relationship from both knowledge sharer and knowledge receiver.

In Vietnamese public organizations, everything becomes easier with a trusting relationship because it gives employees a safe place to express emotion and ideas. Only when both parties both feel secured and comfortable, the learning can occur efficiently (Holste and Fields, 2010). Therefore, their trusted colleagues become a reliable source of information where they seek advice and acquire the right insights (Ling, 2011). It was explained by participants that they could easily admit what they do not know with their trusted colleagues or even ask stupid questions comfortably. This finding confirms prior studies which perceived trust as an indispensable ingredient for knowledge sharing behaviors (Dirks & Ferrin 2002). It promotes an expectation that individual can rely on the colleagues because of the belief in good intention toward each other (Ling, 2011). As a result, when trust exists, Vietnamese public service employees are likely to share more useful knowledge and quickly absorb meaningful lessons

Moreover, trust also carries an expectation of reciprocal relationship. By providing insightful advice to trusted colleague, employees believe that knowledge receiver will return the favor in a near future. In this respect, Vietnamese employees look for honesty and willingness to share back from another party.

"It is all about the balance of give-and-take. If I share with my colleague how to deal with another team, she will gladly to help me out next time. Sharing experience with my team will create trusting relationships that help my work run smoothly. I trust them, they trust me, I help them and they will help me".

Accordingly, a mutual loop of sharing and supporting motivates individuals to exchange their tacit knowledge more frequently (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). Receiving without intention to give back is considered to be selfish, disrespectful, thus untrustworthy (Ling, 2011). As members of high-context culture appreciate the interdependence and mutual relationship, the level of sharing is affected by the history of exchange and the tendency for future support (Chen and Chen, 2004).

However, one of unexpected findings from the interview was that many employees would not share the full extent of what they know. Although high level of trust exists in informal groups, they would only share "maximum 80%" of the practical intelligence and experience. The reason for this partial knowledge sharing was because of the desire to be unique and different. If everything was shared, they might feel "empty" because they did not have any unique insights and secret wisdom anymore. Therefore, although Vietnamese employees are motivated to share tacit knowledge with their informal group, the desire to distinguish themselves from others prevents sharing tacit knowledge to the fullest extent. Even though growing up in a collectivistic culture, they are motivated to be a unique individual that have special capabilities. This tendency is probably explained by the adoption of more individualistic values in Vietnamese culture due to the effects of globalization and free trade (Ralston et al, 1999).

Value of seniority

Firstly, one of the explanations for that is the value of seniority in public sector organizations. Vietnamese people naturally respect organizational hierarchy in which seniors are considered to be more powerful, more knowledgeable and wiser (Gudykunst et al., 1992; Truong et al., 2017). This is clearly illustrated in a Vietnamese old saying "The older the ginger, the hotter the spice" which highlights the importance of senior's knowledge and experience over years. Respondents found learning from manager's experience would not only help to avoid repeated mistakes and unnecessary work, but also benefit their career's advancement. In the eyes of managers, although young people are very "active", "energetic" and "smart", they lack of necessary experience to contribute to decision-making and make rational judgments. Additionally, the importance of experience was particularly emphasized in the context of public sector. One participant said

"We do not generate profit like private companies, but everything we do has wider influence on the society. Hence, our job requires holistic thinking, strategic vision and insights which resulted from many years of experience. School cannot teach us everything"

This statement illustrated the necessity of experience in advising and implement policies that impact the lives of millions citizens. As a participant revealed "With age comes wisdom", employees are willing to listen to feedback and suggestions from their managers to enhance performance as well as their career's path. In other words, transferring valuable knowledge to the younger employees is strategically important for public sector to provide public policies, and address any challenging issues in the local area (Yao et al., 2007).

Indirect expression of opinion

Moreover, indirect ways of interacting and sharing knowledge is common in Vietnam context where the concern for face is important. Participants revealed that Vietnamese people tend to avoid direct confrontation and speaking out his/her true intentions with words, particularly on controversial issues. Within hierarchical relationship, the proper behaviors and language for seniors are neccessary in public sector to maintain harmony and long-term relationship. This implies that juniors are expected to speak softly and use positive language when talking to the seniors. It was further explained as follows:

"It is not what you share but how you share it. You might have lots of interesting ideas, but how you express your opinions determines whether others wants to hear them. I never directly voice against my boss or my colleages because I don't want to unintentionally declare war with them"

It is necessary for employee to consider their ways of expression carefully when discussing any issues with the other. To avoid hurting the inner feeling and damage the "face" of another party, participants shared that they will not directly disagree with their

boss' ideas or express negative responses. Instead, they might choose to use positive words, open-ended questions, non-verbal language, head nods to soften their message to the seniors. Additionally, they will try to avoid showing "too much of their tacit knowledge" as a way to show respect their seniors' position and intelligence.

The finding comes in agreement with Hall (1989)'s culture theory that in high-context culture such as Vietnam, indirect communication style is preferred over direct style. Given the value of face-honoring exchanges in high-context culture, the indirectness in discussion and knowledge sharing is crucial to satisfy face-needs and ensure harmony (Gudykunst & Ting Toomey, 1988). In other words, those behaviors which can humiliate others and damage the mutual relationship are not encouraged (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Instead, they might use silence, express their thoughts implicitly and use qualifiers such as "possibly, "maybe" in conversation with the seniors in public (Chambers, 1997; Tuang & Stringer, 2008).

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. What are the preferred methods of sharing tacit knowledge among employees in the public sector in Vietnam context?

The preferred methods of sharing tacit knowledge among employees in the public sector in Vietnam context primarily revolve around face-to-face interactions. Participants in the study consistently emphasized the effectiveness of direct engagement, peer assistance, and one-on-one discussions as the preferred means of exchanging tacit knowledge. They indicated a preference for personal interaction over digital platforms such as emails, intranets, or online chat. Face-to-face communication was considered more effective in conveying non-verbal cues, which played a significant role in expressing ideas and facilitating understanding. This preference for personal interaction aligns with the cultural context of Vietnam as relationships and non-verbal communication hold significant value. Overall, face-to-face methods of KS were regarded as more conducive to meaningful exchanges, immediate feedback, and building strong working relationships. Moreover, this study highlights the significance of tacit knowledge for good performance among public-sector employees and suggests that there is room for improvement in fostering a culture of knowledge sharing within public-sector organizations (such as formal mentoring programs, onboarding initiatives, or official rewards to encourage knowledge sharing behaviors).

2. How do cultural values and trust affect the willingness of employees in the public sector in Vietnam to share tacit knowledge?

The study highlights the role of cultural values, particularly in a high-context culture like Vietnam, in shaping knowledge sharing behaviors. Participants emphasized the importance of trust as a precondition for engaging in meaningful knowledge sharing interactions. Trust was believed to impact the extent to which employees were willing to share their valuable insights and experiences. The cultural value of maintaining harmonious relationships and respecting hierarchical structures also impacted the willingness to share tacit knowledge. Additionally, indirect communication styles and the value placed on seniority were observed to affect the dynamics of knowledge sharing within the public sector. These findings emphasize the need for public organizations in Vietnam to foster a culture of trust, encourage open communication, and recognize the influence of cultural values on knowledge sharing behaviors. By understanding and addressing these factors, organizations can create an environment that facilitates the effective sharing of tacit knowledge and promotes collaboration among employees in the organizations.

Limitations and recommendation for future research

The main limitation of this research is a small sample size from Vietnamese public sector. Only sixteen participants were selected. However, due to the purpose of exploring tacit knowledge sharing behaviors in this particular context, the depth and richness of findings are more focused over the results' generalizability. Given the scarcity of empirical researches on exploring the impact of national culture on sharing tacit knowledge in Asian region, it is essential to have more in-depth studies examine knowledge sharing behaviors in this area.

Secondly, the result of the research could be strongly influenced by factors unique to this organizational context such as leadership, structure, local policies. Future research could further investigate the impact of organizational culture as well as how national culture possibly affect organizational culture in this context. Particularly, a comparative research of this topic in private organizations and private organizations would provide useful exploratory insights into the link between knowledge sharing behaviors and national culture. The research also identified further scope for future research on leadership attitudes toward knowledge sharing in Asia context.

Finally, this study involve some sensitive issue related to sharing intention and working relationship, thus participants in the interviews might have been hesitant to express their inner thoughts. However, because this research aims to have an insight into employee's intentions and experiences, investigating individual's perception is the most appropriate approach. The research fully protects the confidentiality of participants.

VI. Theoretical and practical implications

Implication for theory

From theoretical perspective, this study has four main theoretical contributions. Firstly, although literature has increased its attention to knowledge sharing during the past decades, there has been limited studies on knowledge sharing in emerging economies in Asia. This study contributes to fill the gap in the field by focusing on Vietnam culture. Secondly, given the predominance of studies on knowledge sharing in private companies, this research provides useful exploratory insights into knowledge sharing in public sector organizations. With the transformation of public sector and the requirement to improve public service quality, it is vital to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge sharing among public-service workers in this context. Thirdly, this research brings attention to tacit knowledge which is highly valuable but hard to be codified. The insight into tacit knowledge sharing behaviors and Vietnamese culture would shed light on the importance of frequent interaction as well as possible barriers for sharing practices. Fourthly, most of research on this issues relied on cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1997) though his framework might be no longer appropriate to examine a complex phenomenon like culture. This study would apply Hall (1976) high context – low context theory, to provide a new lens to explain knowledge sharing behaviors in Vietnamese context.

Practical Implications

In practice, this study will foster public sector at different levels in Asian countries to improve their awareness of tacit knowledge flows in their organization and improve their knowledge sharing strategies accordingly. The evidence regarding employees' preference and current barriers in knowledge sharing will allow better solutions to facilitate collaboration, reduce knowledge hiding behaviors and capture employees' competency. As a result, this study will not only contribute to Knowledge Management practice but also human resource management in general. Moreover, this study also helps international business that seek to operate in Vietnamese context, have better cultural sensitivity to ensure supportive knowledge sharing climate for its people

Since majority of tacit knowledge is kept implicit and only shared through informal way, organization's leaders need to formally manage and facilitate tacit knowledge sharing. It is essential to have internal organizational documents to facilitate knowledge transfer such as standard training materials, records of problems solved and knowledge map which visually shows knowledge sources within the organization. These tools should not only focus on work procedures but the experience, advice, insights into work-related issues.

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