

# Knowledge Sharing of Management Undergraduates

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Focus of the present study is to explore the factors determining university students' knowledge sharing intention in Management education.

According to the Economic Policy Statement of government of Sri Lanka, issued in October 2016, Sri Lanka envisions achieving sustainable development [6]. It is stated in the economic policy statement that Sri Lanka's human capital is an essential resource in achieving the envisaged development goals and in transforming the economy into a modern manufacturing economy [6]. As highlighted, it is increasingly important for the country to be equipped with an educated workforce. Thus, in attaining the envisioned national goal it is essential that universities facilitate intellectual discourse among undergraduates. A critical element in intellectual discourse is Knowledge sharing [9].

In one hand knowledge sharing is essential to improve the learning process [9]. Higher education institutes focus on increasing student's performance by conducting knowledge sharing effectively among students [9]. On the other hand, knowledge sharing is vital, as when doing recruitments companies give much priority to the student's knowledge sharing ability. Therefore, Students in learning communities are expected to be responsible of their education proactively by learning with both individual responsibility and communal sharing [9].

## ABSTRACT

Lack of knowledge sharing is one of the major issues haunting the university students in Sri Lanka. Knowledge sharing represents a social dilemma where a rational individual may decide to freeride on others knowledge contributions. As knowledge sharing is a social dilemma it is important to investigate the factors affecting for individual's knowledge sharing intention. Theory of Planned Behavior is an ideal theory to understand why people choose to share knowledge in some contexts not in others. Present study investigates how attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality of students affect their intention and behavior to share the knowledge.

**Keywords:** knowledge sharing, intention, behavior, personality

## I. Introduction

Higher education institutes have long been regarded as knowledge-intensive organizations [1]. One of the prime tasks of universities is to transfer the knowledge base to the students which enable them to thrive upon the graduation [2]. Due to the high demanding nature in the education, students tend to engage in Knowledge Sharing activities [3]. Research has provided much evidence that Knowledge Sharing in collaborative learning results in reflection and learning where all participant benefit in terms of cognitive gains and positive learning outcomes [4]. Therefore Studies on knowledge sharing among university students have been recognized as an important and interesting area of study in the academic world [5].

However, as per the previous studies it is evident that individuals are likely to withhold their knowledge in knowledge contribution activities [7]. Students may embrace the mentality of hoarding knowledge with competitive advantage against other students [5]. If their unwillingness to share knowledge with peers continues, it is very likely that this may become part of their personality and students may exhibit the same mindset as they continue their studies, or worst, at the workplace [5]. Therefore, student's unwillingness to share knowledge is an obstacle to social knowledge construction in the context of university management education [8].

In the context of Management education many students tend to withhold their efforts in group works when they are asked to share knowledge [8]. One of their beliefs is that if shared with others in the group their knowledge would become less valuable [8]. Therefore, a key challenge in both online and traditional learning is to encourage knowledge sharing through various forms.

Engaging in knowledge sharing is strongly influenced by the individual's willingness to engage in the knowledge sharing process. In [9] it is stated that simply telling the students that sharing knowledge make you learn better do not automatically lead to knowledge sharing among them. Therefore, investigating willingness to share knowledge through the determinants of knowledge sharing behavior of

students is vital to understand the social phenomena better in order to promote knowledge sharing for better learning process.

Many studies have investigated about the determinants of knowledge sharing behavior of individuals. However, pause of attention has been given for knowledge sharing behavior among the students in online and traditional learning environments where teaching and learning is the main concern [9]. Further much attention is given for knowledge sharing behavior in organizational setting, but pause of literature available on the studies conducted in educational settings considering knowledge sharing behavior among students [9]. It is stated that future research should examine knowledge sharing of students from different theoretical perspectives as very few studies ground the studies on the theory [3]. Thus, it is emphasized that further studies required to establish clear conclusions on knowledge sharing behavior of undergraduates [3].

Due to highlighted paucity in theoretical and empirical studies the present study focusses on investigating the determinants affecting knowledge sharing intention of students in Management education.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Knowledge and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Knowledge sharing is considered as a social phenomenon based on interpersonal and social interactions [8]. In online and traditional learning it is a key challenge to encourage knowledge sharing through social interactions. Knowledge sharing happens when the knowledge is shared by individuals negotiated, refined within a group until it becomes common knowledge to the group [10]. Knowledge sharing enables individuals to re adapt and reconstruct knowledge by opening up multiple perspectives to challenge one's understanding while taking into peer's perspectives. Individuals co construct the knowledge by reflecting newly shared knowledge, justifying, defining, reevaluating thoughts and externalizing [11].

Extant knowledge management literature have investigated the factors affecting knowledge sharing intention [12, 13, 14, 15, 16]. In [15] it was found that personality traits have a significant influence on knowledge sharing. Furthermore, prior studies usually explain knowledge contribution behaviors from various theoretical perspectives and Knowledge Sharing is important because of its role in student's learning outcomes.

Attitude toward the behavior is the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior Ajzen [17]. Students are likely to have intention to share knowledge if their common feelings towards the sharing behaviours are positive. Thus, it is assumed that there is a positive relationship between attitude of student's and knowledge sharing behavior.

H1: Attitude towards knowledge sharing is positively related to the intention to share knowledge

### B. Subjective Norms and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. According to [17] Social pressure may be from the working groups, peer groups or from colleagues. In universities, students may have their groups. If a university student feels that his friends expect him to share his knowledge with them, and if he would like

to enact it, then he has the intention to share his knowledge. Therefore it can be predicted that subjective norms will positively related to the intention to share knowledge.

H2: Subjective norms positively relate to the intention to share knowledge

### C. Perceived Behavioral Control and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Perceived behavioral control is the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles [17]. In a university if the students perceive more barriers and challenges to share knowledge they will be less likely to share knowledge. Thus, it is assumed,

H3: Perceived behavioral control is negatively related to intention to share knowledge

On the other hand, perceived behavioral control may directly relate with the knowledge sharing behavior. According to the theory of planned behavior, perceived behavioral control, together with behavioral intention, can be used directly to predict behavioral achievement. Thus, it is assumed,

H4: Perceived behavioral control negatively related to knowledge sharing behavior

### D. Intention and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Intention is an indicator used to capture the factors that influence a desired behaviour [17] In this case, a behavioural intention measure will predict the knowledge sharing behaviours. Thus, it is assumed,

H5: The intention to share knowledge is positively related to knowledge sharing behavior.

### E. Personality and Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Big Five Personality traits are extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism and conscientiousness. [18]

Agreeableness personalities are fundamentally altruistic, sympathetic to others and eager to help others and believe others will help in return [19]. Since knowledge sharing is a particular form of individual helpfulness, cooperation and collaboration, and entails "getting along with others" within interpersonal relationships with university course-mate and friends, individual high in agreeableness are more likely to share knowledge

It is expected that highly conscientious people better perform in organizations and focus on tasks. They engage in activities which are beyond their responsibilities and expected to be more willing to share knowledge [15]. In the university environment, conscientious students tend to engage in more knowledge sharing activities such as sharing information about hobby, movie and music reviews published in the library website.

Individuals high in extraversion have the inclination to be sociable [20]. Extroverts are enthusiastic, energetic and optimistic. Studies have suggested that extroverts are positively affective, and therefore are likely to have positive emotions and contribute to greater team satisfaction [21]. When completion of group assignment depends on team work university students who are extraverted tend to share more knowledge with team-mates to accomplish group assignment.

Neuroticism contrasts emotional stability with different negative moods such as anxiety, sadness and nervous tension [22]. Low anxiety levels and high self-confidence characteristics of emotional stability make it easier for such individuals to engage in knowledge sharing behavior [22]. Thus likely that students who score high in neuroticism would interact and share information with others.

Openness to experience indicates a person as being imaginative, curious, artistic and original [18]. Thus students who demonstrate higher levels of openness, would be more willing to express their opinion and share their knowledge with others in the university.

Accordingly it is assumed that,  
H5: Personality positively relates to knowledge sharing behavior

### III. Research Methodology

The study adopted the quantitative survey-based technique to test the hypotheses. The questionnaire was developed based on widely used instruments. The items for attitude towards knowledge sharing, subjective norm, intention to share knowledge, perceived behavioral control and knowledge sharing behaviour were adapted from [17]. The response format is seven-point Likert type scale.

The five dimensions of BFP [(1) extraversion; (2) agreeable; (3) conscientiousness; (4) neuroticism; and (5) openness to experience] are measured using the instrument developed by [18]. Respondents indicated how they generally feel by rating the degree of their feelings on a six-point scale.

The unit of analysis for this research is the individual, that is, the university student. The Participants sampled are students from both public and private Sri Lankan universities. Stratified random sampling method is employed in this study. The strata used in this sampling are students' who are reading for Business Management degree programmes. An online and self-administered questionnaire was distributed to students enrolled in the Business and management degrees. Sample consisted 230 students where 203 respondents responded.

### IV. Discussion

According to the conceptual framework developed in the study, there are four (04) independent variables, one mediator and a dependent variable. Attitudes towards knowledge sharing, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality have been identified as independent variables whereas intention to share knowledge is the mediator which mediates the relationship of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and knowledge sharing behavior. Knowledge sharing behavior is the dependent variable of the study. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior [17], intention to share knowledge mediate the relationship of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and knowledge sharing behavior. Therefore using regression analysis in SPSS 21 authors initially checked the mediating effect of intention to share knowledge.

Since, intention to share knowledge identified as a mediator in the conceptual framework, first the regression model has been obtained with the absence of intention to share knowledge. In this model the knowledge sharing behavior has been identified as the dependent variable where attitude,

subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality identified as independent variables.

The regression model indicates a significant positive relationship between knowledge sharing behavior and independent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality) where regression line is significant (F value= 760.594, P value< 0.05) and according to the coefficients of the regression shows the P values of the independent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality) are less than 0.05 and the R square of the model is 89.7%. The variation of knowledge sharing behavior is explained by the dependent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality). In the next step, the regression model obtained with intention to share knowledge.

However, a special behavior of attitude and subjective norms can be observed in the regression analysis when the intention to share knowledge is absent attitude and subjective norms are significant to the regression model and when intention to share knowledge present in the regression attitude and subjective norms become insignificant to the model. Therefore, it is clear that the relationship between knowledge sharing behavior and attitudes, subjective norms is fully mediated by intention to share knowledge. Further it is confirmed that according to [17] in The Theory of Planned Behavior, Attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control mediated by intention to share knowledge. According to the results of the analysis relationship between knowledge sharing behavior and perceived behavioral control partially mediated by intention to share knowledge where in both regression models perceived behavioral control remain significant.

The regression model after adding intention to share knowledge indicates a significant positive relationship between knowledge sharing behavior and independent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality) where regression line is significant (F value= 623.423, P value< 0.05) and according to the coefficients of the regression shows the P values of the independent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality) are less than 0.05 and the R square of the model is 90%. The variation of knowledge sharing behavior is explained by the dependent variables (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and personality). The findings of the present study confirms the previous empirical evidence in the extant body of knowledge management (Bock & Kim, 2001; Bock et al., 2005; Chatzoglou & Vraimaki, 2009; Lin, 2007b; Lin & Lee, 2004; Ryu et al., 2003; Sihombing, 2009; So & Bolloju, 2005; Tohidinia & Mosakhani, 2010; Zhikun & Fungfai, 2009; Witherspoon, et al., 2012; Wang, 2015; Bordia et al., 2006

### V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study addressed a significant gap in the knowledge sharing literature in the educational context. In particular, the present study contributes by enlightening the understanding of factors affecting knowledge sharing intention and behavior of Management students in Sri Lankan Universities. According to the investigation it was found that there is a significant relationship between Management student's attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, personality and students' knowledge sharing intention and behavior. Therefore, in facilitating the learning process by focusing on



higher level of knowledge sharing, universities must try to create an environment which can enhance the attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control of students. Further in developing educational policies to facilitate for more knowledge sharing among management students, universities and educators must be more concerned regarding the personality of the students and its influence for their intention to share knowledge.

However, one of the limitations of the present study is the reliance on sample data collected from Sri Lanka. Since international research will contribute to greater generalisation of the model proposed, a replication of this study should be performed in other countries in other educational streams with larger sample size.

Given the importance of knowledge sharing in today's society, it is hoped that the research model proposed in this study will be useful to other researchers seeking to understand the factors that influence the knowledge sharing behaviour among the students. Further Findings of the present study will contribute for the educators, instructional designers and curriculums developers to identify key factors involved in successful knowledge Sharing process in designing and delivering the degree programmes. Further such understanding can be utilized to develop advisable strategies to create conducive learning environment. It is expected that the findings will contribute knowledge sharing practices among students in order to enhance their student's performance as well as for the education policy reforms of Sri Lanka.

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