



## Full length article

# Factors affecting employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour in the virtual organisation from the perspectives of well-being and organisational behaviour



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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on the concept of organisational behaviour, this research augments the concepts of social capital theory and organisational culture with one pioneering precursor and mediator, the sense of well-being, to develop an integrative understanding of the factors affecting individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviour within the more complex context of the virtual organisation of Taiwanese Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). A field survey of 131 employees from the selected virtual organisation was analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the outcomes empirically. Our research offers a persuasive body of evidence supporting the notion that increasing employees' sense of well-being can successfully form a bridge that can connect social capital tendency, organisational culture and employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour. Surprisingly, and contrary to common belief, the integrated model shows that social capital tendency seems to play a more important role than organisational culture in affecting employees' sense of well-being within the virtual organisation in a Chinese cultural context. Consequently, this research reveals the subtle interplay of employees' sense of well-being, social capital tendency, organisational culture and knowledge-sharing behaviour, while the in-depth analysis provides strong support for knowledge management research and practice.

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## 1. Introduction

With the advent of economic globalisation and the Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE), successful knowledge management (KM) has become a critical determinant affecting the effectiveness and performance of an organisation (Sharma, Singh, & Neha, 2012). Meanwhile, effective knowledge sharing is of great importance as a foundation stone in knowledge management (Sharma et al., 2012). This is mainly because, through effective knowledge-sharing among employees, organisations can increase their profile and gain market opportunities, enhancing performance and increasing their competitive advantage in an uncertain environment (Lin, 2007). As a result, a great many enterprises are extremely keen to draw new knowledge from organisational knowledge workers in order to maintain the sustainable development of their companies

(Liu, Raahemi, & Benyoucef, 2011).

However, a review of the literature concerning individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviour shows that the motives and factors involved in behaviour such as knowledge sharing are still regarded as difficult to understand comprehensively and explore in great detail (Holste & Fields, 2010; Wang & Hou, 2015). Chief among the reasons is that individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviour goes against human nature as people think their knowledge is valuable and important (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Hence, organisations' employees often feel reluctant to share their knowledge because they fear that they might lose their jobs or that their status in the organisation might be jeopardised because of their knowledge sharing (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). In this respect, it is inevitable, perhaps even instinctive, that, since individuals possess their own unique and precious knowledge, they may be reluctant to share it, particularly in a virtual organisation (Burn & Ash, 2000). Moreover, Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) indicated that the knowledge management established in many organisations focuses merely on technology, and in particular, information technology. Finally, Davenport (1994, p.120) stated that "...in most companies, many

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managers still believe that once the right technology is in place, the appropriate information-sharing behaviour will inevitably follow" while Dixon (2000) stated that "build it and they will come" is a myth of knowledge sharing. Yet, these views seem rather to over-emphasise the important position of knowledge management with regard to information technology (Leonardi & Treem, 2012). Clearly, the biggest challenge in building successful knowledge management is the willingness for members to share their knowledge with others. Recently, rather than focusing on negative psychology, an increasing number of research studies have instead begun to investigate the impacts of an individual's positive psychology on his/her knowledge-sharing behaviour. For instance, Wang and Hou (2015) adopted the perspectives of self-determination and altruism to explore relevant factors with regard to knowledge-sharing behaviour and illustrated that these factors were positively associated with knowledge-sharing behaviour. Wasko and Faraj (2005) also demonstrated that enjoyment in helping others, which stems from altruism (Lin, 2007; Meier & Stutzer, 2008), had a positive impact on an individual's knowledge-sharing behaviour. The positive psychological effects mentioned above, such as altruistic behaviour and enjoyment in helping others, have all been found to be significantly associated with an often overlooked consideration in positive psychology: an individual's greater sense of well-being (Lin, 2007; Meier & Stutzer, 2008; Midlarsky & Kahana, 2007). In fact, the sense of well-being has been explored and discussed more and more in western countries (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The importance of the sense of well-being can be seen in "Nicomachean Ethics", written by Aristotle in 350 BCE (Johnson-Miles, 2007, p.3), where he states that "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence." More importantly, Carr (2004) stated that the central concept of positive psychology consists mainly of two elements, happiness and well-being, while Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) pointed out that, for the majority of human beings, it is imperative to pursue sustainable happiness and a long-term sense of well-being. An increasing number of research studies have suggested that individuals who experience greater happiness and satisfaction are relatively more successful in organisations (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Past research has found that, not surprisingly, individuals' sense of well-being is strongly associated with income (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), helping co-workers (George, 1991), and giving social support to colleagues (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998). Most research studies have speculated that such signals of achievement and success in work tasks cause an individual to be happy (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). To date, however, no research seems to have explored empirically the relative effects of organisational culture, social capital tendency, employees' sense of well-being, and the different types of knowledge-sharing behaviour (namely tacit and explicit). Hence, the alternative hypothesis speculated by this study, that employees' sense of well-being mediates the relationship among organisational culture, social capital tendency and both employees' tacit and explicit knowledge-sharing behaviour, may be equally plausible.

This study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors improving or prohibiting employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour within the virtual organisation of Taiwanese non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In Taiwan, non-profit organisations (NPOs), which are regarded prevalently as NGOs, are organisations that use surplus revenues to achieve their goals, instead of distributing them as profits (Jau, 2014). According to statistical data from the Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior, Republic of China (Taiwan), in 2013, 40,316 NGOs had been established in Taiwan. However, unlike for-profit organisations, NPOs need more to be managed more effectively (Drucker, 1990)

and have the demand for continuous improvement (Lettieri, Borga, & Savoldelli, 2004). One important factor in this regard is that NGOs often lack distinct knowledge of management and this may hinder their organisational development (Chi, Yeh, & Yu, 2008). Liu and Fang (2010) further point out that most employees working in Taiwanese NGOs face the considerable challenges of a flat hierarchical structure, lower salaries and unclear promotion opportunities. Moreover, it is of the utmost importance to share the knowledge that exists among the members of different organisations because it is through such knowledge-sharing that organisations can increase their profile in gaining market opportunities, enhancing performance and competing in an uncertain environment (Hong, Suh, & Koo, 2011). Hence, comprehending the factors that affect the knowledge-sharing behaviour of individuals who work within the virtual organisation of Taiwanese NGOs seems difficult to explore and yet may be regarded as being all the more valuable. Consequently, in the light of the important but elusive factors concerning knowledge sharing among individuals in such organisations, this research, based on the concept of organisational behaviour proposed by Langton, Robbins, and Judge (2012), developed a theoretical model which integrates organisational culture (the macro-level), workplace networks (i.e. social capital tendency) (the meso-level), employees' sense of well-being (the micro-level), and their knowledge-sharing behaviour through the use of ICTs within the virtual organisation, composed of the four organisations of Taiwanese NGOs in a Chinese cultural context. This research has developed a theoretical framework in which a critically intrinsic motivation of an individual, the sense of well-being, is integrated with organisational culture and social capital tendency to explore employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour within a virtual organisation. The specific objectives of this research were to: (1) analyse the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) associated with employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour; (2) explore the correlation between organisational culture and employees' sense of well-being; (3) deepen the understanding of the impact of employees' social capital tendency on their sense of well-being; (4) explore the impact of employees' sense of well-being on their knowledge-sharing behaviour within the context of the virtual organisation in a Chinese cultural context.

## 2. Theoretical framework and development of hypotheses

### 2.1. The concept of organisational behaviour applied in this research

Having considered that the diverse reasons for the knowledge-sharing behaviour of an individual within the complex context of a virtual organisation are abstruse and difficult to understand in depth, this research chose to adopt the concept of organisational behaviour proposed by Langton et al. (2012) in order to deepen the investigation of those aspects that affected employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour in the selected virtual organisation. Fundamentally, organisational behaviour, which involves psychology, sociology and anthropology, can be classified into three main levels. These levels involve individuals in organisations (the micro-level), work groups in organisations (the meso-level) and organisational systems (the macro-level); they affect behaviour within an organisation in terms of applying knowledge with a view to enhancing the organisation's effectiveness (Langton et al., 2012). Based on the concept of these three distinct but related levels of organisational behaviour, the researcher explored and analysed the essential elements of employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour in the virtual organisation in terms of the three levels: namely, the macro-level (organisational culture and knowledge-sharing behaviour using ICTs), the meso-level (employees' workplace networks (i.e. social capital tendency)), and the micro-level (employees' sense of well-

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