

# Social Factors of Willingness to Share Knowledge: In Relational Model Theory (RMT)

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Received 30 April 2018    Reviewed 19 May 2018    Accepted 31 May 2018

## **Abstract**

A willingness to share knowledge is an individual intention to share or not knowing. It is unenforceable but depends on individual's itself. Recently, studies highlighted a social psychological context might be major factor that influences willingness to share knowledge. In sharing knowledge process, there is a need to have at least two actors as sender and recipient so that the sharing process will be effective. However, if the relationship between the two parties is harmful, the sharing process is not well implemented. Apart from this process, a social psychological vital stimulates individual's intention and willingness to share knowledge. This study aimed to explore the fundamental of relational model theory, social factors and willingness to share knowledge. The finding will be discussed further the framework of relational model theory and willingness to share knowledge.

**Keywords:** Relational Model Theory, Knowledge Sharing Process, Social Factors, Conceptual Paper

## **Introduction**

Willingness to share knowledge is not an easy way to promote and encourage people in organization to share what they know. This relates to an individual's readiness to share and learn knowledge from others. The literature on willingness to share knowledge has emphasized on an individual behaviour and willingness to share knowledge. The findings highlight the most factors identified are individual characteristic, personality, motivation and satisfaction. However, this study argued that there is another element that is able to encourage people to share knowledge as an interpersonal relationship. A good interpersonal relationship possibly influences an individual willingness to share and learn knowledge from others. According to Cummings' model of knowledge sharing process, interpersonal relationship is viewed as a bridge between the processes of sharing knowledge. Knowledge creators supply their knowledge, experience, skills and ability to others with the purpose to facilitate individuals to perform their job (Cummings, 2003). Meanwhile, a recipient context refers to knowledge takers those who accept, use and store the knowledge (Eckl, 2012). A relational context mentioned in the model highlights about organizational distance, physical, institutional, knowledge and relational distance. However, there are inadequate studies on behaviour in relation to knowledge sharing.

## **The Challenges to Share Knowledge**

Many studies found that an absence of interpersonal relationship, lack of social network and interaction plausible create a social gap, limitation and weakness of the interpersonal relationship (Baron & Markman, 2000). It creates a social gap and consequently weakness the relationship. This study will highlight several issues related to social factors that consequently negatively affect the interpersonal relationship. Numerous studies discussed about people lack of time to spend, fear about misuse of knowledge, differences in status and position (Husted & Michailova, 2002), differences such as experience levels, age, gender, education levels, hierarchy, position-based status, and formal power (Riege, 2005). Moreover, Zaid, Zainuddin and Abdallah, (2013) mentioned that lack of social networking and interaction, poor verbal, written communication and interpersonal skills, and lack of trust also contribute to people unwillingness to share their knowledge. The issues mentioned explain the actual challenges to share knowledge.

Many studies had applied several theories to better understand the interpersonal relationship and willingness to share knowledge. This study found that some theories only focused and determined on one factor such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which concerns human behaviour, Social Exchange Theory (SET) discusses on expectation and perception when exchanging knowledge and social cognition are concentrated a psychological perspective. Hence, this study argued that to understand the factors of interpersonal relationship there must be a combination of theories that can explain various perspectives of knowledge sharing process. Hence this study Relational Model Theory in presenting the relevant social factors that influence individual's willingness to share knowledge.

## **Fundamental of Relational Model Theory (RMT)**

Relational Model Theory (RMT) has been developed by Fiske (1992). Fiske believed that people are fundamentally sociable (Fiske, 1991; Fiske, 1992) and have a relationship with other people (Boer, Baalen & Kumar, 2002). With this foundation, RMT is able to explain an individual behaviour as in an interpersonal relationship to understand the relationship between people. The assumption underlying this theory, when people have good relationship it will make them to have good behaviour and direct to them a positive course of action. A course of action is referred to cooperative behaviour, enjoyment in helping others and feeling of satisfaction.

Fundamentally, RMT consists of four determinants of communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching and market pricing (Fiske, 1991; Fiske 1992; Fiske, 2004; Fiske & Haslam, 2005). First, communal sharing is a common aspect or similarity that exists between people. It describes that a close relationship is based on a concept of a bounded group of people as equivalent and similar (Fiske 1991). People in a group have common characteristics, share beliefs, norms, background, experience, and position. A communal sharing emphasis on commonalities where everyone inside or outside the group has a similar reference (Koerner, 2006). In addition, a communal sharing explains that those who have a common identity will treat the group members as the same and feeling of belonging to a group member (Lin, W & Lu, 2012). This study believed them they share knowledge together without identifying the differences and perceive them as the same.

Second is authority ranking that is based on a relationship which refers to asymmetry context among people in the organization (Fiske, 1992). This study identifies the differences of hierarchy either high and low levels of people in the organization. An assumption is made where people, who at a higher rank, have more power, expert, knowledgeable and valuable experience in an organization (Boer, Baalen & Kumar, 2004) compared to people of lower rank. In other words, people who have higher rank have a formal power and richness of knowledge, expertise, and experience to direct and order people with an expectation to be loyal and respect to them in return. According to Fiske and Haslam (2005), the way people think and communicate depends on the hierarchy and status, such as high and low level, greater and lesser as well as stronger and weaker. People limit their interaction and communication with people in different hierarchies. In authority ranking, the concept emphasizes that people of the higher rank are more influential rather than people at low levels. They control and manage the interaction and regulate the relationship with other people.

Next is equality matching (EM) relationship refers to the relationship which requires a balanced or reciprocated act (Baalen, Dalen & Malsen, 2013). In a relationship, people look to have the same amount of what they gave to others (Fiske, 1992). For example, taking turns, acting in one to one correspondence, balance in efforts, matching with what has been given to others and expecting the same amount in return to them (Fiske & Haslam, 2005). In fact, equality matching makes a relationship feel fair, reasonable and results in commitment to balance out the contributors.

Finally, market pricing (MP) explains the symbols of monetary aspects that bind people in a close relationship (Fiske & Haslam, 2005). The relationship is organized with reference to ratios or rates (Fiske, 1992). In other words, people are expecting something in return in future when they contribute to others (Boer et al, 2011). In fact, the relationships are organized in terms of cost-benefit ratios and involve a rational calculation of expecting a return. Market pricing also associates with rewards that will be given to an individual who is willing to share knowledge, either intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. The more strongly positive outcomes are perceived by a person to be associated with a given action, the more people tend to perform the action (Vroom, 1964).

## **Features of Social Factors and Relational Model Theory**

### **(i) Social Cohesion as Communal Sharing**

Social cohesion is perceived as people who are willing to help others, have a close relationship which can be trusted, easy to get along with each other and have same values (Sampson et al., 1999). In addition, Berman and Phillips (2004), Oxoby (2009) defined social cohesion as a part of a sense of identity which involves people's attachment to a place and has a symbolic bond to people. These features are consistent with the idea by Fiske (1992) who advocated that the features are described as a bounded group of people as equivalent and undifferentiated, which is equal to communal sharing element. This can further be explained, a group of people who have something in common that makes them socially equal to others. Boer et al, (2011) also stated that a communal sharing focuses on commonalities and ignores the

differences. Koerner (2006) also mentioned and supported that in-group or out-group members have a similarity that enables them to be cohesive.

(ii) Social Power as Authority Ranking

Authority is an indicator of power which exists when one person has a formal right to give a command while another has a formal obligation to obey. Authority not only can be earned by a person's leadership capabilities but through his knowledge, experience, and expertise. In the context of an authority ranking, it is basically about people who are linearly ordered by some hierarchical power in socialization (Fiske, 1992). Fiske (1992) further noted that people in a higher rank have privileges, prestige, and have better access to knowledge rather than people lower in rank. Generally, people in the organization are discriminated by a social rank or their level in an organization's hierarchy (Koerner, 2006). Each rank brings their own set of rights and responsibilities for expectations and evaluations of one's own and of others' behaviours (Koerner, 2006). Several studies have been conducted to examine a power that relates to the concepts of authority ranking.

A Study done by Lin et al. (2012) claimed the legitimate and coercive power that has been provided with the same characteristics of authority ranking. In a different review by Boer et al., (2004) authority rank can categorized a formal authority (ARf) and expertise bases (ARe). The authors explain that are individual who has high personal power is able to regulate the relationship between people. People are differentiated not only by a formal position but also be differentiated based on the level of knowledge that belongs to them. The expert power which is categorized as personal power contributes to present the authority ranking by influencing others to administer to another information, knowledge or expertise. From the discussion, this study can conclude that the social power which consists of legitimate, coercive, referent and expert power consistent and relevant to the fundamental of authority ranking in RMT.

(iii) Affective Commitment as Equality Matching

Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment, identification, and involvement in the organization and its goals (Meyer & Allen 1991). This study reckons that emotional attachment, identification and involvement will direct an individual to exert extra effort (Matzler, Renzl, Mooradian, Kroghd & Muelle, 2011). It is similar to a term of reciprocity which means to have a balance in giving and taking. In the context of affective commitment, an individual assesses through how he or she can help by giving all the efforts to those who have earlier given some help to them. Consistent to the basis of affective commitment, the features can represent as equality matching (EM), that ideally applies a balance in giving and taking egalitarians, looking for an equal expectation in-return (Lin et al., 2012). Thus, this study examines from the perspective of affective commitment to what extent an individual will put his efforts and commitment similar to the one who is willing to share knowledge.

(iv) Reward as Market Pricing

The rewards satisfy one of an individual needs indirectly, especially through monetary compensation. Rewards are categorized into two classes which are intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. An intrinsic reward refers to internal values such as satisfaction, enjoyment, recognition and appreciation by others. In contrast, extrinsic rewards are represented as values in monetary terms such as salary, commission, incremental, pay for performance and bonuses (Lin et al, 2012). With these criteria, it can be describe as the features of market pricing.

Market pricing features are considered to be valuable compensation that will benefit an individual either in intrinsic or extrinsic values. According to Davenport and Prusake (1998), market pricing refers to knowledge from outside organization that frequently has to be paid for. As a result, the value of knowledge should be measured and represented with some practical values such as money. While Boer (2005) highlights that market pricing is related to compensation features based on satisfactory compensation and minimal effort. People are that regularly being rewarded in terms of financial such as money, bonus, commission and allowance. This has been supported by the recent study that cost-benefit ratios and rational calculations of efficiency or expected rewards can explain the fundamentals of market pricing (Lin et al., 2012). Another finding claimed that tangible rewards, cost, and satisfaction are associated with market pricing. In contrast to Ye, Liu, Lin, and Chen (1991) mentioned market pricing is about the rate of return, propositional reward, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and money paid and achievement motivated. From the discussion above, this study proposes a new conceptual framework as shown in figure 1, ideally to determine the causal relationship of a social factor and relational model theory on a willingness to share knowledge

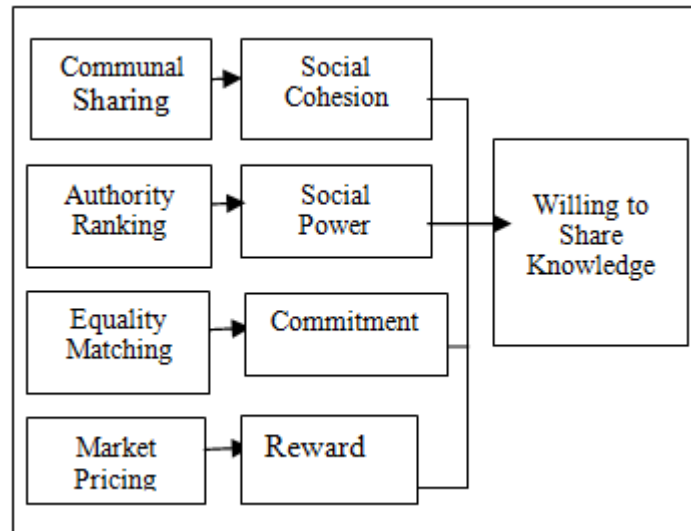


Fig 1. Conceptual Model

## Conclusion

As a conclusion literature review comprehends the relational factors by applying the relational model and willingness to share knowledge. In a process of sharing knowledge, a relational context is viewed as a bridge that links between the knowledge sources and knowledge recipients. These two actors are interacting and communicating with each other. A good relationship between these two parties may make an individual's willingness to share knowledge and probably not to share if the relationship is bad. A relational model theory explains the four components of communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching and market pricing as a basis for a relationship. It may combine two or more components in order to form a good relationship with others. This theory is fundamentally consistent to explore the human behaviour in a relationship and it is significant to extend in order to determine the related factors that influence willingness to share knowledge. From the theory, this study proposes four elements of social factors which are social cohesion features of communal sharing, the social power of authority ranking, and affective commitment of equality matching and rewards of authority ranking. This study further recommends a conceptual framework to be tested on the causal and relationship towards willingness to share knowledge. This finding contributes to the new knowledge in the practices of RMT in explaining social factors and willingness to share knowledge.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by School of Business of Universiti Utara Malaysia.

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