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Motivational theory and knowledge sharing in the public service

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Background: Knowledge sharing has been identified as the core process of knowledge management for institutions which are interested in the retention of knowledge invested in their human capital in the event of their departure from the institutions. To this end, knowledge sharing has been the focus of research institution-wide, and less focus has been paid to communities of practice (CoPs) within the South African public service.

Objectives: This study aimed to explore factors that motivated knowledge sharing practices in a South African public service CoP.

Method: This study used the mixed methods design through the lens of the motivational theory. Primary quantitative data were collected by means of self-administered questionnaires returned by 23 of the 31 KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Provincial Human Resource Development Forum (PHRDF) members to whom the questionnaires were distributed. In addition, primary qualitative data were collected from the senior managers of Human Resource Development (HRD) units from 10 different KZN Provincial Departments of the 14 managers requested. The quantitative analysis was established using SPSS software, whereas qualitative analysis was established using thematic codes with the NVIVO software.

Results: The findings from the results revealed that PHRDF members were intrinsically motivated to share their knowledge rather than extrinsically motivated.

Conclusion: Although literature confirmed the main barrier to knowledge sharing in organisations as being the unwillingness to share, CoPs were likely to reduce the extent to which knowledge sharing was hindered. Members of a CoP ultimately related to one another as homogeneous groups despite representing different departments. To this end, hedonic intrinsic motivation occurred as members shared knowledge for the good of the whole regardless of the absence of extrinsic motivation. Departmental silos fell away, and there was no anticipation of rewards or incentives for knowledge sharing. It is, therefore, imperative that the South African public service strategically positions CoPs as knowledge sharing platforms to curb the loss of knowledge when employees leave its employ for whatever reason.

Introduction

Knowledge has always been treasured in business as it contributes to the success of any organisation; hence, it is required to successfully accomplish organisational goals. However, if knowledge is retained by a few individuals without sharing with others, there is a risk of losing such knowledge should those individuals leave the organisation. Knowledge management (KM) emerged in the 20th century as one of the business processes used to avoid the loss of knowledge with the aim to capture, store and redistribute organisational knowledge. Notwithstanding the business industry's proactive stance towards realising the importance of managing knowledge produced in organisations, the public sector has finally caught up with making KM one of its management processes. Members of the public increasingly demand that the public sector determine, define and forecast their needs as clients and to develop, modify and adjust services to match these needs (Durrant 2001). KM is one of the tools that could be used to provide solutions to the problems of service delivery which the public experience by applying proven best practice to service delivery challenges and problems.

As KM focused on managing knowledge by sharing such knowledge, and the public service operates according to the mandate of delivering uniform and quality service to every citizen, it is imperative that knowledge sharing amongst public servants be used as a vehicle to accomplish such objectives. KM consists of activities whose purpose is to capture, store and share knowledge in various ways (Majewski, Usor & Khan 2011). The South African public service

organisational structure consists of a Human Resource Development (HRD) unit in each government department, which is responsible for equipping public servants with various skills to perform their jobs competently. In the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provincial administration, the HRD units are monitored by the Provincial Public Service Training Academy (PPSTA), which is located in the Office of the Premier (OTP). The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) receives KZN departmental HRD reports such as Assessment and Training Reports (ATR) and Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) sent by the PPSTA. The PPSTA is also responsible for drafting the KZN Provincial Human Resource Development Strategy (PHRDS). The KZN HRD units acknowledge that KM is one of the pillars of organisational development. This article is based on a PhD study, which explored knowledge sharing in the public service. The KZN Provincial Human Resource Development Forum (PHRDF), which is a forum for HRD practitioners, was used as a case study because it comprised a 'group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Ntala 2010).

Problem statement

There is ample knowledge created and accumulated by South African public servants in their duties towards fulfilling their service delivery mandates. The knowledge created is enhanced by the amount of training that occurs through the HRD units and also as applied during projects which government undertakes as prompted by the State of the Nation Address (SONA) or State of the Province Address (SOPA) and supported by the annual budget speeches. Whether the knowledge accumulated by South African public servants was shared amongst one another and what motivated the sharing was the subject of the study. Because of the high turnover of employees in the South African public service as a result of resignations, retirements, promotions, sickness or death, sharing the knowledge which has been acquired by these employees through government spending on their training and other capacitating initiatives would be a justifiable exercise. However, there is no available national KM strategy or policy which would enable the management and sharing of knowledge in the South African public service. Notwithstanding attempts that had been made by the DPSA in drafting a National Framework for Knowledge Management, the area of KM has not received the attention it deserves (Mphahlele 2010). According to the Public Service Commission (2011), the movement of senior managers (SMs)[1] through their ranks is prevalent and normal. However, there is no study that shows what motivates public servants to share their knowledge with one another.

1.SMs ranks start from Level 13 to Level 16 and are named Senior Director, Chief Director, Deputy Director-General and Director General at National Government, respectively, and are called Senior Manager, General Manager, Senior General Manager and Head of Department or Director-General in case of the Office of the Premier in Provincial Government.

Purpose of the study

Several studies have been done on KM and how it contributes to service delivery in South Africa (Bhyat, Van der Westhuizen & Blackburn 2005; Chaba 2003; Fraser 2004; Kgarimetsa-Phiri 2009; Radebe 2002; Soko 2005). Some studies were undertaken to explore indigenous knowledge sharing activities in communities (Lwoga, Ngulube & Stilwell 2012; Munyua & Stilwell 2012). A few studies explored knowledge sharing in the South African public service (Mkhize 2015), whereas other studies focussed on KM in the South African public service (Gaffoor & Cloete 2010; Maponya 2005). The above studies did not focus on isolating knowledge sharing in public service CoPs and what motivates group members to share their knowledge with one another. This article aimed at describing knowledge sharing activities in a case study of a CoP within a public service environment and the various factors that motivated knowledge sharing in this environment.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this article is to explore what motivates knowledge sharing practices of the KZN PHRDF so that the findings could be replicated to encourage the use of CoPs in the public service, specifically for knowledge sharing.

Research question

In order to locate the motivating factors behind knowledge sharing by PHRDF members, this article is guided by the following major question: What factors motivated knowledge sharing between PHRDF members?

Theoretical framework

In order to determine why the PHRDF members shared knowledge, this study examined the motivational factors, which drove their knowledge sharing behaviours. Motivation theory suggests that motivation drives human behaviour (Jeon, Young-Gul & Koh 2011). This study adopted Lam and Lambermont-Ford's (2010) model, 'a three-category taxonomy of motivation to examine knowledge sharing behaviour in' an organisation. The three-category taxonomy of motivation consists of the traditional dichotomy of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and adding hedonic motivation as a way of closing the gap between the two. The gap occurs because 'extrinsic motivation may support the transfer of explicit knowledge, which is measurable but often fails in the case of tacit knowledge' which is intangible (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010).

Literature review

Motivational theories are psychological ways of understanding what inspires human beings to extend their abilities and perform according to expectations. There are various motivational theories developed by theorists such as Abraham Maslow, Douglas Mcgregor, Frederick Herzberg and others. Motivation theory suggests that motivation drives human behaviour (Jeon et al. 2011). In order to

determine why the PHRDF members share knowledge, this study examined the motivational factors which drive their knowledge sharing behaviours. Although 'knowledge sharing is a key process in translating individual learning into organisational capability', facilitating it is a difficult task (Jeon et al. 2011). According to Lam and Lambermont-Ford's (2010) study, 'a three-category taxonomy of motivation to examine knowledge sharing behaviour' in an organisation was used, which this study adopted. Lindenberg (2001) divided 'intrinsic motivation into normative and hedonic types which interact with each other and with extrinsic motivation'. This division provided a 'more complete match between the individual and organisational environments' for knowledge sharing.

'Normative intrinsic motivation is directed towards the individual's sense of compliance with personal and social norms', and the 'degree to which individuals act or do not act when normatively motivated' (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). This type of motivation 'depends on the importance that they attach to compliance in a given context and also the external reaction to non-compliance' (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). Lindenberg (2001) posited that 'hedonic intrinsic motivation is derived from the engagement in self-determined, competence enhancing and enjoyable activity achieved through physical and social wellbeing and improvement in the individual's condition'. 'This influences the willingness of an individual to share knowledge, depending on the importance that the individual' appropriates to being involved in such an activity. The significance of hedonic motivation includes its ability to stimulate creativity and innovation as it induces knowledge-seeking behaviour and increases cognitive effort (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). The relationship between intrinsic, extrinsic and hedonic motivation maybe the complex interaction effects between them. For example, 'extrinsic rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks and encourage knowledge hoarding' (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). 'Self-esteem may be lessened when the individual's intrinsic motivation is not acknowledged, implying that their efforts are not appreciated' (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). 'This may occur when incentives are given for specific performances or behaviours, affecting the internally driven behaviours' (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010) and causing individuals to prefer reward-driven behaviours.

On the contrary, there are beneficial effects of extrinsic motivators on hedonic and normative motivation, which result from the individual's perception that they are supportive and congruent with the underlying normative and hedonic motivational preferences (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). 'These are extrinsic motivators that provide feedback', recognise and reward as well as confirm or improve competencies leading to increased self-esteem (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). Similar 'extrinsic motivators (such as career progression and increased involvement that aligns with the individual's normative and hedonic motivators) could have a synergistic effect. High personal commitment (normative) and enjoyment (hedonic) of the task at hand can be unaffected by extrinsic motivation' because the activity itself becomes the motivation (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). Extrinsic motivations serve to satisfy indirect or instrumental needs and they can be financial or social rewards, whereas intrinsic motivations are driven by values provided directly within the work itself (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010). Amabile (1993) and Huber (2001) argued that 'normative and hedonic motivation are seen to be essential in knowledge sharing and creative activities' and that the 'options for an organisation in terms of motivation are limited by its structure' and the nature of the tasks performed.

Although research on knowledge sharing in the public sector is limited, in the past 20 years there has been 'significant changes of moving from a traditional bureaucratic approach to a more managerial one', so much so that today's public sector organisations are also known as knowledge-based organisations (Amayah 2013). Amayah's (2013) claims depicted that knowledge had become as 'critical a resource in the public sector as it is for private sector firms'. Moreover, public organisations (as with the private sector) 'have to contend with greater competition for resources and competition from alternative services. Improving knowledge sharing processes would help ensure that employees benefit as much as possible from senior employees' knowledge and experience before they retire' (Amayah 2013).

Prior studies of knowledge sharing have focused on similarities and differences between private and public sector organisations, and factors that affect knowledge sharing. For example, Amayah (2013:456) citing Liebowitz and Chen (2003) revealed that 'it is more difficult to share knowledge in public sector organisations because most people associate knowledge with power and their promotion opportunities'. Subsequently, studies were conducted specifically on factors affecting knowledge sharing in the public sector – for instance, Seba, Rowley and Delbridge (2012) discovered that 'organisational structure, leadership, time allocation, and trust could be barriers to knowledge sharing in the Dubai police force'. Chiem (2001) claimed that knowledge sharing in the private sector can always be encouraged and rewarded financially, whereas in the public sector limited resources could hinder that practice. In addition, government workers are often 'bogged down' with completing paperwork for even the most trivial tasks. This contributes to slow productivity, generates frustration and creates a tendency to perform the most minimal tasks. They may therefore 'perceive KM initiatives as extra work and resist efforts to build a culture of knowledge sharing' (Yao, Kam & Chan 2007).

Ardichvili (2008) discovered that the following motivational factors affect individuals' willingness to share knowledge: 'personal benefits, community-related considerations and normative consideration; barriers categorized into interpersonal, procedural, technological, and cultural aspects;

enablers such as supportive corporate culture, trust and tools'. Amongst these processes, knowledge sharing has been determined as the cornerstone of KM. According to Huang, Davison and Gu (2008), 'an anticipated reciprocal relationship does not significantly influence an individual's willingness to share knowledge'. In their study, 'knowledge was shared to make work more effective, not because individuals expected something in return' (Huang et al. 2008). On the contrary, 'social interaction was found to influence significantly the extent to which knowledge sharing occurred' (Huang et al. 2008).

In a study of public sector organisations in Puerto Rico, employees identified 'lack of management commitment, alongside' the organisational environment as well as 'lack of emotional intelligence as significant barriers to knowledge sharing' (Seba et al. 2012). Another 'study of public sector employees in Malaysia concluded that whilst the employees in the public sector understood the importance of knowledge sharing, the fact that the overall knowledge sharing strategy was not clearly explained by their departmental managers affected their willingness to share information' (Seba et al. 2012). In addition, insufficient rewards for knowledge sharing, lack of interaction, lack of time and weak information technology also contributed to poor knowledge sharing. A study of public organisations in 'China also concluded that managerial position and support together with communication between organisational levels and advanced' information technology 'systems were important' to knowledge sharing (Seba et al. 2012).

Methodology and research methods

The case study methodology and the mixed methods design described in this article were used to explore knowledge sharing practices of the KZN PHRDF. According to Creswell (2008:476), 'a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection'. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously during a single phase of data collection. The entire population of KZN PHRDF members who represented the 14 KZN Provincial Departments were surveyed using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Figure 1).

Thirty-one self-administered structured questionnaires were physically and electronically distributed to the PHRDF members who were not part of the SMs category. Of these 31 distributed questionnaires, 23 were returned. Of the 14 requests sent, 10 SMs were interviewed using the semi-structured interview schedule. Combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches for data analysis were used, NVivo was used for creating themes for the qualitative data analysis and SPSS 18 was used for quantitative analysis of data. In order to fulfil the requirements of the ethics policies, the purpose of this study was explained clearly to the respondents before the start of the face-to-face interview, and informed consent cover letters were attached to the self-administered questionnaire. The respondents were also assured that the information they provided would only be used for academic purposes and that their identities would remain confidential and anonymous.

Validity and reliability

In an attempt to achieve validity in this study, the instruments used to collect data, the self-administered questionnaire and the semi-structure interview schedule had adequate coverage of the research question guiding the study.

The pre-testing of the instruments on the KwaZulu-Natal Records Managers and Deputy Information Officers Forum (KRMDIOF) members was used to ensure reliability of the data. The questionnaire used for respondents consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, and the interview schedule consisted of closed and open-ended questions. After grammatical and editorial errors were corrected in the pre-tested instruments, the same questionnaire was used to collect data from all the respondents and the same semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect information from all the interviewees to obtain consistent results and ensure reliability of the results.

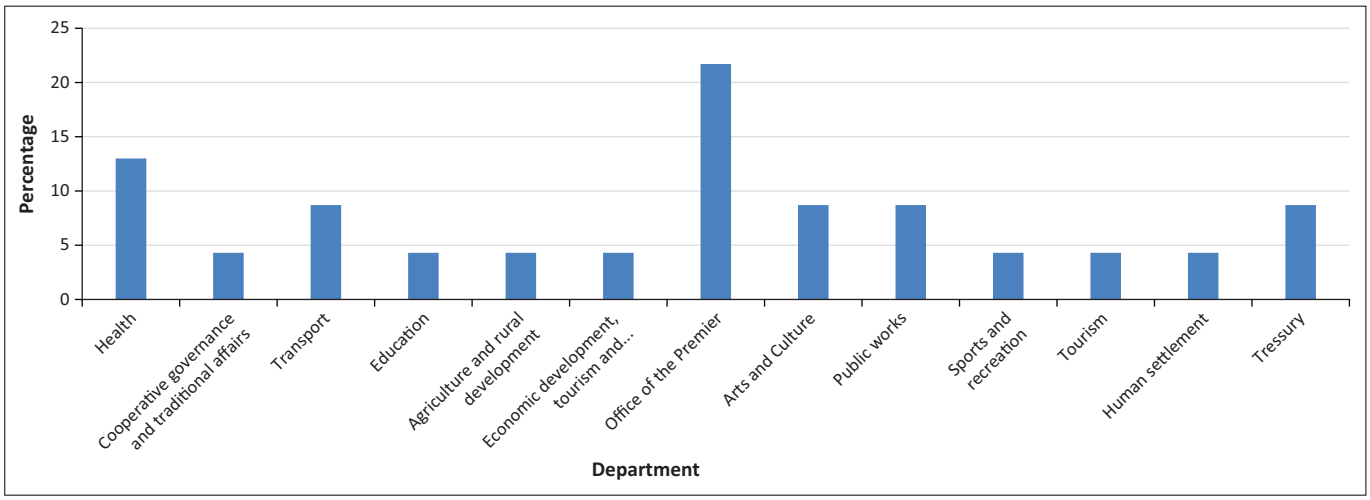

FIGURE 1: Percentage of respondents by department (N = 23).

Ethical consideration

Ethical guidelines were followed as per University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) research ethics and ethical clearance was provided by the UKZN ethics committee.

Major findings and discussion

The results and findings collected from respondents who completed the questionnaires, and interviewees were presented according to the research question. The factors that influenced the members' motivation to share knowledge are discussed in terms of their position held, experience, recognition of expertise and trust (Figure 2).

Position held

This study's findings revealed that the PHRDF consisted of different categories of HRD professionals in terms of position, rank or level and job title, which is often associated with the level of importance depending on the individual's position (high or low) in the organisation's hierarchy (Table 1). According to the findings, the PHRDF members appreciated this diversity within the PHRDF as it was one of the rare occasions where the different categories could mix freely and discuss issues relevant to functions and responsibilities, in this case, HRD.

It emerged from the results that 87% of the respondents felt that the diversity encouraged knowledge sharing across levels and promoted learning from senior to junior members. A few members (13%) believed that learning

TABLE 1: Job titles of respondents (N = 23).

Job title	Frequency	%
HRD	6	26.1
Skills development officer or facilitator or specialist	5	21.7
Practitioner	4	17.4
Deputy manager	3	13.0
Mrs	1	4.3
Trainer	1	4.3
Training advisor	1	4.3
HR policy, systems and HRD	1	4.3
SDF	1	4.3
Manager	1	4.3
Total	**23**	**100.0**

HRD, Human Resource Development; Mrs, Title referring to a married woman; SDF, Skills Development Facilitator.

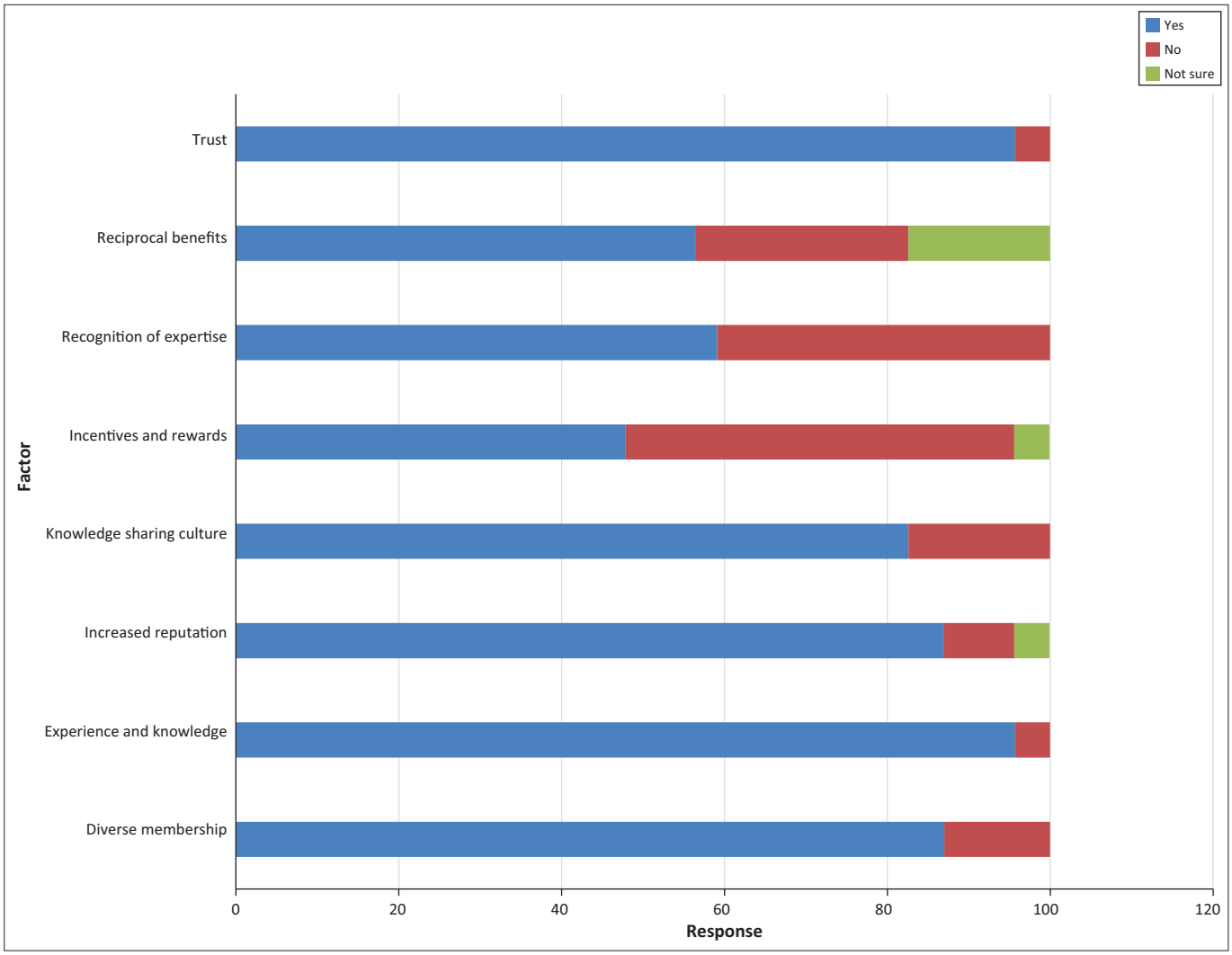

FIGURE 2: Factors which motivated knowledge sharing in the Provincial Human Resource Development Forum.

occurred both ways, from seniors to juniors and vice versa. Diversity of ranks and levels in the PHRDF encouraged knowledge sharing as well as learning. According to Mkhize (2015), knowledge of participants' demographics could help with imitating innovative collaborations where every member of the community could equally contribute.

Experience

The findings revealed that most PHRDF members (95.7%) had experience and knowledge of their field and were therefore motivated to participate in knowledge sharing because of the confidence enhanced by having experience and knowledge. This finding is consistent with the presence of hedonistic intrinsic motivation in this group, which emerged from engagement in competence and self-determined activity. Mannie, Van Niekerk and Adendorff (2013) observed that when an organisation is leaning towards being 'a learning organisation, subject matter experts are more likely to be recognised, empowered and used' for sharing their knowledge. This observation placed the PHRDF as a learning organisation whose members were motivated to share knowledge because they were becoming subject experts. Consistent with normative intrinsic motivation expressed at organisational level, they also attributed their willingness to share knowledge and experience to the fulfilment which they derived from sharing the knowledge that they had gained throughout the period in which they had been in the HRD field.

The findings also revealed that sharing knowledge enhanced reputation and that motivated PHRDF members (86.9%) to share their knowledge even more. This showed that they benefited from sharing knowledge, expressing hedonic and intrinsic motivation to share their knowledge which resulted in the social well-being of the individuals. Personal benefits identified in literature include 'status and career advancement, a better professional reputation, emotional and intellectual benefits' (Amayah 2013). On the contrary, all the SMs interviewed (100%) were motivated to share their knowledge-based on their obligation as managers and leaders to capacitate their staff members. Amayah (2013) referred to this as a 'moral obligation that individuals feel to advance or benefit others in their network'. SMs (50%) were concerned about succession planning, prevention of silos, preservation of institutional memory, encouraging innovation and people development – all of which motivated them to share their knowledge. This sense of obligation also known as 'normative intrinsic motivation' is driven by the individual's sense of compliance with social and personal norms. Enhanced reputation as a result of sharing knowledge was found to be positively related to the repeat of knowledge sharing. However, the absence of mechanisms to recognise the knowledge sharer could result in knowledge hoarding (Akhavan, Rahini & Mehralian 2013).

Recognition of expertise

In terms of the presence of a knowledge sharing culture as a motivator for knowledge sharing, the findings revealed that the majority of PHRDF members (82.6%) agreed that a knowledge sharing culture in the PHRDF was significant. The knowledge sharing culture in the PHRDF was preluded by the high degree of information sharing, which laid a foundation for building a knowledge sharing culture. Findings revealed that there was a high level of knowledge sharing in the PHRDF, hence the members confirming the presence of a knowledge sharing culture. According to Christensen (2005), motivation to share could be affected by both altruistic and intrinsic motivators where both kinds of behaviour could potentially exist in a continuum within a CoP, as illustrated in Figure 3.

The study's findings revealed that there were no incentives for PHRDF members to share their knowledge and that knowledge sharing occurred voluntarily. Half of the members (47.8%) considered the idea of introducing incentives for sharing knowledge to be a positive one, and half (47.8%) were against the idea. Those who favoured incentives regarded these as motivators for knowledge sharing, whereas those who were against the idea raised the point of fearing abuse of the knowledge sharing practice. According to Lam and Lambermont-Ford (2010), the 'exclusive use of extrinsic motivation often places the individual in a transactional rather than a relational stance in respect of the organisation'. In addition, 'extrinsic rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks and encourage knowledge hoarding' (Lam & Lambermont-Ford 2010).

On the contrary, extrinsic motivators that provide feedback, recognition and reward lead to increased self-esteem. From a management point of view, SMs who were interviewed regarded sending their staff members to courses, workshops and training as an incentive for knowledge sharing as they were required to share lessons learnt from attending these events. Some SMs considered allowing staff members to attend events such as sports days and social functions as creating opportunities and incentives for meeting colleagues and sharing knowledge whilst networking at these events. These means to encourage sharing knowledge are what Jeon et al. (2011) referred to as social rewards where in the context of CoPs they exist as acquisition of opportunities. They observed that 'people pursuing social rewards' tended 'to have a relatively greater interest in the social benefits' derived from 'the acquisition of an opportunity' (Jeon et al. 2011).

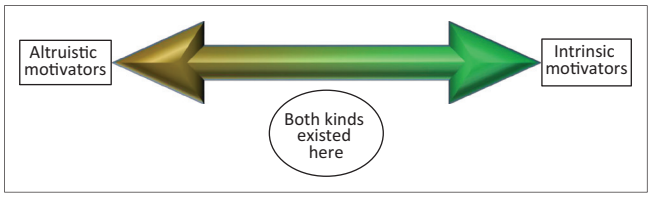

FIGURE 3: Continuum of altruistic and intrinsic motivators.

In terms of recognition of expertise as a motivator for knowledge sharing, the majority of PHRDF (59.1%) agreed that they would be motivated even more to share knowledge if their expertise was recognised. This revealed that most of the respondents were not averse to extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation serves to satisfy indirect or instrumental needs and can also be satisfied by social rewards, especially in a CoP where individuals join the community based on a shared enthusiasm for a common cause rather than as a consequence of anticipating specific economic rewards (Jeon et al. 2011). Those (41.9%) who were not concerned about whether they were recognised or not for sharing knowledge showed that they were motivated to share their knowledge for the sake of goodwill and growth of their colleagues. This finding revealed that there was an element of altruism amongst the members of the PHRDF regarding their motivation to share knowledge, which is closely related to intrinsic motivation. The enjoyment of helpful behaviour is related to altruism as it involves helping others with no expectation of reciprocity (Jeon et al. 2011).

In addition to the above finding, the majority of PHRDF (56.5%) shared knowledge with one another because they expected their colleagues to share knowledge with them should they need it. This motivation to share knowledge is based on reciprocal rewards which are socially extrinsically motivators greatly observed in CoPs (Jeon et al. 2011). The members recognised that as a CoP they would not be able to work in isolation and should they hoard their knowledge, their colleagues would potentially do the same. 'When one member of a CoP shares his knowledge with other CoP members, if reciprocity holds, he/she would anticipate receiving the required knowledge from other CoP members' (Jeon et al. 2011).

The issue of trust

The issue of trust was regarded as a significant factor for PHRDF members' (95.7%) willingness to share their knowledge. Their trust for others' capabilities and competencies, experience and knowledge and the strong relationships formed by their PHRDF members resulted in their willingness to share their knowledge with others at the PHRDF. 'Trust can be widely accepted as being closely linked to organisational culture' (Mannie et al. 2013) which was held in high regard by PHRDF members (65.2%). Venter, Erasmus and Seale (2015) reported that trust was amongst the attributes that promoted the knowledge sharing process in a CoP and was accelerated by the richness and depth of relationships formed during consecutive meetings. If a high level of mutual obligation, expectation and trust exists in a relationship, there will be less risk and uncertainty in future knowledge sharing exchanges (Zhang & Jiang 2015). A high level of trust which led to a high level of knowledge sharing observed in the PHRDF supported the assertion by Maponya (2005) that there must be a certain level of trust to develop and strengthen work relations and social interaction for knowledge sharing. According to Dube and Ngulube (2012), organisations could benefit from strengthening trust as there is a potential for it to lead to openness, honesty, shared goals and outputs.

This high level of a knowledge sharing culture as well as the PHRDF members not being completely enticed or repelled by incentives supported this view that the perceptions run from one end of being enticed to the other end of being repelled by incentives to share knowledge

Recommendations

The recommendations made in the following section relate to motivators for knowledge sharing in the public service utilising CoPs as this article has revealed that there was a large percentage of success in knowledge sharing in the PHRDF. Because of the fact that there were a small percentage of respondents who had reservations regarding the liberty to share knowledge, it is recommended thus:

- *Forums create specific CoPs*: The many forums in the public service should contain aspects of a CoP where meetings are held solely for knowledge sharing targeting technical knowledge rather than information dissemination.
- *Develop a knowledge sharing guidelines*: It is usually difficult to implement any business process without an approved guiding document (such as a strategy or a policy) as most processes in public service are driven by compliance obligations. For KM to succeed, knowledge sharing processes and procedures must be clearly specified in order for these to be properly implemented. From the KM strategy or policy, knowledge sharing guidelines would include motivators for knowledge sharing, and these could be adapted in order to be utilised in other CoPs in the public service.
- *Establishment of a knowledge portal or repository*: Considering that there is a large amount of knowledge sharing during PHRDF meetings, it is recommended that there should be a knowledge reservoir such as a knowledge portal or institutional repository where this knowledge is kept in order to avoid the knowledge gap or 'brain drain' which occurs when some of the members exit the public service. Proven motivators should be used to encourage CoP members to use the knowledge portal or institutional repository to share their knowledge with others.
- *Develop strategies to encourage knowledge sharing:* Although the findings revealed that there was a knowledge sharing culture in the PHRDF and the level of sharing knowledge was high, it is recommended that knowledge sharing be included in performance assessments in order to reward those who share their knowledge because of their altruistic values and to encourage those who might be reluctant to share their knowledge. Motivators such as trust, recognition of expertise, knowledge and experience and the presence of a knowledge sharing culture should be exploited to encourage knowledge sharing as a performance attribute.

Conclusion

This article reveals the PHRDF members were highly motivated to share knowledge during their meetings. The level of knowledge sharing was high, motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators such as diverse membership, experience and knowledge, increased reputation, the presence of a knowledge sharing culture, incentives and rewards, recognition of expertise, reciprocal benefits and trust. It can be concluded that in a CoP, challenges such as diversity of rank or position, competing for recognition, silo mentality, conflicts because of interdepartmental relations and lack of organisational support were limited as members become unified as they regard knowledge sharing as beneficial in the pursuit of similar goals. In addition, members in a CoP become homogeneous in their pursuit of know-how, and knowledge sharing becomes altruistically and intrinsically motivated to achieve the goal of rendering uniform services across departments. Most forums in the South African public service become CoPs by default because they are established mainly for the purpose of information sharing amongst practitioners of the same occupation. The use of the concept of CoPs in reference to groups meeting for the purpose of sharing knowledge is not prevalent. Encouraging CoPs such as the PHRDF and utilising the above-mentioned motivators for members to share their knowledge with one another could assist the public service in implementing efficient service delivery across departments.

The findings revealed that intrinsic motivation (whether hedonistic or normative) was significant in the PHRDF as a result of collegiality and comradeship created by the meetings. If intrinsic motivators such as trust, experience and knowledge, knowledge sharing culture and altruistic values such as recognition of expertise, increased reputation and reciprocal benefits motivated PHRDF members to share knowledge, it is highly possible that the same motivators would be relevant to other CoPs in the public service. Therefore, it can be said that the same motivators from this study will be relevant across the board in the public service, as the respondents clearly agreed that they are intrinsically motivated to share knowledge because of their shared goals.

Further research could look at the length of time the individuals were in their current position to assess if knowledge sharing at a CoP enhanced their chances of promotion.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

N.M-B. is the original author of this article. R.H. was the supervisor of the research done by N.M-B. on knowledge sharing in the public service for her PhD and also supervised and edited this article.

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