Socially Constructed Knowledge: An Inquiry into Sharing Activity among Teachers

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Abstract

School has always been associated with knowledge. Knowledge evolves in and within teachers-students periphery. Teachers in particular, are the master of their work, similarly have additional knowledge about other fields. However, teachers may keep this knowledge to themselves, even though it could be crucial to other teachers and schools. Why teachers become poor knowledge sharer. Do teachers hold on to a restricted view of how knowledge should be shared. Hence, this study is investigating the practice of knowledge sharing activity among the secondary school's teachers at the work place. Three research questions were proposed in this study, a) Do teachers share their knowledge? b) How do they share their knowledge and c) What are the reasons for knowledge sharing. It explains and discusses the issues that intertwine with other aspects in sharing activity. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of 20 teachers as informants for the interview. The results demonstrate how teachers had their own way of sharing. Nevertheless, the norm of equality and reciprocity possibly may act as constraint interplay in their sharing activity. Altruistic behaviour has become the main pattern emerged from the interview. Sharing activity also involves the spirituality and inner aspect of a person which has a link with their belief system.
This is parallel with the nature of this profession when teachers manifested altruistic behaviour, concern for the welfare of others and the pleasure of serving.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, teacher, equality, reciprocity and altruism.

1.0 Background

The globalization, internationalization and information technology explosion has raised the importance of knowledge in the world market. Because of that, knowledge management is normally associated and recognized in the business world as an alternative means to improve and increase the company's profit. Particularly in the knowledge based economy, the implications of knowledge sharing activity has remained crucial. Research suggests that knowledge sharing activity exist in a multi-facet role. Some would stressed sharing activity as a basis of recognition, reputation and credibility (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Swan, Newell, Scarborough and Hislop, 1999) others would interpret it as a manifestation of power (Davenport et al., 1992; Husted and Michailova, 2002), a threat to knowledge ownership and occupational identity (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002). Despite of the complexity of knowledge sharing, others might looked at sharing activity in a different perspective. When knowledge is treated with a certain value, the higher the value is the stickier it became to the owner (Szulanski and Cappetta, 2005). Willingness to share becomes greater when the individual costs is reduced and benefits is increased (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002; Kankanhalli, Tan and Wei, 2005) and as far as the value is concerned knowledge sharing is treated as trading rather than sharing (Konstantinou and Fincham, 2010). Knowledge sharing activity can also be considered as a means of transaction in the "quasi market". Like markets for goods and services, the "knowledge market" too has buyers and sellers who negotiate to reach mutually desire (Davenport and Prusak, 1998, p.25).

Contrasting with other work places, a school is a place where people constantly deal with knowledge and dispose of huge amounts of knowledge and experience everyday. Teachers in particular, know about their work and have additional knowledge about other fields. However, deliberately or not teachers may keep the knowledge to themselves, even though it could be crucial to other teachers and the school as an organization. As Fullan (2002, p.409) argues, "despite being in the learning business, schools and local education authorities (LEA) are notoriously poor knowledge sharers". Fullan (2002) raised this argument based on structural and normative reasons. Structural in the sense that teachers often have little time in their working environment to get together to discuss ideas and refine their teaching and learning, in which limits their capacity for knowledge sharing. Normative, due to the lack of giving and receiving habits among teachers as a result of school cultures that discourage such sharing. In a way knowledge has to be collected, hoarded, conserved, and made accessible but often schools are lack of transparency. Therefore although the average company may be as bad as the average school system, when it comes to knowledge sharing, the best companies seem to be better than the best school systems.

A plausible explanation for this could be that schools still exist in traditional learning environment functions. Among many others for instance are the tasks of qualification, socialization, integration, career planning and secretarial tasks. Teachers are busy running the curriculum and co-curriculum activities to ensure their students leave school with not just certificates but also with other personal and social skills. In doing so they have to handle administrative work which involves extra responsibilities as well as teaching. Consequently teachers do not have much time to actively exchange knowledge with colleagues (Friehs, 2003; Collinson and Cook, 2004). It sounds like clichéd reasoning, but lack of time to meet during the school day and the lack of learning forums are perennial issues for teachers (Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan and Miles, 1992; Donahoe, 1993; Louis, 1994; Lortie, 2002). Teachers' complaints often relate to time erosion or the disruption of work flow, and they consider those who interrupt their scarce time and distract them from work as manifesting a lack of respect for what they consider to be core activities. They constantly feel the pressure of time not just because of the interruption but partly due to the strong norm of not interrupting others as well (Lortie, 2002). A study by Collinson and Cook (2001) revealed that lack of time for interactions and dialogue reinforced low expectations for teachers to learn from and share with colleagues. In addition, teachers

perceived their colleague's attitudes towards sharing as ranging from not wanting to share at all to not realizing they have something to offer, to sharing only when asked, to giving formal presentations, and to creating a Web Page and an extensive outside network.

Another interesting factor influencing a school's culture and teacher's decisions to share their learning is norms of equality and reciprocity (Collinson and Cook, 2004). Lortie (2002, p.194) refers to the norm of equality as the norm of egalitarianism. Egalitarianism in this context is bound to the unwritten rule whereby one should respond to requests for help but not expect special privileges for doing so. Although learning together and from each other seems to be natural for students, this is not necessarily the case with teachers as the "myth of equality" dominates school routine. All teachers are regarded as equal and of similar competence. Gaps in one's knowledge are hidden and teachers are often not willing to share their knowledge with colleagues, especially when their reputation is a result of a store of knowledge. To them, knowledge sharing could endanger their position even though it could improve the overall quality of the school. Due to the culture of "equality", individual teachers try to be different and gain prestige by having a knowledge advantage in special areas (Friehs, 2003). Hence, teachers are discouraged from telling their colleagues if they need to do something different. The only allowance that they have is giving an announcement on something existing or swapping experience by telling a story which contains moral value. Another rule to be obeyed by teachers when it comes to knowledge sharing is the concept of reciprocity. This norm simply refers to the act whereby the recipient of assistance should repay the benefactor (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986) but the rules for teachers appear to be that of giving help upon request. Basically, teachers will make requests for or give offers of assistance in the context of moral constraint even if it is for the most routine matters (Huberman, 1983; Rosenholtz and Smylie, 1984). The main reason for such behaviour is to be non-judgmental of peers by sharing unsolicited knowledge, skills and experience. Unlike being in the "knowledge market" a person who supply knowledge, will be expected to benefit from it too (Davenport and Prusak, 1998).

Having said that, teachers still disseminate knowledge that involves a two-way process in which teachers are helping others to learn when simultaneously helping themselves by learning from others. Empirical study of motivators and barriers of teacher online knowledge sharing had shown that collectivism and reciprocity are two main motivators for their sharing activity (Khe Foon Hew and Hara, 2007). But when it comes to knowledge sharing, relationships tend to be the criteria for selecting whom they will share the knowledge with. Among the criteria were closest friends (Lima 1989), similar experiences and interest (Little, 1982), being team members and most importantly trustworthy colleagues (Huberman, 1983). Understandably, teachers needed opportunities to know and appreciate the views and strengths of their colleagues. They may be willing to cooperate and share their knowledge in the context of informal networks or groups whose members trust each other. What works well within these groups might not in a larger context because sometimes they develop a specific "language and style" which are not familiar to other people. So knowledge sharing may be difficult even if everybody involved is prepared to cooperate (Friehs, 2003).

Why teachers become poor knowledge sharer. Do teachers hold on to a restricted view of how knowledge should be shared. Hence, this study is investigating the practice of knowledge sharing activity among the secondary school's teachers at the work place. Three research questions were proposed in this study, a) Do teachers share their knowledge? b) How do they share their knowledge and c) What are the reasons for knowledge sharing.

2.0 Methodolgy

This study is investigating the practice of knowledge sharing activity among the secondary school's teachers at the work place. A total of 20 teachers were selected as informants for the interview. Respondents were selected from five different schools located at one of the district in

the state of Perak. A purposive sampling technique was used for the respondents selection to give the opportunity to the researcher to select among a key group of individuals who had special function in the schools. For example, the school's principal, due to their role as the head of the management and the decision maker. The subject coordinator, as the mediator between top management of the school and the subject's teacher. Finally, subject teachers are also involved as their views on the sharing activity is also imperative. The interview approach is used to gain insight into people's understanding, rationalizations and arguments on the subject matter. Profiles of the interviewees were presented in Table 1. There were ten males and females respectively with a vast experience in teaching ranging from six years to 32 years or working experience. The interview duration took place roughly from 60 minutes to 90 minutes per individual.

Table 1. Interviewees' Profile

No	Position held	Years of experience	Age	Gender	Duration (minutes)
1	Physical Exercise Teacher	9	32	Female	51
2	Senior Assistant (co curricular)	25	47	Male	78
3	Senior Principal	32	56	Female	90
4	Subject coordinator	32	56	Male	82
5	Language Teacher	5	27	Male	58
6	Head of Department	18	43	Female	65
7	Senior Principal	32	56	Male	75
8	Geography teacher	20	42	Male	55
9	Senior Assistant (Student's affair)	25	47	Male	63
10	Head of Department	6	32	Female	58
11	Religious study Teacher	13	37	Male	50
12	Principal	31	55	Female	70
13	Head of Department	18	45	Female	70
14	Language Teacher	7	30	Female	60
15	Science Teacher	15	40	Male	75
16	Geography teacher	10	38	Male	68
17	Subject Coordinator	16	40	Female	80
18	History Teacher	13	39	Female	60
19	Subject Coordinator	20	43	Male	62
20	Science Teacher	16	40	Female	65

Data from the interview were processed by looking and searching for words and phrases that can be connected to the research questions. Next, was to move to the explanatory accounts and try to find patterns of association within the data and attempt to account for why those patterns occur. It tries to understand by giving meaning and explains the behaviour of knowledge sharing; what, when, how and why people react to such phenomena.

3.0 Findings and discussions

Knowledge sharing is an issue that intertwines with other aspects of knowledge activities. Experience from respondents has given evidence of the wider perspective of knowledge sharing particularly when justifying their action for sharing. Next, findings will be discussed in the context of the research questions.

3.1 Do teachers share their knowledge?

Of course they do, however, teachers were inclined to be selective and cautious when doing so. Types of knowledge have become vital as respondents tended to categorize and differentiate knowledge to be shared. For example, any confidential knowledge that is meant to be known to the administrators only and not to the teachers or students may not be shared. Any knowledge that is for the general use in the organization, for example salary scale or work incentives would be shared openly with everybody regardless of gender, seniority and qualification. However, specific knowledge such as a marking scheme for Science subject, for example, would be shared with a group of science teachers only because it is relevant and within their field of interest.

It is understandable, especially when work-related knowledge is classified as confidential, that this tended to limit the number of people eligible to share. But when it comes to tacit knowledge the number of individuals that can share that type of knowledge can be even more restricted particularly when it is work related. This is because tacit knowledge is more likely to be treated as personal property even though it is socially constructed for example knowledge about school's financial detail or problems related to students' conduct.

Some people are very protective when it comes to sharing their knowledge. They do not simply share the knowledge when it is highly confidential, sensitive or is not conclusive yet such school financial details, school problems, solutions or ideas. They keep a low profile and avoid unnecessary attention or worry to others. Some also feel that it is their intellectual property so they only speak or share when they are invited to do so for a specific audience (#20).

Another related issue pertaining to knowledge sharing is the attitude of the knowledge sharer towards knowledge sharing. This can be a mixture of positive and negative aspects of sharing. The positive aspect of knowledge sharing is when there is a consensus among the sharers to conform to a certain standard that everybody agrees upon. The main constraint or negative aspect in the development of knowledge is when others cannot accept or refuse to accept knowledge sharing. The resistance or apathy to sharing among teachers communities of practice is when knowledge is considered as a valuable personal asset that has to be protected not shared. And the fact is, no one can be forced to accept knowledge but for knowledge to grow and develop, the giver must be willing to give knowledge and the receiver on the other hand must be ready to accept the knowledge. Undoubtedly the positive aspect of knowledge sharing is when it becomes a powerful tool in communities of practice. Through knowledge sharing the horizon is widened and workload is lightened.

This school is neither an elite nor the best school here. However, it has always been referred to for some of its activities or important achievements. I welcome everyone to this school so they can look and learn from us all about our failures and successes. I am not afraid to share about our failures or success because these can serve as guidelines for further improvements in future. I like sincere comments whether good or bad from visitors about our activities so that we can learn something new and improve ourselves (#13).

In terms of sharing and communication, teachers claimed to be cooperative and there was no restriction of gender, academic background or seniority because everyone must achieve a standard. Thus, they were willing to confide in each other in order to reach that standard of sharing that can be of benefit to the entire school.

No-one seems to hoard knowledge. Instead the staff in the school are quite generous in sharing knowledge. I suppose they know that such knowledge speeds up work processes and this can only benefit the school. Such as the OMR (optical mark reader) machine. I was the first person

shown how to use the machine to check students' exam answers. Then another person was sent to attend the hands-on training. Within a week, four more people knew the theory of using the machine. The machine reduced the time required to check exam answer papers by 80% (#8).

However, there is also some resistance or apathy to sharing among the communities of practice, even though they knew how important knowledge sharing was in facilitating their daily work. To some individuals knowledge was a valuable personal asset that has to be protected not shared. It can be used as a tool to develop and upgrade a person's career or to show superiority among the communities of practice. So whatever knowledge is given or discussed it was not always the full extant of knowledge. The basic reason for this attitude of protecting their knowledge is fear that someone might steal their ideas. Sometimes knowledge can also be a shield to protect the individual from being mistaken as ignorant. Some would have the notion that they will lose their knowledge if they let it out so it is better to be quiet. Others would think to avoid voicing their suggestions or ideas no matter how good for fear of being asked to do the job.

The trend among teachers is that they do only when they are asked to; they help only when they are asked to and they share knowledge only when requested to. Not many teachers are willing to share their knowledge voluntarily unless they are unselfish. In this school, teachers do not confide in each other so they would use their own knowledge in their own teaching in class (#9).

For those reasons teachers felt that everybody is equally competent with their knowledge and skills because they were equally trained. Due to this "myth of equality" teachers were expected to know what they were supposed to know and they only responded if there was a request from another party. Similarly, in return they will not expect to get any extraordinary treatment from others (Lortie, 2002). Teachers can only feel that they are different from the rest of their colleagues if they have something different to offer for instance having different skills in a special area (Friehs, 2003). As a result it would secure their position and maintain their reputation among their colleagues.

Sometimes, some people do not want to share any knowledge at all. If they do, they do not give one and hundred percent of it. We are teachers, we can tell, whatever knowledge that they shared are knowledge that is universal or just common sense. They don't want to reveal too much. This is because they probably want to protect their patent or idea so that they are more superior to others. This is human nature and it is beyond our control (#11).

Thus, attitudes to knowledge sharing demanded several conditions to occur. First is the attitude of the knowledge sharer. Knowledge sharing is defeated if the speaker is halfhearted in telling and sharing or the listener is bored to hear and accept. Second is accuracy. If wrong information is given out due to the source or the speaker's mistake, then this will lead to miscommunication that will cause further problems. Third is inadequacy. Sometimes when knowledge is delivered it requires special tools such as LCD projectors, a sound system or books to help the listeners understand and benefit from knowledge because they cannot see, hear or read it. Finally, it also involves time and venue. There must be a proper time, a conducive venue and a person or a team to organize and stimulate knowledge sharing.

3.2   How do they share their knowledge?

Methods of knowledge sharing were another aspect that emerged from interview data. How people share their knowledge seems to be directed by personal preferences and this leads to issues of trust and honesty. Teachers share knowledge among those whom they are very close

and comfortable with, perhaps because they were teaching the same subject. However, as knowledge sharing is not limited to a specific way, it can be either formal or informal and it can occur in several conditions. The common ways of knowledge sharing practiced by teachers were via discussion, meetings, seminars, in-house training, subject panel meetings, chatting, e-mails, on the job contact and the list goes on. All these activities occur both in formal ways such as organized seminars or meetings or take place in informal and friendly conversations at the school canteen, staff room or classroom corridor.

In a different setting sharing sometimes happened when teachers bring along their work to other schools during meetings. Given teachers' claims not to have the luxury of time they seemed to take the opportunity to make the best of their time. Here they exchange, and learn new ideas and practices from other schools. As much as time pressure is a constraint on knowledge transfer, it still takes place unintentionally. It is through these activities new knowledge, skill and experience were developed. But most of all teachers shared a lot of information during subject panel meetings. Teachers who teach the same subject would be able to discuss their main interest, that is, the respective subject and its related issues.

Sharing of knowledge within the school among teachers always happens especially during panel meetings where I would encourage all teachers to share materials and resources for teaching, where we would even share our "thumb-drives". This is obvious especially among the Malay Language subject teachers who are the most cooperative group in school. Teachers share any new knowledge or teaching practices that have tried among students and found to be useful and true. Then other teachers could apply the same technique in their respective subjects and make new additions to suit their lesson. This is the way knowledge and skills grow in this school; beginning from a simple idea, it eventually grows to become more complicated and comprehensive (#6).

Basically knowledge sharing neither needed to be technology driven nor traditional because in either way it still exists. Technologically driven knowledge sharing still faced human-factor limitations such as time, skills and inadequate facilities. Therefore, the traditional method, that is face-to-face, is consistently being used as a convenient and flexible way (McKinlay, 2002). On the other hand, the existence of technology is also unavoidable as it appears to be handy and efficient at times (Alavi and Tiwana, 2005). Knowledge sharing according to teachers' experience did not necessarily occur in the presence of technology.

We do not use the email for communication often here because of the time constraint. I prefer to communicate face-to-face or through personal meetings because we get more information besides talking by looking at the person's body language. Furthermore, we get immediate response and instant answers which saves time and effort unlike emails. It takes time to use the email because we must access a computer, the service must be online, and the recipient has to do likewise in order to be able to send an answer to us. Sometimes the recipient causes more delay by giving excuses such as being too busy (#10).

As far as knowledge sharing was concerned, the tendency seemed to be more by means of mentoring or personal coaching. This was likely to occur among the top management individuals and among the more experienced teachers. Peer-to-peer sharing is an example of personal coaching practiced by the schools' principals. This type of sharing is unique and specially tailored to this high rank of the school's administration. Among these groups, they have a mentoring system according to administrative zones[1] which were created by the Ministry

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[1] Schools in Malaysia were located within the five zones; North, Central, South, East and Sabah and Sarawak. These zones were created by The Ministry of Education for the purpose of administration, resource allocation, budgeting and expenditure.

of Education. There is a principal mentor for several principal mentees in each zone. So, a new principal could refer to a senior principal in her/his zone as her/his principal mentor. It is through these communities of practice that the top management will be able to share knowledge, experiences, exchange ideas and learn from each other. Such knowledge activity had shown elements of professionalism and unselfishness in sharing that took place in the circle or networking of school's leaders.

The mentor-mentee mode of knowledge sharing among the school's leaders also applies to the individual school's community of practice which it worked under the same basic principle of knowledge sharing. In doing so, schools managed to share and retain knowledge that was beneficial to the management of the school.

We have several school cultures. First any new teacher will be assigned a mentor specially appointed by the principal. This is because there is not enough time to do an orientation course for the new teacher. Thus the mentor has to guide and give orientation to the new staff. The new teacher then is expected to take her/his own initiative to locate other professional information for example she/he can refer to the school flowcharts. Because of this mentor and mentee system, teacher transfer is not a problem to us anymore. If the mentor leaves, others will be appointed to take over or by that time, the previous mentee would be experienced enough to be a mentor to other new comers. In this way we have a staggered team of mentors. Another culture of ours is that teacher is assigned a particular duty for at least three years to make her/his experience in that area of work and maybe able to share her/his knowledge in the future (#4).

3.3   What are the reasons for knowledge sharing?

Why do people want to share knowledge? This is an interesting question that reflects individuals' belief and culture, honesty, sincerity and integrity. From the interview data, several unexpected outcomes emerged as the justification for knowledge sharing activity. Respondents tended to associate their spiritual and religious beliefs with a sense of duty and fulfillment in connection with knowledge sharing. It reflects the way they perceived knowledge almost as a divine substance and how it is in the hand of mankind to disseminate knowledge among others. This tended to be a slightly difficult issue to discuss as it involves the spirituality and inner aspect of a person which again has a link with their belief system. Nevertheless, this phenomenon allows the emergent and unexpected issues to be highlighted in this findings.

3.3.1   Belief and culture

Under these circumstances the interviewees were seen relating their view to their respective religious beliefs. It seems that this aspect of the sacred created a kind of virtuous circle in which "knowledge" was regarded in a particular way; not as a narrow possession, but as a common good which is not necessarily diminished when it is shared.

Knowledge is a gift from God. The more we learn, the more skilful we become. Our knowledge will not lessen or neither will it diminish if we share it with others. In fact, it will grow and be enhanced. There is so much knowledge everywhere and no one can steal knowledge from others. Knowledge can be copied but can never be reproduced to be exactly the same as the original because our experience effects our own perception of knowledge. I am sure I have knowledge that only I know, therefore, I want to share with others. Sharing knowledge is beneficial to continue the production of new knowledge. We should share and use our knowledge with our students in order to produce students who are better than us. We will be considered to have shared knowledge successfully when we produce 'value-added' students (#1).

In the view and experience of respondents it was almost certain that those who do not wish to share knowledge and skills are those who do not understand the concept of knowledge according to their respective religions. To the respondents it was very important to share and teach because tacit knowledge may end and die with mankind and this would be a loss to the individual and society at large. It is interesting to understand how individuals try to link the knowledge that they possess with their sacred belief and its teaching. Their strong belief was something that most of the respondents upheld; thus, it became the justification for their action as well.

The connection between knowledge and sacred belief did not end there. Another reason for the respondents to become motivated to share knowledge was the idea of a multiplier effect on knowledge, which had it roots in the interviewees' belief or religious teaching as well. It is difficult to express the reality of it unless the respective religious teaching is internalized. Respondents unconsciously believed that the value of knowledge increased whenever it was disseminated or shared, and to them it was important to teach others.

…regardless in any religion, worshippers know that they should share and teach what they know and as the result God will multiply what they owned. If they can teach ten of their friends, then God will increase their knowledge ten times. Those who do not wish to share or teach is because they do not understand their religion. Knowledge may end and die with us if we don't pass it on because it is all within us. I always tell my teachers that teachers are preachers who preach knowledge (#7).

Since faith is the basic foundation of a religion, knowledge sharing is more likely a kind of religious fulfillment. They would feel satisfied and proud to know that the knowledge that they have shared will be propagated, value added and modified for the benefit of others. This is what they believed to be the "multiplying effect" of knowledge sharing, and the possibility of a mixture between the belief and what has been imposed and practiced as moral values in the society.

Passing of knowledge is enjoyable and fulfilling.....Our work must be sincere and full of enthusiasm.....Sincerity and honesty are God given values which we must uphold in our work..... We must be generous with others in kind, deeds, words, and especially knowledge. According to Islam, the more we use and spread knowledge, the greater it will become. We must be friendly by greeting others or make polite comments, as some people are too shy to talk. At the same time, we must not be afraid to ask when seeking information or knowledge (#6).

This phenomenon is possibly related to the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial society with a relatively strong belief and practice of respective religions and cultures. Added to this condition is the fact that Islam is the official religion and has contributed in some way to the management practice and the organizational culture especially in the public sector (Mellahi and Wood, 2004).

A "soft touch" was another aspect highlighted by interviewees. In this circumstance "soft touch" was actually referring to the inner aspect of the individual which is the manifestation of good moral values. This reflected an emotive and sensitive aspect of knowledge sharing which is partly driven by the moral culture and by the teaching profession itself. Culturally, the individual has been brought up and taught a certain standard of accepted values in the society. Therefore, as an individual who has internalized cultural values, it is accepted and expected by the respective social norms that teachers are role models and ought to be "good" persons in the society. Their role seemed to be not just being an educator but simultaneously the substitute parents' role.

Teaching is considered a noble job because teachers are preachers who preach knowledge. They are the people who are able to sink into the deeper feeling of the listener, who can talk softly, who can always be careful with the language intonation, who use the appropriate vocabularies and who do not say something that might upset or insult people. Wherever I go I always tell my staff to use the soft touch. Speaking and talking must be proper. We need not to shout or be forceful on our students. We may call them "my dear" or "my son" so they will be more open and receptive to us (#7).

I like to praise those who deserve it, I always appreciate them and always use touching words to soften their feelings and make them feel loved and appreciated. They will be touched, appreciated and motivated that they will be dedicated to work, ready and not easily bored because they are feeling happy. I think that everyone has potential in them. I do not like to condemn others because I think that there is always some goodness in that person even if he makes a mistake (#13).

Therefore as respected role models their thinking and points of view are expected by society to be balanced and harmonious. What is important to the knowledge sharer is to be sensitive and selective with the choice of words so that whatever is said will be effective and touching to the listener.

3.3.2   Altruism

When it comes to knowledge sharing, interviewees tended to stress the elements of integrity, sincerity and honesty in their actions. This is perhaps a real manifestation of a teacher being genuinely devoted to his/her profession. To the respondents it is part of their professional identity as well as their responsibility as a teacher to want to tell, to teach and to share. They sincerely want to share their knowledge with others and feel fulfilled when they are able to do so. Putting it into perspective, this condition could be seen as an overlap in knowledge sharing between teachers and the knowledge sharing that teachers do in teaching pupils.

This altruistic behaviour seems to fit well into the characteristics of the teaching profession. Teachers are likely to act as selfless individuals who show concern for the welfare of others and are perhaps motivated to perform their duty as a moral obligation towards individuals or organizations. Since altruism was central to most, if not all, in religious teaching, promoting altruistic morality is also promoting altruistic behaviour. Hence, teaching is possibly a special case and that these simple "altruistic" reasons are likely to figure more highly because of the nature of the occupation. Teaching by definition is about passing on knowledge. Nevertheless, some individuals may feel both altruism and duty, while others may not. The boundary seems to be vague as individual teachers could play different roles in society. A genuine sense of altruism as one of the elements of trust can be detected in the pattern.

In managing knowledge, I believe in generosity. I like to share my knowledge and expertise with anyone who asks me. In school, we always welcome anyone who visits, asks and wishes to learn from us. Their visit or request are good for us because we can exchange ideas and gain new knowledge. I think those who do not share knowledge are very selfish (#12).

Therefore, schools as places of work offer an environment that has a special relevance for notions of learning and knowledge exchange. To these communities of practice, teaching appears to be a way of practicing what is believed and preached. Within this community, teaching is considered a noble job with a huge responsibility. Teachers wanted to carry out this duty because they are sincere and passionate for the profession. This scenario suggests how knowledge can be considered as a public good that does not belong to any individual but

everyone in the organization. This view corresponds to studies of e-communities (Wasko and Faraj, 2000) and virtual knowledge-sharing communities of practice (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling, 2003) where knowledge can be shared and spread throughout the community without losing its value due to a sense of common ownership and moral obligation.

Sharing knowledge is beneficial to continue the production of new knowledge. We should share and use our knowledge with our students in order to produce students who are better than us. We will be considered to have shared knowledge successfully when we produce "value-added" students (#1).

In order to excel in our work and career we must have good networking. We cannot work alone. Through sharing and networking, we can polish our ideas, modify it and share it with others. We will gain more experience and maybe we could spark off better with quality ideas (#15).

Another issue which was embedded in the elements of altruism was the relationship between junior and senior teachers in relation to knowledge sharing. When it comes to knowledge, juniors are expected to give way to the seniors because this is what has been taught from the socialization process of the society. It is still part of Malaysian traditional culture to give respect to those who are older because to them knowledge and experience grow simultaneously with age.

I always remind myself not to be too proud instead try to be modest. I should always be present and get involved in any activity. Junior teachers should respect and obey the senior teachers. They are more knowledgeable and experienced than we are so we should always consult them for advice and knowledge. As junior teachers, we do not wait for the seniors to come to us but we should make the first move and approach them for advice. On the other hand, the senior teachers should realize that they also could help and be open with their juniors. Anyhow, the junior teachers should be proactive to take the first step to approach the seniors so that they would accept him. A simple analogy would be parents and children. No matter what, children should be the ones to impress upon their parents and not the other way round (#10).

This kind of relationship may also be an example of how junior teachers accept their subordination to the senior teachers. The juniors have a dilemma over whether or not to expose themselves based on the expectation of the seniors in which they were able to monitor or exert control over the juniors (Luhman, 1988). However, there is also a possibility that this type of relationship between the junior and senior teacher might instead be just trust between friends without any prejudice between the two parties. This relationship purely rests on a moral foundation whereby each party expects to be honest and sincere (Newell and Swan, 2000). Therefore, such expectations held considering seniority might be overcome and the junior teachers may feel "safe and secure" in the relationship.

4.0 Conclusion

Knowledge sharing among secondary school teachers demanded several conditions to occur. First is the attitude of the knowledge sharer. Second is accuracy and classification of knowledge that leads to the constraints of knowledge sharer involved. Third is inadequacy which will be related to traditional or technologically aided way of sharing. Finally, it also involves time and venue. There must be a proper time, a conducive venue and a person or a team to organize and stimulate knowledge sharing. Much knowledge sharing was not related to self-interest but rather came from the internalized spiritual teaching that promotes social and altruistic behaviour. The spiritual dimension meant that knowledge was treated as a public good in that it was maintained and exchanged within communities of practice and for the same reason knowledge was embedded in community. In this society teaching is still regarded by many as a noble profession and teachers as role models. This is again parallel with the nature of this profession when teachers manifested altruistic behaviour, concern for the welfare of others and the pleasure of serving.

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