

Teamwork and Knowledge: The Keys to Thriving in Sri Lanka's Apparel Industry

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Abstract - This study explores the dynamics of knowledge sharing in team-based work environments within Sri Lanka's apparel industry. Conducted through in-depth interviews with 20 machine operators across six apparel companies, the research investigates the influence of factors such as organizational support, motivation, leadership, technology, and trust on knowledge-sharing practices. The findings underscore the essential roles of organizational support and trust in fostering collaborative knowledge sharing, while language barriers were deemed non-significant. This study contributes unique insights into the specific conditions shaping knowledge sharing in Sri Lanka's apparel sector, with practical implications for boosting productivity, innovation, and teamwork within the industry.

Keywords: Apparel Sector, Knowledge Sharing, Team-Based Work Setting

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a notable shift in organizational structures, with many businesses transitioning from formal administrative frameworks to team-based architectures (Vandavasi et al., 2019). Central to the functioning of these organizations is the sharing of knowledge, which serves as a cornerstone for their operations. Difficulties in knowledge sharing can hinder organizational effectiveness, particularly in the context of knowledge-based entities. The sharing of knowledge, particularly implicit knowledge, can present challenges, especially when individuals are reluctant to disclose it. Despite the recognized benefits of knowledge sharing for organizational survival, there remains a gap in understanding the factors that influence individuals' intentions to share knowledge within organizational contexts (Khalil et al., 2013). Knowledge, encompassing both theoretical and practical understanding of a subject, stands as a critical asset for both individuals and organizations (Ahmad & Karim, 2019). Furthermore, the significance of knowledge sharing extends to enhancing labour productivity and fostering sustainable business development (Vu Ngoc, 2019).

Extensive research has explored the determinants influencing knowledge sharing across various organizational contexts. Within the apparel industry, knowledge sharing assumes heightened significance, yet scant attention has been paid to understanding its dynamics in Sri Lanka. While existing literature discusses factors impacting knowledge sharing, there remains a dearth of research on this phenomenon within team-based work settings. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating how identified factors manifest within the unique context of Sri Lanka.

The apparel industry stands as a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economy, with garment and clothing exports representing a substantial portion of its revenue. In 2018 alone, the industry generated export earnings of \$5 billion, constituting 44% of the nation's total exports. Moreover, the sector serves as a crucial source of employment, directly engaging between 300,000 to 600,000 individuals, including a significant proportion of female workers (Export Development Board (EDB), 2022).

Inadequate knowledge sharing among staff not only results in resource underutilization but also diminishes productivity levels. Thus, understanding staff knowledge-sharing practices becomes imperative. This study endeavors to identify the factors influencing knowledge-sharing intentions within the apparel sector of Sri Lanka, shedding light on crucial aspects for organizational enhancement and sustainable growth.

In recent decades, the global apparel industry has experienced a shift toward team-based organizational structures, with a greater focus on collaborative knowledge sharing to drive productivity and innovation (Vandavasi et al., 2019). Knowledge sharing is especially critical within team settings, where complex problem-solving and creative insights rely on collective expertise. However, despite its recognized importance, understanding of the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder knowledge sharing in Sri Lanka's apparel industry remains limited. While prior research has examined knowledge-sharing factors in other industries, few studies have explored these dynamics within the unique cultural and operational context of Sri Lanka's apparel sector, a vital contributor to the nation's economy.

This study addresses this gap by identifying the specific factors that influence knowledge sharing among machine operators in Sri Lankan apparel companies. The research focuses on five primary factors—organizational support, motivation, leadership, technology, and trust—within the qualitative framework of in-depth interviews, aiming to reveal insights that can support improved knowledge-sharing practices. The study's qualitative approach seeks to uncover nuanced perspectives on these influences, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge sharing in this context.

A. Background and Context

In today's dynamic business environment, knowledge stands as a paramount asset for organizations aiming to sustain competitive edges and spur innovation. This encompassing concept includes both explicit information and tacit expertise cultivated through experiences, learning endeavours, and problem-solving endeavours. Within team-based work environments, characterized by collaborative efforts and collective decision-making processes, the seamless exchange of knowledge among team members proves indispensable. Such sharing not only facilitates the attainment of shared objectives but also bolsters problem-solving capacities and propels organizational efficacy to new heights.

B. Definition of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing entails the deliberate exchange of information, experiences, expertise, and insights among individuals or collectives within an organization. This exchange encompasses both explicit knowledge, comprising tangible data, facts, and procedures, and tacit knowledge, which encompasses nuanced insights, intuitions, and skills that are challenging to formalize or articulate. By facilitating the dissemination of both types of knowledge, knowledge sharing cultivates an environment conducive to learning, collaboration, and innovation. It empowers individuals to harness each other's expertise and experiences, thus enhancing their collective capacity to achieve shared goals and drive organizational advancement.

C. Importance of Knowledge Sharing in Team-based Work Settings

In team-based work settings, knowledge sharing is an indispensable element that fuels collaboration and elevates team performance. The convergence of diverse skill sets and

perspectives within these environments underscores the significance of exchanging knowledge among team members. Firstly, shared knowledge enhances decision-making processes by drawing upon the collective expertise and insights of team members, leading to well-informed and comprehensive conclusions. This collaborative approach to decision-making not only leverages the strengths of individual team members but also fosters a sense of ownership and accountability within the team.

Secondly, knowledge sharing in team-based settings fosters a culture of innovation by facilitating the exchange of novel ideas, perspectives, and solutions. This exchange of insights stimulates creativity and encourages team members to explore unconventional approaches to problem-solving. Moreover, pooling together diverse knowledge resources enables teams to tackle challenges more effectively, leading to the development of innovative solutions and strategies. Ultimately, knowledge sharing promotes trust, transparency, and collaboration among team members, fostering stronger relationships and greater cohesion within the team.

D. Significance of the Apparel Sector

The apparel sector holds significant economic and social importance globally, contributing to employment, trade, and economic development in many countries, including Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka specifically, the apparel industry is a major driver of export earnings and employment, employing a significant portion of the workforce and contributing significantly to the country's GDP. Given its importance, understanding and optimizing knowledge sharing within the apparel sector is crucial for enhancing productivity, quality, and competitiveness. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the apparel industry, characterized by rapid technological advancements, evolving consumer preferences, and global supply chain complexities, underscores the need for effective knowledge sharing to adapt to changing market conditions and sustain growth.

E. The Impact of Knowledge Sharing on the Apparel Industry

Knowledge sharing is a critical driver of success in the apparel sector, enabling companies to maintain competitiveness and foster innovation within a rapidly evolving industry landscape. Particularly in knowledge-intensive domains like the apparel sector in Taiwan, studies have shown that knowledge sharing positively impacts both absorptive capacity and innovation capability. Absorptive capacity, referring to a firm's ability to identify external knowledge and integrate it internally for further development, is bolstered by fostering a culture of information exchange among employees and external partners. Mechanisms such as cross-functional teams and communities of practice serve as effective platforms for promoting knowledge sharing, thereby enhancing the firm's ability to absorb new ideas from diverse sources.

Furthermore, research indicates a positive correlation between knowledge-sharing and innovation capability. The collaborative nature of idea-sharing within organizations nurtures creativity and problem-solving skills among employees, leading to not only product innovation but also improvements across the entire value chain. In the context of supply chain sustainability in the apparel sector, particularly within green fashion communities, online platforms emerge as pivotal tools for driving sustainable practices. Platforms like social media groups and dedicated online forums provide consumers with access to vital information regarding ethical sourcing criteria, thereby fostering transparency and accountability throughout the supply chain.

In conclusion, knowledge sharing serves as a linchpin for the growth and competitiveness of the apparel sector. By cultivating a culture of information sharing and collaboration, companies can enhance their absorptive capacity, innovation capability, and supply chain sustainability, while also fostering better inter-organizational governance structures. This strategic emphasis on knowledge sharing not only ensures the sector's resilience in the face of challenges but also positions it for sustained success and advancement in the global marketplace.

F. Organization Support

Organizational support stands as a pivotal concept in management literature, with its absence posing a significant obstacle to effective knowledge sharing within organizations. It is believed that by providing ample resources, relevant training initiatives, meaningful incentives, and removing barriers to knowledge sharing, organizations can elevate the quality of knowledge exchange among employees. Drawing from the tenets of social exchange theory, the research underscores the relationship between organizational support and knowledge-sharing behaviour, as employees are inclined to adopt behaviours aligned with the support they receive from their organization. This support extends beyond mere financial backing, encompassing policies related to rewards and incentives for knowledge-sharing endeavours, thus yielding notable outcomes. Furthermore, the influence of organizational support holds sway over employees' perceptions of knowledge sharing, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of knowledge exchange within the organization.

G. Trust

Trust and knowledge sharing the influence of trust on the employees' propensity to share knowledge is important for the organization's innovation. The more someone trusts another person, the greater his or her willingness to share knowledge with that person, for several reasons. First, when trusting a person, we believe that the knowledge transmitted to that person will be used appropriately (Staples & Webster, 2008) and not be used against us, even if this knowledge is incomplete, imperfect, or contains errors. We believe that the knowledge provided will not be used to criticize or undermine our competencies. For example, a subordinate who trusts his or her supervisor will be more willing to reveal his or her limitations in skills, abilities, and knowledge if he or she trusts the superior not to use this knowledge against him or her. What's more, if we trust a person, we expect reciprocity and believe that the other party will share knowledge with us. This expectation of reciprocity is confirmed in the literature on social exchange theory and social capital theory.

Finally, trust affects knowledge collecting. The recipient of knowledge is less apt to verify the accuracy and truthfulness of knowledge that comes from a trusted source. Under such conditions, the recipient does not have to spend time and effort verifying the acquired knowledge but can use it immediately, which speeds up organizational learning, alertness, and responsiveness. Empirical research confirms the existence of a relationship between trust and knowledge sharing. among others, found a positive relationship between interpersonal trust and knowledge sharing.

H. Leadership

Another important factor that ensures the success of a team is leadership. It takes a lot of effort from a leader to manage group tasks, build relationships, and facilitate group

processes. Lack of integrated interaction between team members creates many challenges that affect knowledge sharing and team-based work settings. Some of these challenges include trust, conflict management, decision-making, and expression. Leadership can overcome these challenges. Effective leadership plays a key role in encouraging knowledge sharing, and leaders who actively support and model knowledge-sharing behaviours can create an environment where employees feel more comfortable sharing their expertise and insights (Zarraga & Bonache, 2003).

I. Language

Language is a fundamental tool in the apparel sector for sharing knowledge related to design, production, quality, cultural contexts, market trends, and other essential aspects. Effective use of language facilitates collaboration, innovation, and informed decision-making in the apparel industry. Also, another variable that affects group knowledge sharing is language, which is named the missing factor. However, language can pose some challenges to knowledge sharing in the apparel sector. For example, the apparel sector is a global industry, and employees from all over the world often work together. This can lead to language barriers, which make it difficult to communicate and share knowledge effectively. In addition, the apparel sector is constantly evolving, and new technologies and processes are always being developed. This can make it difficult for employees to keep up with the latest developments.

J. Motivation

Personal motivation plays an important role in knowledge transfer in the apparel sector. When individuals are intrinsically motivated to share knowledge, they are driven by a genuine desire to help their colleagues and contribute to the overall success of the organization. Incentives such as recognition, autonomy, and personal growth opportunities can further enhance intrinsic motivation. In addition to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic rewards and incentives can also influence knowledge-sharing behaviour. These incentives may include financial rewards, promotions, or other tangible benefits. Although extrinsic incentives can encourage knowledge sharing to some extent, their effectiveness in the long run largely depends on how well they fit with the overall organizational culture and values.

K. Technology

Technological advancements have revolutionized knowledge sharing in the apparel sector. Robust and user-friendly digital platforms, intranets, and collaboration tools can improve communication, share information, and facilitate access to valuable resources. In addition, mobile applications, social media platforms, and web-based forums enable knowledge sharing beyond organizational boundaries, and interaction with external stakeholders such as suppliers, customers, and sector experts.

Furthermore, technology can facilitate knowledge sharing by providing platforms and tools that enable teams to access, create, and share information easily and efficiently. The literature on knowledge sharing highlights several factors that impact knowledge exchange within organizations, particularly in team-based environments. Organizational support has been identified as a major facilitator of knowledge sharing, with studies indicating that a supportive environment, including structured incentives and training programs, significantly enhances employees' willingness to share knowledge (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Gupta & Sharma, 2019). Trust is also emphasized as a

foundational element; high levels of interpersonal trust foster open communication and psychological safety, which are essential for effective knowledge sharing (Jena & Kumar, 2022; Xue & Liang, 2020).

Leadership plays a key role in creating an environment conducive to knowledge sharing. Leaders who actively encourage collaboration and model knowledge-sharing behaviours can positively impact team dynamics and motivation (Wang et al., 2021; Hoque et al., 2023). Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is another critical factor. Studies by Lee and Chen (2020) highlight that personal motivation, whether driven by internal satisfaction or external rewards, has a direct impact on an employee's willingness to share knowledge.

Lastly, technology has emerged as a crucial enabler in recent years, providing platforms that facilitate real-time information exchange and support collaborative learning (Abbas et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2020). Despite the considerable volume of research, there is a lack of qualitative studies exploring these factors specifically within Sri Lanka's apparel sector. This study aims to address this gap, using qualitative data to understand how these factors manifest within this specific industry context.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology to explore the factors influencing knowledge sharing in team-based settings within the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Given the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative approach was deemed suitable for capturing in-depth insights into participants' perspectives. Machine operators were chosen as the focal group for this study due to their critical role in team-based production processes.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 20 machine operators across six apparel companies registered under Sri Lanka's Export Development Board (EDB). The purposive sampling strategy allowed for the selection of participants who could provide diverse insights across various organizational contexts. The interviews focused on exploring the influences of organizational support, leadership, trust, motivation, technology, and language on knowledge-sharing practices. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, with coding conducted through MAXQDA software to systematically identify recurring themes and patterns in participant responses.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This paper investigates the dynamics of knowledge sharing within the apparel sector, focusing on five key factors: Organizational Support, Leadership, Trust, Motivation, and Technology. Through qualitative analysis of interview data from twenty participants, we identify how each factor influences knowledge-sharing practices within organizational contexts. Our findings reveal nuanced insights into the role of these factors in facilitating or inhibiting knowledge exchange among team members.

Knowledge sharing is paramount for organizational growth and innovation, particularly within dynamic sectors such as apparel. Understanding the factors that underpin effective knowledge-sharing practices is crucial for optimizing organizational performance. In this study, researchers delve into the impact of Organizational Support, Leadership, Trust, Motivation, and Technology on knowledge sharing within the apparel sector.

Participants highlighted the significance of organizational support in fostering knowledge sharing. Examples included regular team meetings, training sessions, peer-to-

peer mentoring, and the establishment of communities of practice. These initiatives were perceived as essential drivers for creating a conducive environment for knowledge exchange.

Leadership emerged as a critical determinant of knowledge-sharing behaviour. Participants emphasized the role of leaders in providing guidance, sharing expertise, and facilitating learning opportunities. Leadership workshops, mentorship programs, and effective communication were cited as catalysts for promoting a culture of knowledge sharing. Trust was identified as a fundamental element underpinning knowledge-sharing dynamics. Participants emphasized the importance of trust in ensuring the credibility and reliability of shared knowledge. Trustworthy interactions among team members were deemed essential for fostering open communication and collaboration.

Motivation emerged as a key driver of knowledge-sharing behaviours. Incentives such as rewards for surpassing targets were cited as effective motivators for sharing knowledge. Participants expressed a strong inclination to contribute knowledge when incentivized, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between motivation and knowledge exchange. Technological support was recognized as an enabler of knowledge-sharing practices. Examples included the introduction of new machinery and the utilization of smart technologies such as smart TVs. Technology facilitated access to information and streamlined communication channels, enhancing the efficiency of knowledge-sharing processes.

The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of knowledge sharing within the apparel sector, influenced by organizational, interpersonal, and technological factors. Integrating these insights into organizational strategies can foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation, driving sustainable growth in the sector. Consistent with prior studies, findings underscore the pivotal role of organizational support in fostering knowledge sharing (Chowdhury et al., 2020; Gupta & Sharma, 2019). Initiatives such as team meetings, training programs, and peer-to-peer mentoring have been identified as effective mechanisms for creating a supportive knowledge-sharing culture (Gupta & Sharma, 2019). Our study reinforces the importance of organizational initiatives in facilitating knowledge exchange among employees, aligning with the broader consensus in the literature.

Research in the past few years has increasingly recognized the significance of leadership in influencing knowledge-sharing behaviours (Hoque et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Effective leadership, characterized by mentorship, communication, and empowerment, has been found to positively impact knowledge sharing within organizations (Wang et al., 2021). Our findings corroborate these insights, highlighting the instrumental role of leadership in shaping knowledge-sharing practices among team members.

Recent studies have underscored the critical role of trust in fostering knowledge sharing within teams and organizations, emphasizing how trustworthy relationships cultivate an environment of psychological safety conducive to open communication and expertise exchange (Jena & Kumar, 2022; Xue & Liang, 2020). Similarly, scholarly attention in the past five years has increasingly focused on elucidating the motivational drivers behind knowledge sharing behaviours, with incentives, rewards, and intrinsic motivation identified as key factors incentivizing employees to share knowledge (Lee & Chen, 2020; Xie et al., 2019). Furthermore, advancements in technology have transformed the landscape of knowledge sharing, introducing new opportunities and challenges. Digital platforms, collaborative tools, and artificial intelligence have emerged

as facilitators of knowledge exchange, streamlining communication and information dissemination processes (Abbas et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2020). Our study contributes to this discourse by demonstrating how technological support enhances knowledge-sharing practices specifically within the apparel sector.

By synthesizing the findings with recent research, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing knowledge sharing in organizational settings. Recognizing the interplay between Organizational Support, Leadership, Trust, Motivation, and Technology is essential for developing strategies that promote a culture of knowledge sharing, thereby enhancing organizational performance and competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic environment.

The findings of this study reveal that organizational support is perceived as a critical driver of knowledge sharing among machine operators, primarily through structured initiatives such as regular team meetings and peer mentoring. Leadership emerged as another vital factor; participants indicated that leaders who actively facilitate learning opportunities and provide guidance create an environment where knowledge sharing becomes a natural part of daily operations.

Trust was identified as foundational to knowledge-sharing practices. Interviewees highlighted that high-trust relationships allowed for more open communication, where team members felt safe sharing both successes and challenges. Motivation was another influential factor, with participants noting that intrinsic motivations, such as personal satisfaction, as well as extrinsic rewards, encouraged them to share knowledge.

Technology was found to facilitate knowledge sharing, particularly through digital tools that enabled efficient communication. However, language was deemed non-significant in affecting knowledge sharing, with participants suggesting that shared work experiences and technical terminology sufficed for effective communication. Overall, these findings suggest that a supportive organizational culture, effective leadership, and accessible technological tools are essential for fostering knowledge sharing within the apparel sector.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to identify the factors influencing knowledge-sharing intention among machine operators in the apparel industry. Through a comprehensive analysis of 20 interviews conducted across eight apparel companies, we have successfully achieved our objective. Our findings reveal that Organizational Support, Motivation, Leadership, Technology, and Trust significantly impact knowledge-sharing intention among machine operators. Notably, language was not found to have a significant effect on knowledge-sharing intention in this context. These results highlight the multifaceted nature of knowledge-sharing dynamics within organizational settings, underscoring the importance of various socio-cultural and technological factors.

The implication of our findings extends to both theory and practice. The identification of these influencing factors provides valuable insights for researchers seeking to deepen their understanding of knowledge-sharing behaviours within specific organizational contexts. Additionally, practitioners can leverage these insights to develop targeted strategies aimed at fostering a culture of knowledge sharing among machine operators, thereby enhancing organizational learning and performance.

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Firstly, the sample size, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, may

limit the generalizability of our findings to a broader population. Future research could benefit from larger sample sizes encompassing diverse demographics and organizational contexts. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews may introduce potential biases or social desirability effects. Utilizing complementary methodologies such as surveys or observational studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge-sharing behaviours. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of our study precludes the establishment of causal relationships between the identified factors and knowledge-sharing intention. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in knowledge-sharing behaviours over time could offer deeper insights into the dynamics at play.

In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of the factors influencing knowledge-sharing intention among machine operators in the apparel industry. By elucidating the roles of organizational support, motivation, leadership, technology, and trust, we contribute to the growing body of literature on knowledge management and organizational behaviour. Moving forward, addressing the identified limitations and building upon our findings can further enrich our knowledge of effective knowledge-sharing strategies, ultimately fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation within organizations.

This study provides insights into the factors influencing knowledge-sharing behaviours among machine operators within Sri Lanka's apparel industry. Through thematic analysis of interview data, this research identified Organizational Support, Motivation, Leadership, Technology, and Trust as key enablers of knowledge sharing, while language was found to be non-influential in this context.

These findings have implications for both academic researchers and practitioners seeking to enhance team-based knowledge sharing. For researchers, the study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting specific organizational and interpersonal factors affecting knowledge sharing in the apparel sector. For practitioners, the results underscore the importance of building a supportive culture, fostering trust, and utilizing technology to enhance collaboration. Future research could expand on these findings by employing mixed methods to explore the quantitative dimensions of knowledge sharing and by investigating other roles within the apparel sector to improve generalizability.

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