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An examination of facilitators and inhibitors to knowledge sharing in a policing environment

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An examination of facilitators and inhibitors to knowledge sharing in a policing environment

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Abstract

This paper explores the specific factors influencing knowledge-sharing facilitators and inhibitors within a policing culture. The research found eight distinct but interrelated factors that have influenced knowledge sharing between individuals. We established that knowledge sharing operates in a highly complex system of ecological entities with unique interrelationships that are difficult to visualise and capture.

Keywords

knowledge management, policing

Synopsis

This paper explores the specific factors influencing knowledge sharing facilitators and inhibitors within a police agency as determined by individual staff members. A synthesis of the factors is also presented.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to present the findings of a larger research project into knowledge sharing in policing. The researchers found eight distinct but interrelated factors that influence knowledge sharing within a policing environment. We established that knowledge sharing operates within a highly complex ecology. This 'knowledge ecology' contains unique objects and interrelationships that are often difficult to visualise and capture.

We anticipate that the benefits of this research to contemporary managers will:

- assist police managers understand the strategic potential for knowledge management to improve ongoing operational effectiveness
- develop an insight into factors which influence knowledge sharing within a policing environment and develop appropriate responses
- provide a platform for future research into improving knowledge sharing.

The findings have not only added to the theoretical body of knowledge; they provide useful heuristics that will assist police managers in understanding the complexities of knowledge sharing and provide potential solutions to address these complexities. The findings may also be beneficial to other researchers and public sector managers who are interested in applying the outcomes to the broader public sector environment - it is from the many unanswered questions that interested researchers can begin to explore the phenomenon in greater detail.

Methodology

This research is based upon a case study of the Western Australia Police, which expressed a willingness to be associated with, and learn from, independent and open research into its workings. Data was collected in individual interviews and focus groups. The interviews

involved semi-structured face-to-face discussion with 40 individual employees from within the Western Australia Police. These included sworn police officers and public servants recruited from various management levels. Focus groups were also utilised to allow the development and distillation of questions through group norms and dynamics and while not as controlled as face-to-face interviews, they provided an alternative and rich data source (May, 1993). Three focus groups were conducted with a total of 60 members who were attending the Police Officer Development Course.

The research approach for this thesis was interpretative and qualitative, based upon the perceptions and observed behaviour of participants, all of whom were volunteers and remain anonymous. It was conducted in the main by the prime researcher, a police professional, immersed in the material and participating with an interactive, action research orientation (Dick, 1997; Sankaran, 2001; Whitehead, 2004; Williams, 2004). The data analysis and quality control were guided by Klein & Myers' (1999) 'principles of hermeneutic enquiry', using critical reflection and dialogue with the co-author, another knowledge management researcher.

Research outcomes

The first cycle of our analysis revealed 15 factors inhibiting or facilitating knowledge sharing in the Western Australia Police. Later, through the action research cyclic approach, we distilled these to 12 factors, and then to a final eight overarching factors. The following table gives an overview of the progression from the initial 15 factors to the final eight.

Table 1 – Progression from 15 to final 8 factors

Cycle One (15)	Cycle Two (12)	Cycle Three (8)
Promotion system –'we to I'	Promotion system – 'we to I'	Promotion system –'we to I'
Sworn versus unsworn divide	Sworn versus unsworn divide	Sworn versus unsworn divide
Nature of the beast	Nature of the beast	Nature of the beast
Different skills between sworn and unsworn	Inequity relating to skills	
Little recognition of completion of tertiary education courses	Little recognition of completion of tertiary education courses	Qualification and non-qualification divide
Recruiting officers with degrees		
Training courses	Training courses	Training courses
External oversighting	External oversighting	Influence of command and control management style
Commitment to agency	Micro management	
Micro management		
Subservience to rank	Subservience to rank	
Risk Averse agency		
IT- driven rather than IT- led	IT- driven rather than IT- led	IT- driven rather than IT- led
Managerialism (New Public Management)	Managerialism (New Public Management)	Managerialism (New Public Management)
Decentralisation	Decentralisation	

The following table presents a brief overview of the eight factors which finally emerged from this research (cycle three):

Table 2 - Factors facilitating or inhibiting knowledge sharing

	Factor		Facilitator / inhibitor
1	Promotion system – 'we to I'	Inhibitor	Behavioural interviews continue to concentrate on individual knowledge rather than creating and sharing within teams.
2	Sworn versus unsworn divide	Inhibitor	Integrated workforce between sworn officers and public sector staff has not as yet materialised.
3	Nature of the beast	Inhibitor Facilitator	Police officers are by nature sceptical of outsiders. This suspicion extends to public service staff. However, sharing can occur when police officers believe public service staff can value-add their outputs.
4	Qualification and non-qualification divide	Inhibitor	Qualified public service employees leave the service due to sworn police officers holding positions based solely on rank rather than skills and competencies. Police officers also felt unrewarded for their educational effort, were more likely to be dissatisfied with the job and under-stimulated by the work. They want to be promoted quickly and get involved early in the promotion race otherwise they tend to move on to other employment fields.
5	Influence of command and control management style	Inhibitor	Police officers are trained to be subservient to rank, which can lead to innovation being stifled. Leads to micro management style where socialising is not encouraged and therefore sharing of knowledge reduced. Focus of knowledge requirements change with promotion.
6	Managerialism (New Public Management)	Inhibitor	Managers are forced to dismantle frontline positions to cater for government reporting expectations. Takes officers away from the community thereby reducing their intelligence gathering capacity. Decentralisation of districts promotes a 'patch mentality'. External organisation oversight leads to risk averse policies and practices.
7	IT- is driving business rather than business driving IT	Inhibitor	IT has become omnipresent in the organisation but it has been described as 'conceptually elegant but functionally restrictive', and officers find it ironic that they spend much time inputting data but find it difficult to access information.
8	Training courses	Facilitator	Allows staff to meet in informal settings and exchange knowledge.

Promotion System - We to I paradox

The factor most commonly deemed by participants to have an inhibiting impact on knowledge sharing is related to the promotion system. It was continually stated that an over-reliance on behavioural interviewing techniques, at the expense of exploring police officers' interaction within teams, was the main reason police officers do not share knowledge.

The following figure maps the process by giving a broad overview of the factors and timeline involved. It shows that early in their career, police officers are inclined to share knowledge but once exposed to the promotion system, knowledge sharing is reduced.

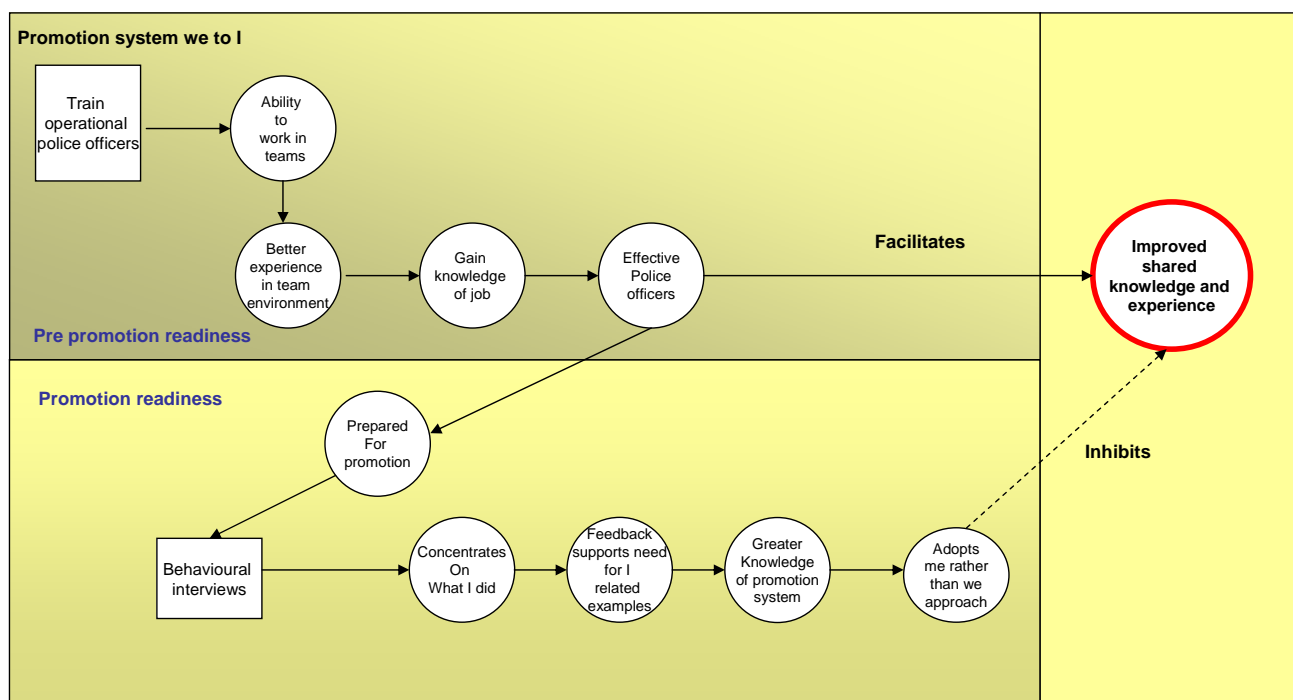


Figure 1 - Promotion system – We to I outcome map

Sworn versus unsworn divide

In all Australian Police organisations, there are two types of employees: police officers and police staff. Police officers take an oath to enforce the law of the state and as such are colloquially referred to as ‘sworn members’ or ‘blue shirts’. On the other hand, police staff (public servants) do not take an oath and do not have police powers of arrest. Colloquially these staff members are referred to as ‘unsworn members’ or ‘white shirts’.

A compelling inhibitor arising from the research is the perceived divide between police officers and public service staff, especially those who do similar functions. This situation was succinctly explained by a public service crime analyst who conducts criminal profiles on specific offenders as one of her core duties. Whenever she required information that was not available on the computer, she would have to ring sworn police officers who were familiar with the case or the offender. However, on a number of occasions, when she rang these officers, she was asked questions such as ‘Are you a sworn officer?’ ‘What rank are you?’, ‘Why do you want it?’ or ‘Have you got permission to have access to this data?’. The fact that this public servant had a ‘Secret’ level classification, which was a higher information access classification than the officers she had contacted, made no difference.

From the figure below, it can be seen that there is a need for the police service to address this divide between sworn and unsworn before it becomes such a chasm that any attempts to reduce it become futile.

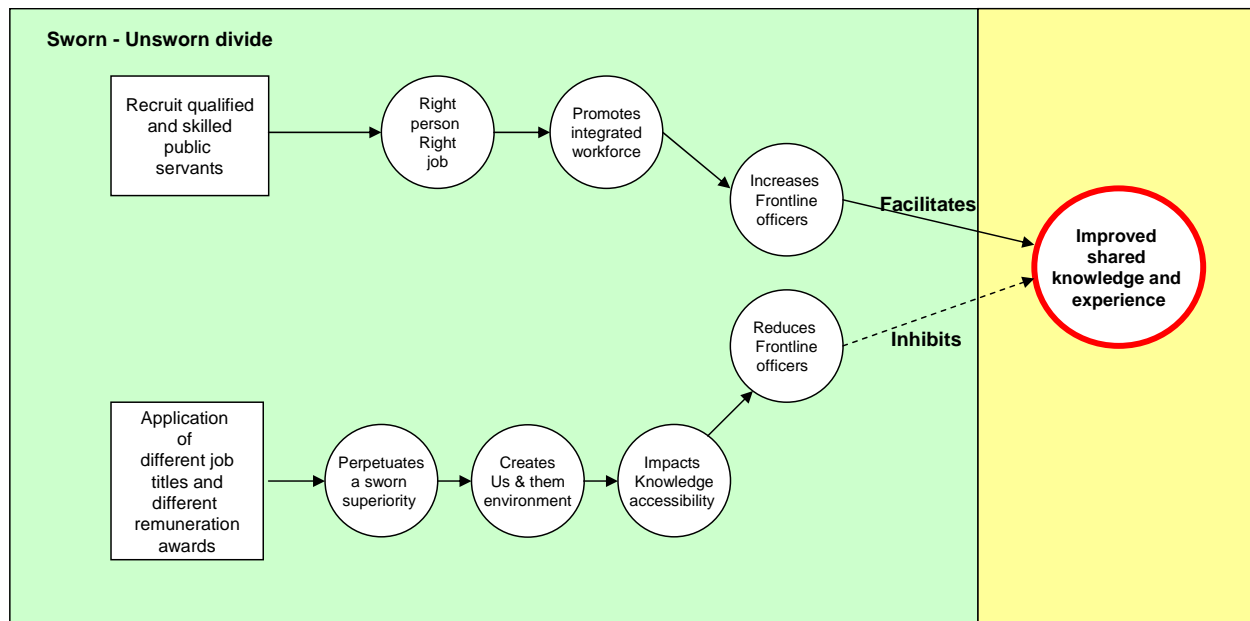


Figure 2 - Sworn unsworn divide

Suspicion, scepticism and mistrust – ‘Nature of the beast’

In our quest to explore further the divide between public servants and police officers, we presented our findings to a number of senior detectives. The findings generated robust discussion and also unearthed other factors. For example, they pointed out to us that a core function of police officers is to investigate crime. To do this successfully, police officers tend to build what they call a ‘knowledge fence’ around a suspect and as they receive more information and create more knowledge about the offence and suspect, they begin to tighten the fence until the suspect can do nothing else but tell the truth. It was said that as a consequence, police officers open all avenues to create knowledge, but close all avenues when it comes to sharing what they have created – unless the disclosure is deemed to improve the matter under investigation.

I suppose it is akin to a poker player who holds his cards close to his (sic) chest. Likewise, detectives or investigators holds their cards close to their chests and only discloses information that they feel will enhance the investigation. I suppose you could call it a type of survival. I am not sure if we are sceptical by nature or we become sceptical by experience – it is probably a combination of both. It is fair to say though, that this trait, no matter how insignificant it is at the beginning of our careers, becomes a learned behaviour over time and transports itself to other areas of the job. What is useful in one situation probably works against me in another situation. When I think about it, I even do that [adopt a sceptical and suspicious nature] at home. I am regularly accused by my wife and kids of always acting as a police officer. Now I can see why those outside [non police officers] have that perception of us

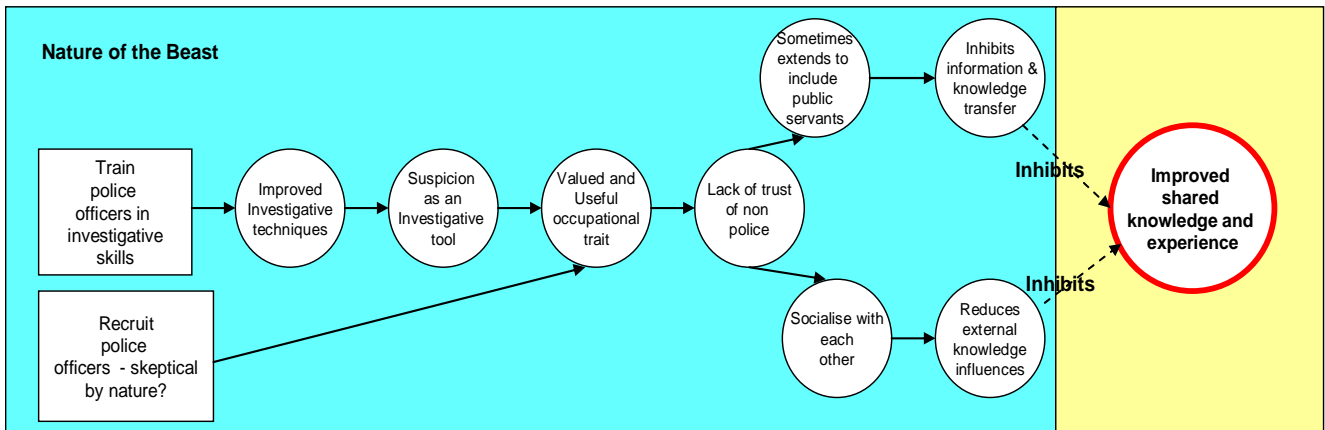


Figure 3 - Nature of the beast

Qualification and non-qualification divide

Skills inequity was also raised as a strong inhibitor to sharing knowledge by many staff members. It was surprising that this perception was held by both police officers and public service employees. Public service employees believed that no matter what qualifications or skills they had, they would not be acknowledged by police officers, especially if those skills and qualifications related in any way to ‘policing type activities’. It is said that they are deemed to be crossing the boundaries. Similarly, police officers actually felt disadvantaged by having qualifications, and so did not promote the knowledge gained from such qualifications. Furthermore, and as a consequence, they tended to leave the police service in favour of other agencies.

Similar findings were evident among police officers, especially those with educational qualifications. It was found that a number of police officers felt they were unjustly penalised because of their educational qualifications. Such officers were generally self-starters and high achievers and tended to get involved early in applying for promotion or specialist positions. However, if they were not successful there was a tendency for them to move on to other employment.

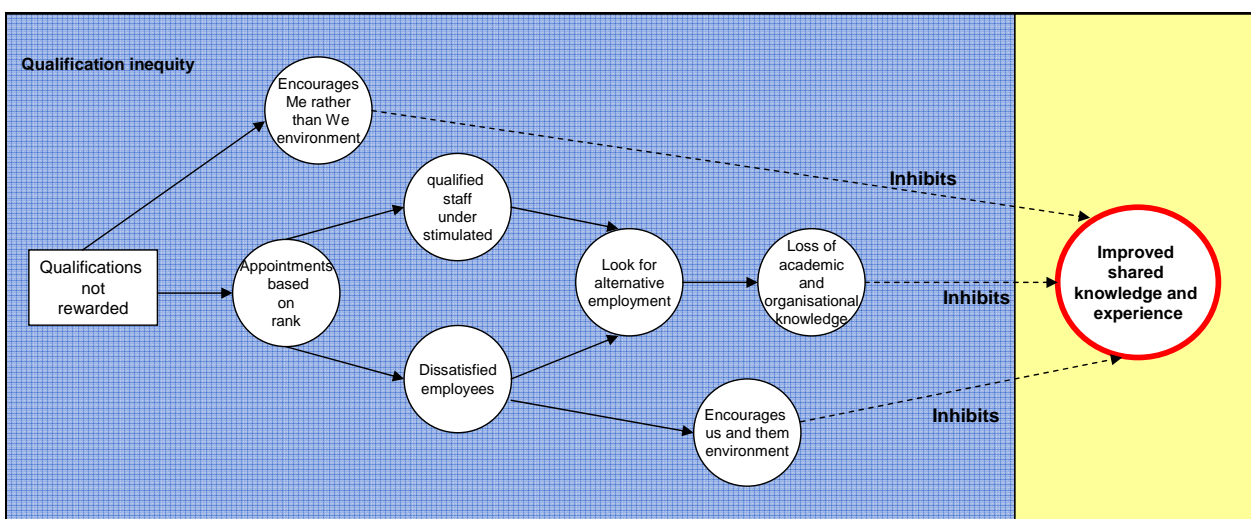


Figure 4 - Qualification and non-qualification divide

Influence of command and control management style

The management style in police agencies emphasises a bureaucratic command and control approach. Findings from this research indicate that an inhibiting knowledge sharing factor

stems from officers' subservience to the rank structure. We found that since police officers are trained to be subservient to higher ranking officers, important knowledge sharing traits such as innovation and creativity can be stifled. This is even more apparent if senior officers are not open to feedback and input especially the sharing of knowledge in relation to new ideas. In addition, we found disproportionately high levels of oversighting by external bodies compared with other agencies, which also impacts the sharing of knowledge.

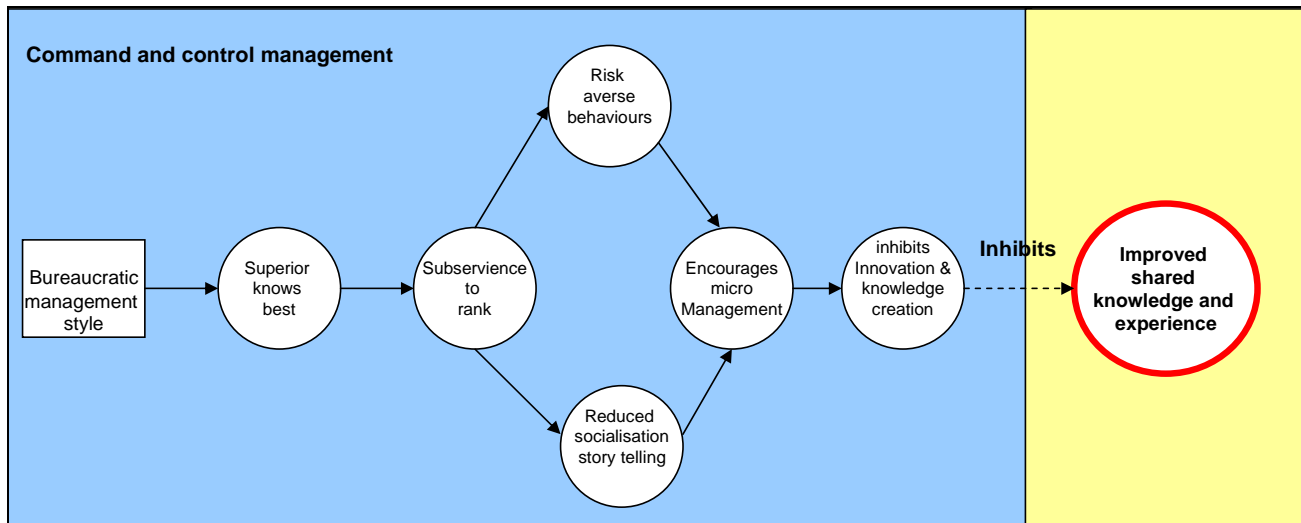


Figure 5 - Command and control management style

Managerialism (New Public Management)

The need to ensure that government services are provided both efficiently and effectively has influenced and shaped the drive for public sector efficiency in service delivery, including the need for greater transparency and accountability.

As such, New Public Management (NPM), offering a new model of public sector management, is a public management trend that is gaining popularity throughout Australia. This model has led to a greater concern for increased efficiency through measurable performance outcomes and decentralisation (Funnell, 2001); therefore it was interesting that this research should find that a management model introduced by governments a decade or so ago to improve police effectiveness, was actually impeding knowledge sharing in this police organisation.

A number of supervisory officers in different police stations raised concerns about the ever-increasing time demands placed on them to collect data in relation to organisational inputs, outputs and outcomes at the expense of creating intelligence. They maintained that the time spent filling in forms to meet the requirements of performance reporting was at the expense of time needed to create intelligence related documents.

Comments were made regarding the concept of decentralisation. It was said that a number of mistakes were made when implementing the decentralisation model. As such, it resulted in the generation of a 'patch mentality' where data information and subsequent knowledge became district property rather than an organisational asset, and was not shared appropriately across the organisation.

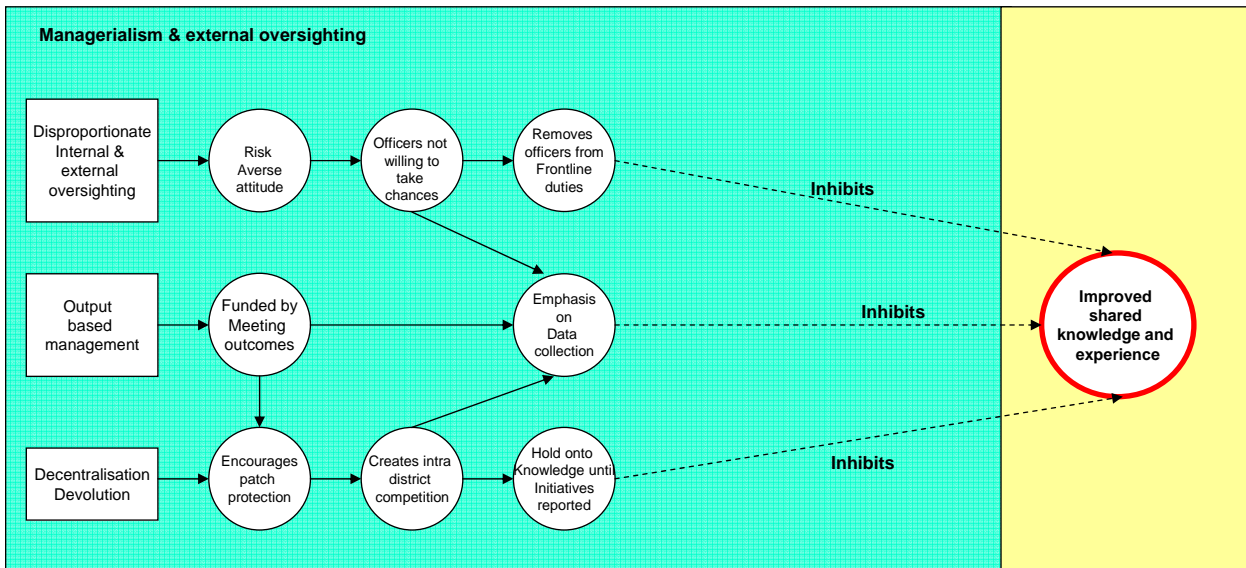


Figure 6 - Managerialism (New Public Management).

IT driving business rather than business driving the IT

Some staff members raised the issue of the information and communications technology as a hidden inhibitor of knowledge sharing. They described the IT systems as being aesthetically pleasing but functionally restrictive. However, when they were questioned further about this matter, most officers acknowledged the need for IT to assist in police organisations’ increasing accountability and compliance loading. They held the view that IT was embraced by all staff members who believed that the systems would actually free up additional hours for front line police functions and assist with generating intelligence products. However this has not been the case; in fact it is believed that the IT and information systems in the current format are actually impeding sharing of knowledge.

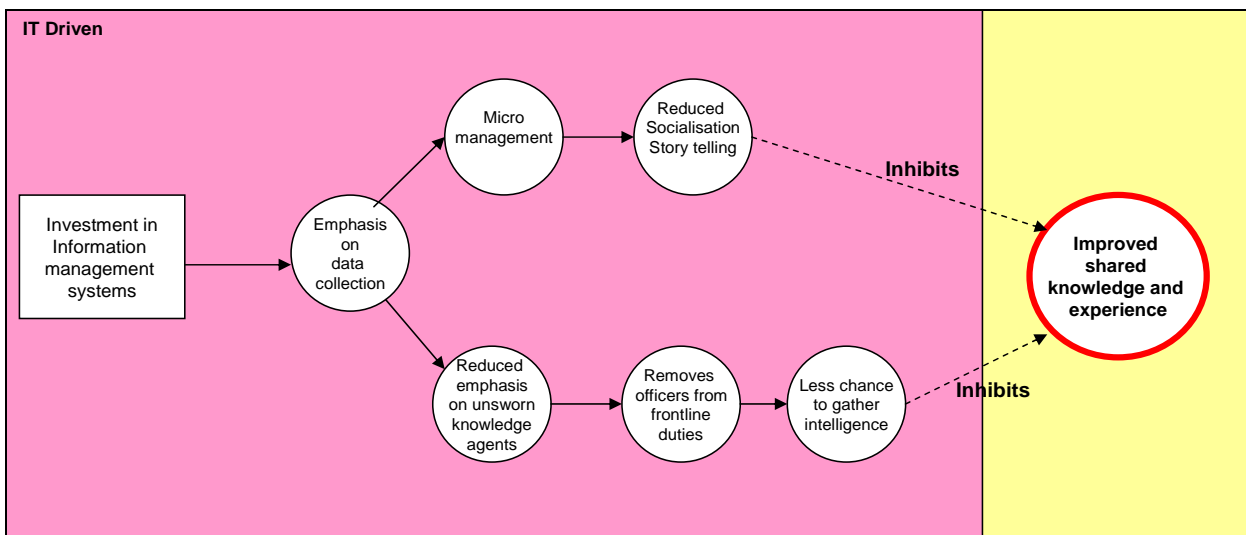


Figure 7 - IT driven

Training courses

The only universally agreed *facilitator* of knowledge sharing related to in-service training courses. It was interesting to note that the knowledge gained by attending the course was not deemed as important as the knowledge that was shared during breakout sessions and lunch breaks.

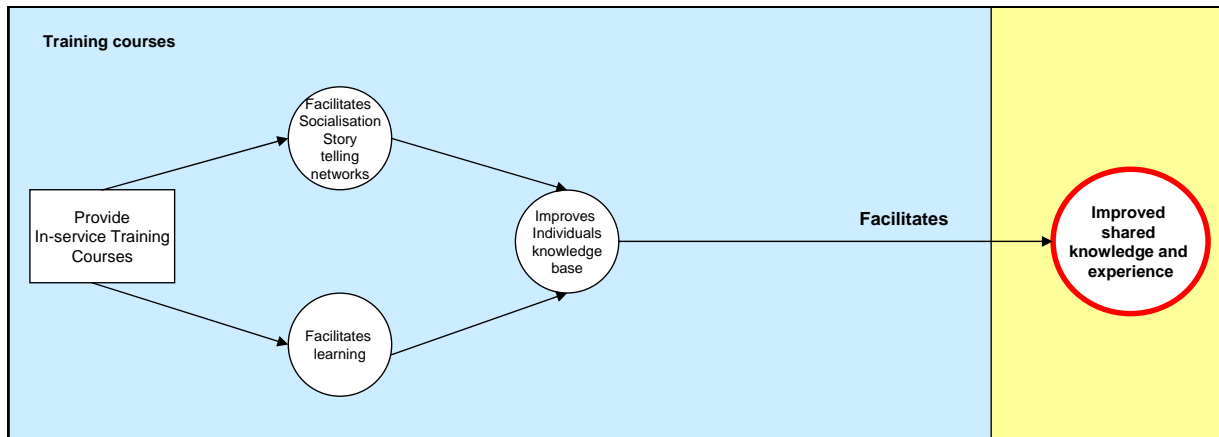


Figure 8 - Training courses

The aforementioned diagrams briefly present the views of individual staff members regarding their perceptions of the inhibitors and facilitators of knowledge-sharing within this environment. The outcomes further advance our understanding of knowledge-sharing inhibitors and facilitators within a policing environment and provide a foundation for understanding the phenomenon from individuals' perspective. However, within each of these factors, other influencing relationships are evident.

The following figure shows how the preceding factors are part of a 'knowledge ecology', by demonstrating that they have deep, complex and ongoing relationships with other elements within the policing environment. While the diagram appears busy or, as some have suggested, confused, we felt it was necessary to show the complexities and interdependencies of the challenges facing police reformers. It is clear from the diagram that for knowledge sharing to be successful there is a need for an organisational approach. Tackling one factor in isolation will not suffice as either the other elements will continue to operate and influence outcomes, or a remediation in one area may have deleterious effects in another.

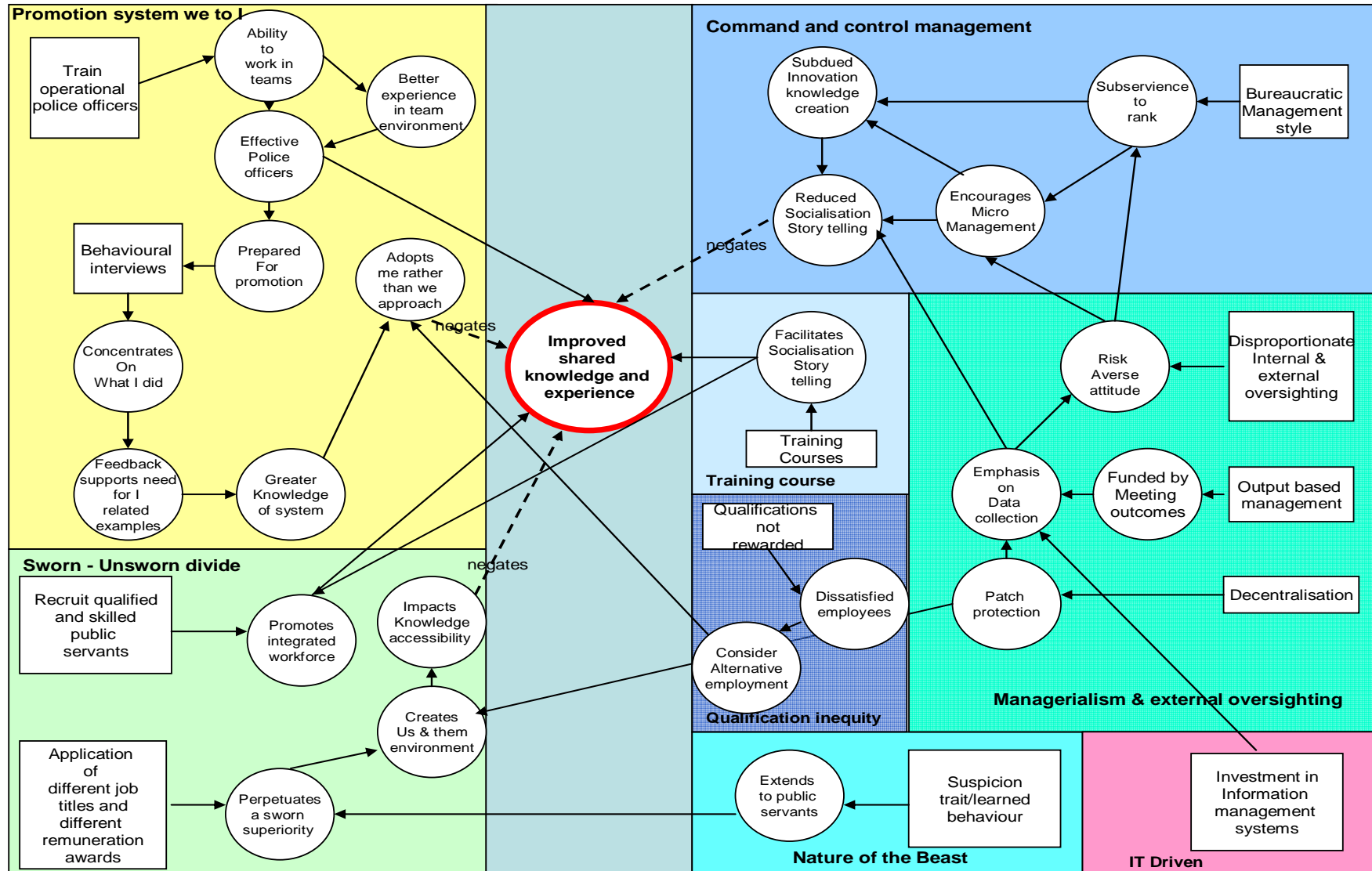


Figure 9 – Interrelationships of knowledge sharing factors – the knowledge ecology

Discussion of the research outcomes

1. Promotion system – We to I

Little research has been conducted into police promotion, and what has been done has tended to concentrate on gender and cultural issues and not on behavioural interviewing. Having regard to the emphasis placed on behavioural interviewing as a means of promotion and the concerns raised in this research, the need for more research in this area is obvious. Brunetto & Farr-Wharton (2003) found police officers' commitment decreased as they moved from constable to sergeant ranks. They called for further research in this area to identify the cause for this lack of commitment. This research has addressed that call by specifically identifying the influence of a specific promotion system-type on individuals' commitment, especially their commitment to share knowledge.

2. Sworn vs unsworn divide

The sworn versus unsworn divide is not peculiar to the Western Australia Police. A similar state of affairs was found in a study of three British police forces where problems between public sector intelligence analysts and police officers were evident. The problems were attributed mainly to low pay, the lack of a well-developed career and an ad-hoc promotion structure for intelligence analysts (John & Maguire, 2004). It was also found that lack of standardisation of the intelligence products caused confusion among the operational officers who used these products. This in turn posed the danger of developing a vicious circle, where those who use the intelligence products lose respect for the efforts involved in developing them, and that those who create the product lose the incentive to put energy into improving the quality.

This research also complements the findings of Thomas and Davis (2002) relating to a police service in England. In this research they found that many police civilian managers resented the failure on the part of their senior officers and the senior uniformed ranks to recognise the value of their professional expertise. This led to reduced commitment on the part of public sector employees.

3. Nature of the beast

Miller (1999) discusses the benefits and disadvantages of police officers being sceptical or suspicious by nature, and argues that while a character trait such as suspicion may be desirable among police officers, it may not be suitable for other professions. The constant looking for 'wrongdoing' may make for an excellent detective but the trait may not be suitable in other work or social environments. Currently, the positive aspects of scepticism and suspicion outweigh the negative side effects, especially when it comes to investigating crime. But police officers sometimes forget that other staff members have important but less visible roles in those investigations, and that by sharing knowledge with all staff the complexity of the investigation may be reduced.

This concept of the 'nature of the beast' raises a number of challenges for police managers. While it may be seen as an inhibitor to knowledge sharing, it can also be cultivated to act as a facilitator. If it is to be harnessed as a knowledge sharing asset, public service employees need to appreciate that police officers will share knowledge and accept public servants as part of the team if the police officers believe that sharing such knowledge will be used to improve operational outcomes. If this concept is to be successful, it will not only involve a major shift in thinking by public servants it will also require innovative ways to change work practices that currently absorb operational police availability.

This research has led to an important question and an area of future research: is the beast a child of the organisation, or is the organisation an outcome of the beast?

4. Qualification and non-qualification divide

The outcomes in this category are in line with those of Kakar (1998), who found that tertiary educated police officers felt they had an advantage over officers less qualified, especially in the areas of taking responsibility, undertaking leadership roles and displaying initiative. However, they also found that tertiary educated police officers were more cynical than those with no tertiary qualifications.

In Western Australia, Kennedy (2003) argued that exposure by police officers to higher education programs was critical in improving the service delivery policing demands of the future. While Kennedy's comments may have merit, they are the outcome of a Royal Commission and not based on empirical research. The outcomes of my research found that police officers with higher education do not feel their education is appreciated and have a propensity to find employment elsewhere. This results in them taking away many years of individual and corporate knowledge. This problem is not new, in fact Kakar (1998) quotes 30-year old research by Regoli (1976) and Swanson (1977) who both found that university educated officers felt unrewarded for their educational efforts, and were more likely to be dissatisfied with the job and under-stimulated by work. Police managers, police recruiters and promotion panel participants need to be aware of this problem. A balance needs to be found between the appointment of police officers to positions based on qualifications and knowledge, as opposed to appointments based on rank.

5. Influence of command and control management style

This research established that in order for police agencies to foster effective knowledge sharing, there is a need for senior police officers to tailor their management and leadership styles to reduce the disproportionate emphasis on command and control practices. Accordingly, police managers need to encourage improvement in two key performance areas namely the effectiveness of leaders and the motivation of followers. The research outcomes also identified a definite link between management style, rank and knowledge sharing. The current bureaucratic command and control style inhibits innovation, which in turn inhibits knowledge creation and as such reduces the amount of knowledge that could be shared. These findings have been recently supported by Reige (2005) who asserts that knowledge sharing is less likely to occur in highly structured multi-layered and hierarchical organisations.

The influence of the rank structure and the command and control philosophy on the working and behavioural practices of police officers is not a new finding. McCarrey (1993) argued that police managers in Western Australia received little training in the principles and techniques of management and so based their style of policing on their early training which emphasised a command and control philosophy. The McCarrey report was followed and supported by the Andersen report (1994) which identified that the emphasis placed on the command and control style had led to a negative autocratic leadership philosophy. Similar comments were also made in the recent Western Australia Royal Commission findings which called for a more modern management approach with a reduced emphasis on command and control practices (Kennedy, 2003). The command and control style also attracted unfavourable comment in a review of practices in the Australia Federal police, which found that police services have traditionally tended to focus too much on the aspect of reactive punishment. What is required is an emphasis on personnel management and less interest in the alleged motivations stemming from military-style discipline (Fisher, 2003).

In presenting these observations, we are not ignoring the need for command and control practices when the circumstances require it, but merely referring to a management model that, according to Murray (2002), assumes the commander will always have the right solution, that subordinates have little to contribute, and that the severity of sanctions will deter breaches of the rules.

The change will be difficult to implement, but this research will have been successful if it at least gets managers to acknowledge the problem, discuss the issues and embark on finding solutions.

6. Managerialism

The aspect of managerialism which has caused most concern in relation to knowledge sharing was the decentralisation of police districts and the devolution of centralised responsibility. This move happened primarily during the 'Delta' program, which was driven by new public management philosophies to improve organisational efficiencies and accountability. The concept espoused empowerment of district superintendents with control over resources and business processes (Western Australia Police, 2001). In effect, superintendents were given the mandate to operate as local chiefs of police (Western Australia Police, 2003a). While in theory, devolution and decentralisation had many benefits it also had a number of drawbacks, especially in relation to knowledge sharing.

The learning outcomes indicate that the emphasis on performance reporting under the new public management paradigm is gaining momentum. We are not arguing that police services must not be managed efficiently and with a high degree of accountability. Nevertheless, a problem arises when the very functions that have been put in place to improve efficiency and accountability are to a degree inhibiting efficiency. The final sentences of one of the emails summed it up as follows:

I agree with the commissioner when he recently spoke about not closing police stations, we are in the business of social rationalism not economical rationalism, so give me a performance system that measures our influence on society not what we are costing society. Otherwise, we may never see the wood from the trees.

Similar findings were identified previously in the following two Western Australia Police internal reports: Devolution Decentralisation Report (2003a), and Intelligence-Led Policing In The Western Australia Police Service-Proposed Framework (2003b). We used both of these reports to verify the research data relating to decentralisation. Both reports corroborate what was said to the prime researcher, in fact they also outline some of the mistakes that have led to this situation. For example, the Devolution Decentralisation Report (2003a) maintains that in order for decentralisation to be effective the process must clearly identify regional and portfolio responsibilities and accountabilities, and delegate authority appropriately. In addition functional responsibility should be accompanied by an appropriate redistribution of human, financial, infrastructure and specialist support. In addition, expertise should be available to regions under agreed circumstances, with funding provided to the appropriate area. However, as per the extract below it would appear these principles were not adhered to ... in many instances, these devolution principles and frameworks have not been adhered to and as a consequence, frontline resources have been deployed to undertake the functions, processes or services (Western Australia Police, 2003a).

The reports also maintained that the rate of decentralisation was too rapid, leading to a number of inconsistencies, which in turn have lead to a loss or degradation of specialist skills

across the agency (Western Australia Police, 2003a) especially in relation to intelligence gathering and intelligence dissemination (Western Australia Police, 2003b).

The demand for increased efficiency in the public service started in the 1980s. Yet it was arguably only in the early 1990s that police agencies received the same attention which had been directed at other public services. This came as a shock to many senior police officers who believed that by the nature of the work the police would be insulated from radical market reform (Loveday, 1995). However, to date no evidence has been provided to suggest that the effectiveness of any public service has substantially improved as a consequence of the reforms to which they have been subjected. While Loveday's assertion may be ten years old, this research has found efficiency gains have been claimed but these gains seem to be at the expense of reduced service delivery, poor staff morale, motivation and good will. The long term impact and cost of the new managerialism has still to be ascertained (Loveday, 1995). This research goes some way towards understanding the impact of managerialism on police services in relation to knowledge sharing.

7. IT driving business rather than business driving IT

As discussed in Chapter 4, staff members raised the issue of the information and communications technology as a hidden inhibitor of knowledge sharing. They described the IT systems as being aesthetically pleasing but functionally restrictive and are not producing the outcomes they were promised. However, when they were questioned further about this matter, most officers acknowledged the need for IT to assist in the fight against crime and the police force's ever-increasing accountability and compliance loading.

This finding is not peculiar to the Western Australia Police, in fact Chan et al. (2001) found a similar situation in the Queensland Police. On a broader scale, research conducted by Ross and Weill (2002) found that 'most organisations are not generating the value from their IT investments that they should be' (p 85). While a number of factors impact this lack of return, the most important factor appears to be senior managers' role in the IT decision-making process. They found that when senior managers abdicate decision-making responsibility to IT executives 'disaster often ensues' (p.85).

It is acknowledged that advances in information and communication technology (ICT) can significantly influence the way in which organisations conduct their business and their overall competitiveness (Bai & Lee, 2003). However, to fully realise these benefits, a degree of re-engineering needs to be undertaken, which may include a subtle shift in management style within the organisation (Hedelin & Allwood, 2002; Irani & Love, 2002).

Thus, police managers should focus on developing a better understanding of the identification and application of ICT within policing environments. The need for such a focus is all the more important when it is considered that police support services have been utilising ICT to assist the 'fight against crime' for many years (Chan et al., 2001), but that acquisitions have not been matched by improvements in police managers' ICT knowledge and skills (Ackroyd, 1993; Enders, 2001). In fact almost 20 years ago when the ICT revolution was seen as an opportunity for police agencies, it was considered a crisis that very few high ranking police administrators were prepared to take advantage of the opportunity (Munro, 1984 p.5). Munro argued that in order for police managers to be in a position to meet future strategic challenges, three areas of police managers' professional development needed attention:

- program budgeting
- strategic planning
- information communication technology.

A cursory analysis of police management educational courses nationally and internationally suggests the areas of strategic planning and to some degree financial budgeting have received attention, with a number of police management courses offering educational units covering those streams. However, even though police agencies' investments in ICT have increased significantly over the past 20 years, exposure to educational courses in information communication technology has not materialised. Accordingly, the situation as outlined by Munro some 20 years ago concerning police managers' understanding of technology still remains an issue that needs to be addressed if the full benefits of knowledge sharing are to be realised.

8. Courses

Of the eight factors presented, the only universally-agreed facilitator of knowledge sharing relates to in-service training courses. This outcome is similar to that of Earl (2001), who found that networking was an important element for knowledge sharing. Earl found that sharing in organisations is more likely to work where there is a 'tradition of sociability and networking' (p. 225). Oil companies such as Shell and BP have become famous for this networking and find strong sharing connectedness between members of graduate entry classes.

However, having regard to this research, participants stated that the knowledge gained by attending the course was not as important as the knowledge that was shared during breakout sessions and lunch breaks. Here, another avenue for further research may have opened. If it is the actual networking and not the courses that are important, then the Western Australia Police needs to explore further different ways of breaking down networking barriers and creating spaces for social interaction..

Conclusion

It would be unfair to assert that organisational members have consciously created these inhibitors. Many have evolved naturally, and often reflect the values of those who shaped the organisation and the senior managers who maintain it and enact initiatives. The literature shows that knowledge is more effectively shared when individuals are not simply presented with answers but are involved in discovering the solution (Leonard-Barton, 1998). This involvement is best achieved in less hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations (Davenport & Prusak, 1998) and therefore it seems impractical to try to implement such an approach in the current policing environment.

Nevertheless, the suitability of the paramilitary, hierarchical structures and the associated authoritarian and bureaucratic command and control style of police management is being continually challenged and the need for police managers to adopt a more modern management style is becoming stronger (Densten, 2003; Etter, 1996; Stevens, 2000).

When it is considered that the bread and butter activities of intelligence analysts and investigators are primarily accessing, leveraging and sharing knowledge, this shift appears particularly necessary. Police managers need to recognise knowledge management as a holistic purposeful constructive management philosophy with multiple dimensions. Since it is an organisational philosophy, it is not owned by one group or business unit. It has been suggested that such a shift in management style can be achieved through the adoption and application of transformational leadership behaviours (Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978; Yukl, 1998). It is argued that transformational leadership is appropriate to appeal to employees' higher

ideals and values including emancipation, participation and equality and not to the more base emotions of fear, greed and jealousy.

Considering the entrenched stratified command and control structure in policing, such a move will not happen immediately. As a first step in this change process, the concept of diverting from the command and control paradigms may be achieved in small but well-designed increments. One solution espoused by Densten (Densten, 2003) is to encourage employees to shift from continually focusing on their immediate operational environment to one that embraces and integrates the external environment. Employees are encouraged to develop conceptual maps of their external environment to establish where their organisation links with that environment. This shift in focus can be achieved if employees are sufficiently intellectually stimulated. But it is worthwhile repeating our earlier caveat that any attempts to remove or ameliorate the impact of inhibitors to knowledge sharing need to consider the complexities and ramifications of the overall knowledge sharing ecology.

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