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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND SHARING INITIATIVES IN DEVELOPMENT SECTOR:

CONTRIBUTION IN EFFECTIVE RISK MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

“Knowledge management and sharing initiatives in development sector: contribution in effective risk management”

This thesis study explores the existing knowledge management and sharing practices in donor organizations, particularly working in the developing countries. The potential of knowledge management and sharing to facilitate development organizations in carrying out development work has been recognised in the literature. Literature presented mix of critique and appreciation to the existing efforts of donor agencies. Knowledge sharing platforms revolves around the country initiatives and donor agencies like UNDP and World Bank which are proactive in establishing these platforms for partner organizations. This research contributes practical insight to the question of delivery of these platforms, through an empirical investigation based on the development professionals' experiences. As earlier research shows enormous amount of literature on individual, team and organizational level knowledge sharing, this study sets prime focus on community level or external knowledge sharing, an area where there exist a dearth of empirical research or contributing literature on examining the role of sharing initiatives and possible contribution in improving risk management in development projects.

Literature shows the potential of knowledge management and sharing practices, as their possible contribution in the global development practices and in bridging gap between North-South stakeholders. However, cultural, technological, organizational and individual level issues escalate with external level of knowledge sharing and thesis rightly, identifies success factors from the literature alongwith their viability from the professionals. It is even more inadequate when it comes to projects of donor organizations in under developed and developing countries. With 80% of documented failure rates of knowledge sharing systems, external knowledge sharing with partner organizations or network organizations is really not adequate and do not have supporting culture. As this whole process of sharing knowledge, heavily relies on the perceived motivation and willingness to share, study has tried to identify the challenges facing wider use of these sharing systems. Study also contributes with suggestions for knowledge management and sharing system developers, policy and decision makers and system users, to improve the overall contribution of knowledge sharing in better

risk management. Apart from the cultural barriers, there are technical and policy level issues which need more concerted efforts to improve the use of these sharing systems by various organizations and individuals.

Keywords: *Knowledge Sharing; Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management in Development Sector, Knowledge Sharing in Donor Funded Projects*

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Important Terms

Development Sector: A not-for-profit sector, aimed at delivering support to vulnerable and under-privileged communities of under-developed and developing countries.

Donor Organizations: International or national private, multilateral or bilateral organizations supporting projects in development sector.

Donor Funded Projects or Development Projects: Projects sponsored or implemented by international and national private, bilateral or multilateral not-for-profit organizations in development sector.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The opening sentence of World Development Report: Knowledge for Development (World Bank 1998) frames the core problem in very simple terms where it starts as:

“Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people still live in the darkness of poverty – unnecessarily. Knowledge about how to treat such a simple ailment as diarrhoea has existed for centuries – but millions of children continue to die from it because their parents do not know how to save them. Poor countries – and poor people – differ from rich ones not only because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge”.
(World Bank 1998, p. 1)

Historically, In 1597, Francis Bacon termed knowledge as power (Barclay, 2000). Strategic management literature also elaborates more on the importance of knowledge in resource based theory of the firm and knowledge based perspective of the today’s firm (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge being the source of economic success (Drucker, 1995), is increasingly becoming a strategic concern of many organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). Its importance is not limited to for-profit organizations only, organizations working in the international development sector including non-for-profit organizations, multilateral, bilateral and private organizations are also benefiting from the management of this priceless asset. In international development section, knowledge management and sharing practices started with the World Bank’s self-proclamation of calling itself Knowledge Bank and started opting practices to ensure the management and sharing of knowledge in its countries of operations (World Bank 1998).

Emergence of new issues like environmental concerns, natural disasters, debt relief, food shortages, health, employment, shows the changing priorities of the development sector. The purpose of this study is to understand different knowledge management and sharing practices prevalent among organizations working this sector. It will make an attempt to identify and analyse different systems where coordination between these development organizations is facilitated in terms of knowledge sharing. This study is to analyse the existing approach of knowledge sharing, supporting structure and organizational culture, and technological influence on existing practices in donor funded projects. In addition, the study will assess the effectiveness of these systems and their contribution towards effective risk management.

1.1 Background

Globalisation is giving birth to economic development while creating more opportunities, and increasing the dissemination of knowledge between organizations giving birth to new

international partnership (OECD, 2001). Interaction and information sharing is increasing in the form of South-North learning (Scarf, 2010). This in turns gives opportunities to enhance capacities and promote interest and motivation by sharing valuable experiences with others from different parts of the world (Chowdhury, 2006).

This interaction between donor organizations of “North” and recipient developing countries of “South” is of high value now when these donor organizations are trying their best to bring change in the developing part of the global village. Donor Funded Projects (DFPs) are often carried out in alien environments, where pilot activities take place before the mainstream programme activities. The level of uncertainty associated with new projects hinders and slows progress. Research shows that these new initiatives cost a lot due to the high level of uncertainty involved (Kaija, 2009).

This research has a potential to identify best practices of knowledge management in DFPs, and platforms where donors are sharing their project experiences, indirectly harmonizing organizational learning in development sector. These initiatives are to foster knowledge sharing among organizations that are geographically dispersed. However, in the presence of International Development Goals, Millennium Development Goals, Paris Declaration and several other humanitarian joint initiatives these geographically dispersed organizations are very much thematically aligned to improve development performance.

Previous scholarly literature has highlighted that development sector do not have adequate knowledge sharing platforms (Wood, 2004). Perhaps, there is not much research done to identify gaps in these knowledge sharing systems and to improve their effectiveness to reduce risk of upcoming projects. The underlying assumption of using these knowledge sharing platforms is to improve development initiatives delivery, which requires diverse stakeholders to input their experiences. Moreover, the wider use of these knowledge sharing platforms, will not only improve the decision making ability of stakeholders, it will also contribute at strategic fronts (OECD 2001).

It is argued here that if donor agencies share their experiences and lessons learned, while emphasising on identified risks, their assessments, mitigation strategies and best practices, this level of coordination and knowledge sharing will give a better understanding of the uncertain situations (NRC 2009) and it will effectively contribute in the delivery of DFPs. This requires supportive organizational structure, culture, and provision of information technology solutions to exploit the valuable knowledge among development organizations (OECD 2001; Kim & Lee

2004). This study reveals how development practitioners see these supportive mechanisms in their respective organizations.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Research identifies that donors are showing a growing interest in and demand for improved cooperation and knowledge sharing among donor organizations working in development sector. This is to reduce duplications of efforts (Schulz & Blecken 2010, Blecken 2010, Seneviratne, 2009, Rotimi *et al.*, 2006), to learn lessons from the valuable experiences of other participants in order to assist continuous improvement (OECD, 2001), to create more opportunities of informed and intelligent decision making (Lank, 1997) and to reduce costs, increase productivity and ability to meet global development challenges (Maglite, 1995).

With this, donor organizations become more responsive to the development challenges with local knowledge, feedback, experience and innovative ideas from the participating developing countries (Scarf, 2010). Development organizations also anticipate that in the result of improved coordination and information flow will help to increase the efficiency or impact of the overall operations. However, research shows that knowledge sharing is difficult due to a variety of barriers including mismatch in perceived and actual benefits from knowledge sharing, different organizational mandates, different organizational structures, inadequate employed IT systems and issues in timely exchange of accurate information (Kim & Lee 2004; Schulz & Blecken 2010).

Some donors and humanitarian organizations have provided information for public using World Wide Web in a more collaborative approach (DFI 2010, DRR 2010, DAD 2007), but several have not shared their experiences and learning even to this extent. Either this is because of the lack of awareness about the existence of these knowledge sharing systems, or due to the above mentioned barriers, however still there is a need of having a detailed research of knowledge sharing platforms, and identifying the gaps which need to be covered by up-to-date accurate information of donor activities. This has long lasting impact on overall performance of donor funded projects, where knowledge can form a base for future improvements and can help in reducing risks of the upcoming projects on the basis of stored knowledge of the previous projects. The absence of knowledge sharing culture and inadequate level of awareness of existing platforms demands a research to explore the horizon of knowledge sharing and identification of exiting platforms. With more and more emphasis on risk management in scholarly literature and practitioners approach, there is a need of identifying the contribution of knowledge sharing in risk management of new projects.

1.3 Problem formulation and purpose

This research will not only identify the existing platforms for knowledge sharing among donor organizations, it will also look into the kind of knowledge being shared. It will unearth the challenges being faced by individuals in the organizations in adopting these knowledge sharing platforms and it will also see the contribution of shared knowledge in risk management of new projects. Earlier research shows the importance of supportive organizational structure, culture and provision of ICT solutions for knowledge sharing initiatives, so this current study will unveil the issues at individual and organizational levels, hindering the progress of knowledge sharing. While identifying the challenges being faced by these knowledge sharing platforms, this research has potential of increasing the awareness of these platforms in development sector.

Due to the limited time, research will cover only some of the donor organizations in development sector, while leaving out a lot of potential donor organizations which would have been included in the study, given the time constraint. This will set a path for future studies in this direction of exploring more platforms among the donor organizations. Contribution of Knowledge sharing in improved risk management will be of limited scope, as it is only based on the personal judgements of the respondents being selected for questionnaires. However, this paves future way forward for a comprehensive empirical study, based on a larger sample of development professionals.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Thesis will cover three important areas, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing and contribution of shared knowledge in effective risk management. Literature review covers the theoretical basis, frameworks and processes identified by scholars in these three areas. To uncover ground facts and actual practices in donor funded projects, questionnaires will be used to collect valuable experiences and opinions of the development professionals, alongwith elite interviews to find the underlying perceptions and strategic nature of these initiatives. Personal observation from the secondary sources of humongous information from websites, annual progress and evaluation reports will provide another dimension to understand prevalent behaviour in implementing these knowledge sharing initiatives. Analysis will unearth existing gaps in the effectiveness of knowledge sharing systems and based on experiences of respondents, thesis will recommend important steps to be taken while initiating and implementing these knowledge management and sharing systems in development sector organizations.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter brings theoretical understanding of the concepts, required to study the research findings. Knowledge management and knowledge sharing have been reviewed at length from the scholarly resources. A special focus is on the knowledge sharing in the development sector, which forms basis for the analysis of the research data.

2.1 Knowledge Management (KM)

Knowledge management (KM) is a tool to capture knowledge, improve the sharing and use of information within the organization, a tool to build competitiveness by taking advantage of the knowledge that the employees are sitting on (Goodman 1998). There is not a standard definition of knowledge management that fits in all industries but it is viewed as a management tool to improve performance, productivity, competitiveness and decision making in the organizations (DiMattia and Oder 1997). As knowledge management has numerous scholarly definitions, varying from one industry to another, one of the widely quoted scholarly definitions is from Van Beveren (2002), who defines knowledge management as *“a practice that finds valuable information and transforms it into necessary knowledge, critical to decision making and action.”*

Knowledge Management growth during 1980s emerged from the down cuts and technological development (DiMattia and Oder 1997). Cuts were a popular way for companies to reduce their overhead costs and increase profitability (Forbes 1997) but this also meant that the knowledge and experience that had taken decades to collect disappeared from the company, the knowledge that might not have existed in physical form (Manville & Foote 1996). To increase competitive advantage companies needed to use their specialized resources, assets and skills they have.

Knowledge is the only resource that provides sustainable competitive advantage according to the knowledge-based theory (Roberts 1998). Organizations need to value knowledge as an important resource and develop a way to use the employees' knowledge and intelligence to enhance the organization's knowledge. People tend to think that by understanding the past, they have greater opportunity and experience to make correct decisions in the future. Companies lost valuable knowledge and needed systems and processes to capture knowledge and skills of their workers, organizing them and making them locally available for the rest of the organization (Grønhaug & Nordhaug 1992).

The need to absorb knowledge, store it and make it available to effectively drive the new technology; has enabled global sharing of information (DiMattea and Oder 1997). This becomes a reusable resource, constantly growing which provides a variety of competitive advantages. In order to effectively utilize the information, it was necessary to make it easy to input new data, navigate and organize effectively.

2.1.1 Information and Knowledge

In knowledge management literature, a common composition is that data is collected and combined to create information and information is further used to create knowledge (Hicks *et al.*, 2006). In the early knowledge management literature, a type of knowledge called explicit knowledge is often used interchangeably with the term information (Polanyi 1962). For the understanding purpose of this manuscript, information and knowledge are being used interchangeably. This refers to the form of knowledge that can be easily expressed and readily available in words and numbers, and individuals can transmit it easily (Scarf 2010). However, literature also refers to Information, as the base of all kinds of tacit and explicit knowledge, comprising on data that has been interpreted, translated, or transformed to decipher and understand underlying context (King, 2005).

2.2 Knowledge Management Process

Knowledge management process consists of four stages: gathering information, storing it, making it available to end users and using that information to support decision-making (Fig-1). The process is not a new concept but the technology has given us new opportunities to collect, store and distribute information. Increased interest in knowledge management also increased due to the tremendous growth of information sources as Internet and technology to store this data (Hibbard 1997; Mayo 1998).



Fig-1: Stages of Knowledge Management Process
Adopted from Hibbard 1997; Mayo 1998

2.2.1 Collecting information

The first step in the process is to gather information but the problem is that humans have a tendency to not want to share their special skills as you sit on. This expertise has been gained through the studies, experiences and reflections. In organizations, knowledge is knowledge of customer, product and development (Grayson & O`Dell 1998). It is management's responsibility to change the employees' way of thinking, creating information data and share information that can be used in other contexts. This is a critical element for successful knowledge management.

2.2.2 Storing information

Technological developments have made it possible to collect information, store it and make it available everywhere thanks to the internet (Hibbard, 1997). This is done through data management (computer based information systems in most cases), records management and human-centred information management (information management is handled by humans instead of technology (Grudowski, 1995)).

2.2.3 Making the information available

The third stage in the knowledge process is about making sure that the information goes to as many employees as possible (Laplante, 1997), easily accessible, at the right time and where it makes the most use (Nerney, 1997).

2.2.4 Use the information

The final step in the process is to utilize the information, that is, convert it to knowledge and experience. Until this step, information has only been processed and stored. Information will not be knowledge without being processed by the human mind (Ash, 1998). Knowledge is a personal interpretation of this information, an interpretation that based on the experience, skills and competencies. If knowledge and information does not lead to a basis for decision the whole process becomes invalid (Infield, 1997).

2.3 Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing also cited as one of the sub-processes of knowledge management (Egbu *et al.*, 2003, King, 2005). Previous research identifies greater competitive advantages and effectiveness of knowledge sharing culture in organizations (Desouza and Awazu, 2006, Thanurjan and Seneviratne, 2009). Adherence to knowledge sharing practises can increase efficiencies in operations, levels of customer service and even it can produce higher rates of successful innovations. However for this purpose it requires individual and organizational level

capabilities, supportive culture and suitable consistent practices to let knowledge sharing culture flourish with the provision of adequate Information Technology infrastructure. All these important aspects in knowledge sharing are discussed below:

2.3.1 Knowledge Sharing Capabilities

Knowledge sharing is a process of disseminating and making available the already existing knowledge (Scarf 2010). Earlier research has unearthed different organizational factors effecting knowledge sharing capabilities of organizations. Kim & Lee (2004) researched on the influence of organizational structure, culture and information technology infrastructure in knowledge sharing capabilities. Precisely, these factors submerges in the knowledge sharing culture and research shows that absence of knowledge sharing culture has tendency to impede organizational progress, resulting in failures to stimulate creativity in the organizations (Desouza and Awazu, 2006). This research aims to analyse the existing level of supportive culture and structural aid to the wider application of knowledge sharing platforms in development organizations. Research also showed that project management practices usually aim high at knowledge management and sharing capabilities (Raelin, 2001) because they consider them integral to the success of actual practices. In this way it is also expected that future project teams or other partner organizations will benefit from the documented information of previous projects (Sharp, 2003).

2.3.2 Technological Fronts in Knowledge Sharing

Meyer (1997) identified that the costs of transmitting and sharing information have decreased sharply in last 10-15 years and with advent of new technological innovations it will become even more economical for the organizations. Today, we can see that how much technology has evolved and has given us fronts to collaborate and coordinate efforts. Organizational information resources like web sites and discussion forum through e-mails and web feeds are some of the widely used forms of collaboration or interaction between individuals and organizations (Scarf, 2010).

However, some of these only provide information about the peculiar tasks, not stimulating communication and collaboration using its true potential. That creates need of other systems or platforms where information can not only be shared but also used as medium of collaboration and constructive interaction (Santoro *et al.*, 2006). Information about several intriguing aspects like lessons learned of the previous initiatives, resource availability for the existing efforts and risks identification for the planned activities can be used to benefit users. Another important aspect is the presentation and preservation of information. Ruuska and Vartiainen (2005)

presented two different strategies of sharing information, labelled as codification and personalization. In codification strategy, information is tabulated, coded and stored in repositories or on remote media or a common location accessible to others; precisely it is more technology dependant. However, in personalization strategy, it is more associated to individuals and often shared in social face to face interactions. In these interactions, tacit knowledge becomes important to be shared. Information can also be shared between organizations in barter transaction form or it can be pooled as they jointly undertake a project (Meyer 1997).

2.3.3 Knowledge Sharing Platforms: Sources of Knowledge

Knowledge sharing can be seen from two different dimensions, internally and externally. Internal knowledge sharing is about knowledge dissemination inside the organization, like between departments and different units. External knowledge sharing is where, an individual or department or an organization shares information or knowledge to a partner organization or department or to an individual, using formal or informal means. Knowledge sharing is not merely “transferring” knowledge; rather it is “creative sharing” which encompasses thinking, speaking and perceiving (Kululanga and McCaffer, 2001). Closely knit organizations and individuals will further enhance the information sharing and knowledge management (National Disaster Management Division, 2005). The empirical study of Thanurjan and Seneviratne (2009) mentioned competencies, lessons learned, repositories and teams (individuals) as high used sources of knowledge internal to an organization, whereas repositories, communities of practice, individuals, networks and knowledge gate-keepers being the significant external sources of knowledge to organizations (Fig-2).

Source: Conceptualized from Thanurjan and Seneviratne (2009)

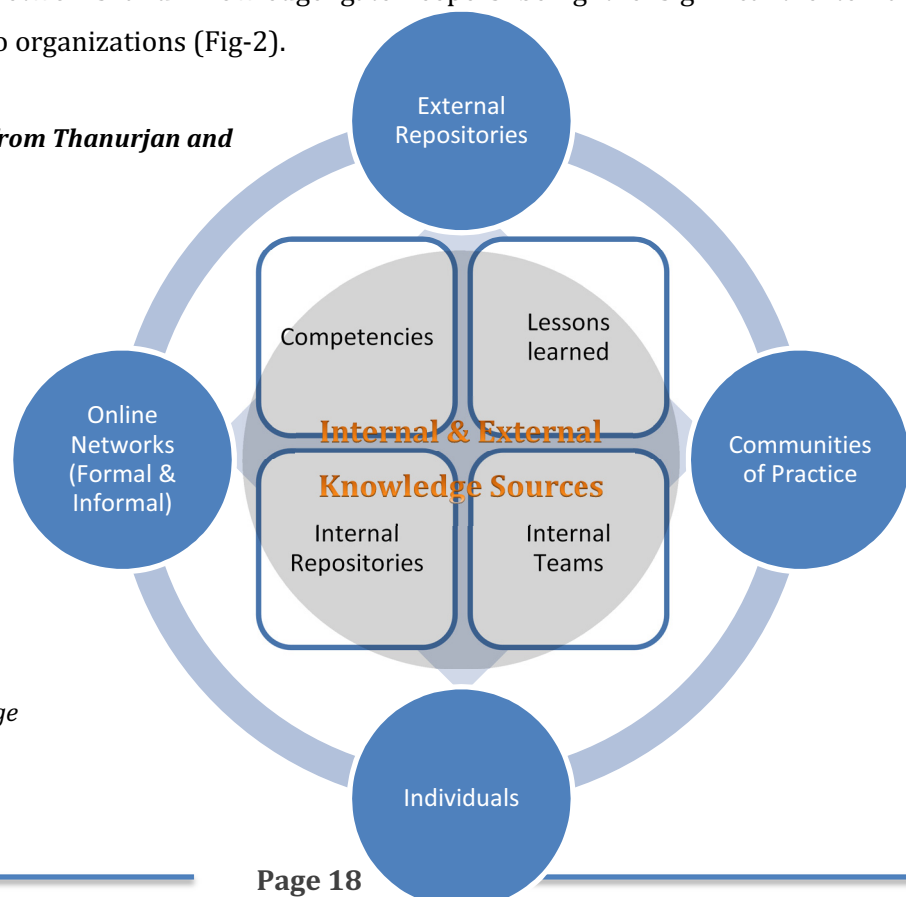


Fig-2: Sources of knowledge (Internal & External)

As Information may become rapidly obsolete and need to be updated regularly, so its usefulness may also be dependent on time and place of sharing information, and the sharing arrangement between organizations, which is of more importance than the information being shared (Meyer, 1997). In an empirical study, Novell *et al.* (2006) shared that often knowledge documentation becomes too late and in the result, when project teams get disbanded or get involved in a new activity, they become less motivated to document their learning. Another dimension to the timing is documenting too early with inadequate experience of particular project activity.

2.3.4 Our focus: An overlooked dimension

Scholarly literature predominantly is focused on internal knowledge sharing which is precisely sharing inside the organizations among individuals. Usually, organizations share knowledge internally on organizational intranets, accessible to all employees working in the organizations (Newell *et al.*, 2006).

For this very aspect, current study focuses on external dimension of knowledge sharing. This dimension sees theoretical evidences and practices in organizations sharing knowledge with other organizations (Thanurjan and Seneviratne, 2009). Possibly, there are several different arrangements between organizations in context to knowledge sharing. Formally, organizations collaborate and share knowledge by forming alliances or networks or they share information while executing joint projects. Informal arrangements include communities of practice, social networking, and other loosely structured independent knowledge sharing groups.

2.4 Knowledge Sharing in Development Organizations

In a study about knowledge sharing in development organizations, Ferguson *et al.* (2008: 33-34) stressed that a broad study is needed to reveal what knowledge sharing means to different development organizations and how interaction among these can be improved. This hints that sharing initiatives are linked with organizational objectives and need to be aligned with the community needs at large. In the similar pattern,

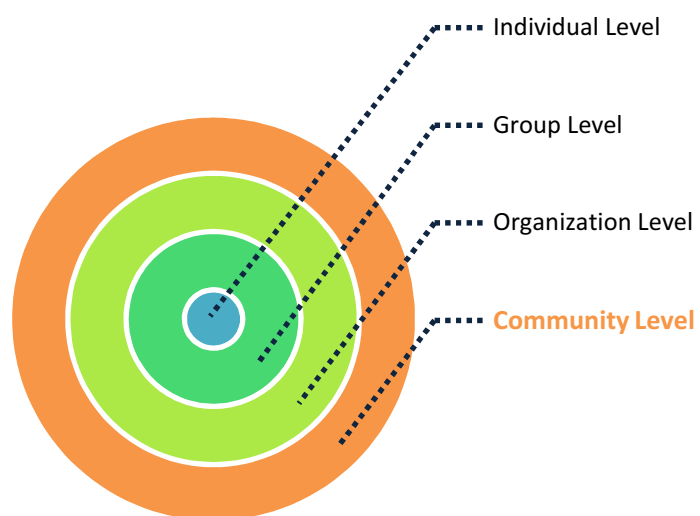


Fig-3: Levels of Knowledge sharing in Development Organizations
Adopted from Quagli 2001

Quagli (2001) presented a process of creating and utilizing knowledge in the development organizations. This process comprises on following four levels (Fig-3).

- Individual level knowledge is collected and used by the same person. This is the inner circle and becomes the first building block of knowledge sharing initiatives.
- Sharing knowledge from one person to group level is between teams, working groups and thematically aligned but geographically dispersed teams in different organizations.
- Sharing knowledge within the whole organization, points to the establishment of knowledge management system and sharing practices inside organizations.
- Staring knowledge with the whole community is the prime concern of this study, that how organizations and individuals working inside those development organizations share knowledge with other members of community.

2.4.1 Knowledge Sharing with Development Community

The last cycle, broader sharing throughout organizations, is main difference between profit and non-profit organizations. In non-profit sector organizations knowledge is not kept secretly as a competitive edge on competitors, rather intended to be shared among others for greater benefit of the whole development community (Scarf, 2010). The decision making process during a crisis or a vulnerable situation requires finding information, analyzing it and making a decision. Speed, processing information and making correct decisions can save lives. A big challenge for non-profit organizations is that knowledge and information are scattered and owned by different organizations which lowers efficiency, utilization and complicates decision making process. It is still not uncommon for organizations that are facing problems to not know which information other organizations have that might help them in decision making. Whereas knowledge management is about the right people have access to right information at the right time. The advantages of this practice are that employees can access information faster and easier, they can concentrate on their specialty, they will have more opportunities to make intelligent decisions (Lank, 1997), save lives, have less stress and use fewer resources. Knowledge management and sharing has this potential to reduce costs, lead to higher productivity (Maglite, 1995) and increased ability to meet organizational requirements.

In an evaluation study of the “Development Gateway”, a knowledge sharing initiative by the World Bank, development organizations have started to realize the problem and are slowly developing common infrastructure to manage information and knowledge sharing (Jha *et al.*, 2004). Such an approach will help communities and countries at large in participating more

efficiently and effectively in international development efforts (OECD 2001). This will provide opportunities to benefit from the adverse effects of globalization. It should also enable improved dialogue with foreign governments, corporations and NGOs to negotiate new ways of working towards and supporting sustainable development (OECD 2001, Scarf 2010).

2.4.2 Formal Platforms of Knowledge Sharing

Formal networks or knowledge sharing platforms form an outcome-oriented and more integrated approach to knowledge management and sharing than informal networks (Scarf, 2010). For this research both kind of platforms are being looked at to have the diverse understanding of existing sharing platforms. Usually, these formal knowledge sharing platforms are established by donor agencies (Clark 1995) to track the funded projects' performances alongwith tracking the expertise of their staff and external consultants. They present varying purposes ranging from capturing the contracting arrangements, assigned work plans and progress reporting (World Bank, 1998). These require participants to work together according to the roles defined, and to address strategic gaps in the donor agency's knowledge base. UNDP's Local Knowledge Centres and is one of the major formal knowledge sharing platforms available to development organizations working with UNDP.

In addition to these agency centered formal platforms, there are other networks which are based on thematic mapping and with volunteer participation from the development sector; they attract individuals to share their expertise in exchange for gaining from others (Scarf, 2010). These platforms are quite similar to the informal platforms; however these are more structure and theme based. The

principle driver of these kinds of platforms for individuals is the desire to work together on common objectives, alongwith strengthening their own skills (Scarf 2010). Development Gateway (World Bank), Development

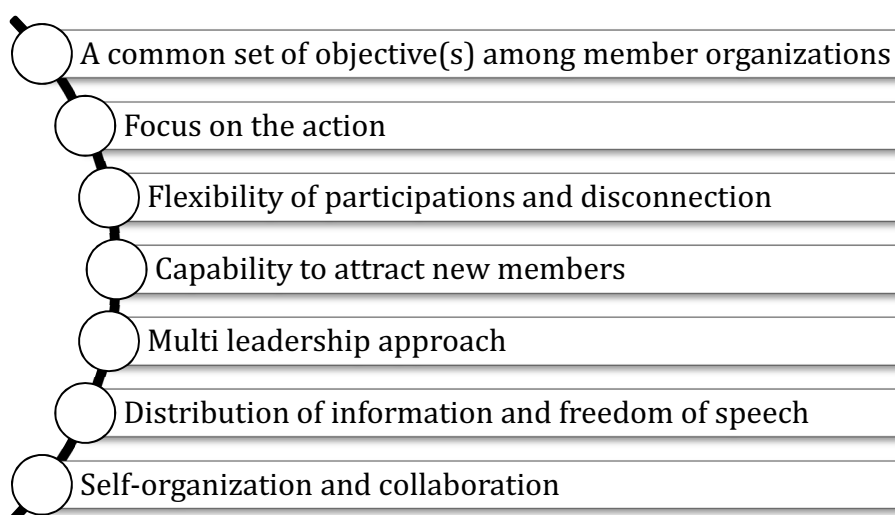


Fig-4: Core characteristics of a Formal Knowledge Sharing Platform

Source: Adopted from Santoro et al. (2006)

Assistance Database (DAD-PAK), Global Practice Networks (UNDP) and Solution Exchange

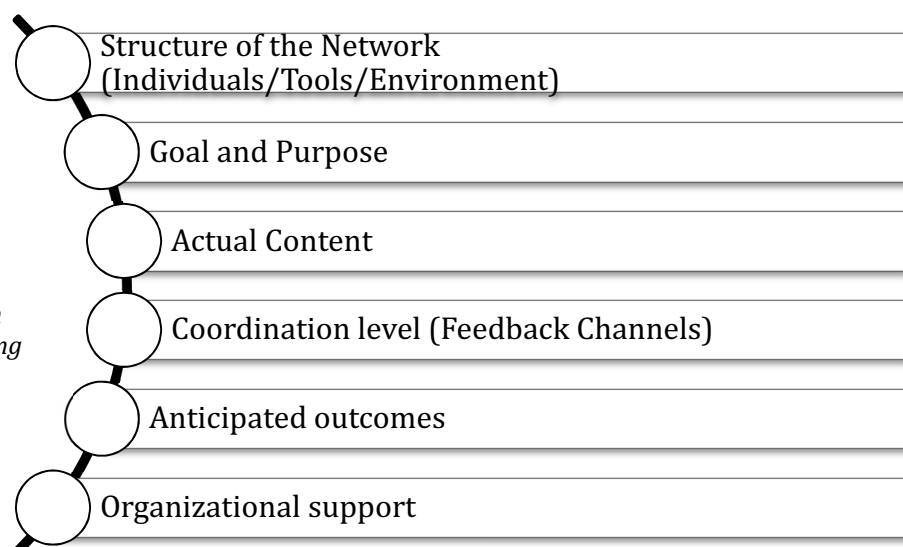
Network (UN) are few of these formal networks. Precisely network works more than just an institution. So the network does not only facilitate sharing of information, it also becomes a larger entity comprising on all member organizations (Theunis 1992: 124). For this kind of formation of development organizations, Santoro *et al.* (2006) presented core characteristics to motivate member organizations and individuals to share information. These characteristics serve as one of few benchmarks to see the great ownership of a sharing initiative among development sector organizations.

2.4.3 Informal Platform of Knowledge Sharing

The emergence of informal knowledge sharing platforms is organic, from the bottom-up, where it forms and disbands spontaneously as a function of interest in a particular issue (Scarf 2010). Informal networking also exists in the form of communities of practice. Communities of practice are autonomous and loosely connected entities, which usually shape up with common interest, similar working domain of member individuals or organizations, and they are not integrated into management processes (Storck and Hill, 2000). To analyse a community of practice for knowledge sharing purpose, their structure, purpose and goal, actual content, coordination level and anticipated outcomes are important. However, organizational support stays central to the wider acknowledgement of the community efforts, where it provides recognition to the community (Ruuska and Vartiainen, 2005). Andriessen (2003) presented a model that holds some conditions for the success of such communities. Foremost, the way members interact (feedback channels), characteristics of the individuals, tools and the environment. There are numerous information arrangements over the internet, which are informal, open, people-centred, decentralized and interactive. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nation's thematic knowledge networks are informal arrangements between communities of professional staff and collaborating centres with common interest and share similar eagerness to sustainable agriculture and food security

Source: Adopted from
Andriessen (2003);

Fig-5: Characteristics of an
Informal Knowledge Sharing
Platform



Peculiar to development sector or DFPs, Clark (1995) identified that donors have preferences towards formation of formal networks of NGOs, based on program activities. However, some scholars have noted that apart from donor driven networking, Informal networking often comes into existence when organizations discover their mutual concerns, and reasons to cooperate. Such informal networks may possibly strengthen internal management through sharing of ideas, leadership skills, and management and administration practices (Fisher, 1994). For this kind of network, Internet is most widely used medium, because of the global reach and being an economical medium to facilitate collaboration.

2.4.4 Need of Sharing Knowledge

In development sector, donor activities often shape up as project based organizations, working on particular development challenges. These project-based organizations, while interacting with community and handling natural calamities directly, represent a true source of grassroots information. Ruuska and Vartiainen (2005) and Novell et al (2006) identified that these project teams are more vulnerable to lapse of learning, when they disband. As Meyer (1997) identified the wider use of technology and speculated this to increase even at greater scale, non-government organizations have also made their presence, and development sector has also expanded in last two decades.

Working for common causes like Millennium Development Goals, agreeing to internationally accepted standards like Sphere, HFA (Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015) and adherence to widely accepted accords like Paris Declaration, organizations particularly involved in development sector require more coordinated and concerted efforts (Wood, 2004). Salamon (1995) described that widespread use of communication satellites, coupled with computing equipment like modems, routers and, televisions, faxes, and phones has greatly facilitated these organizations, working for common causes. Technology has complemented to the connectedness of grassroots, domestic and international organizations (Annis, 1992). Kim and Lee (2004) also recognised that with adequate information technology infrastructure being one of the core capabilities of knowledge sharing, organizations can effectively disseminate knowledge among other partner or network organizations. By forming these collaborative or networking arrangements, organization's information exchange strengthens each other. Scarf (2010) also felt knowledge sharing as a way to bridge gap between professionals from donor and recipient countries. Donors, have also realized that encouraging partnership among partner organizations will cut training costs, where funded project based organizations can learn from each other rather than depending on donors for trainings (Meyer, 1997). In addition to the financial gains with more information, shared information is also expected to increase the

quality of work. Research identifies that donors are showing a growing interest in and demand for improved cooperation and information sharing among donor organizations working in development sector. This is to reduce duplications of efforts (Schulz & Blecken 2010, Blecken 2010, Seneviratne, 2009, Rotimi *et al.* 2006). They also anticipate that in result of improved coordination, information flow will help to increase the efficiency or impact of the overall operations. However, research shows that Information sharing is difficult due to a variety of barriers including, mismatch in perceived and actual benefits from information sharing, different organizational mandates, different organizational structures, inadequate employed IT systems and issues in timely exchange of accurate information (Schulz & Blecken 2010).

2.4.5 Knowledge Sharing Platforms: North & South Gap

Another important consideration is identified by Hovland (2003) that the bigger chunk of research is focused on development organizations based in the North. She cites Suzuki (1998) and Madon (2000) who have argued that there are gaps between global and local knowledge because of the geographical distance between headquarters and field offices. Donor funded knowledge sharing platforms were heavily criticised by observers for failing to pay attention to the importance of local knowledge (Scarf 2010). They have also criticised the absence of feedback loops between the users and content editors. This makes relevance of the content to local conditions even difficult. Another critique is that platforms are failing to enable users to share their own knowledge. Which often limits the capacity of these platforms, which can share tacit knowledge and transform the product based knowledge to process level, which can potentially help other users in management of development projects. Along with numerous other critics, they also argue that these platforms are being filtered through a Northern lens. This also increased the gap between North-South knowledge sharing. So in result, plurality of alternative and legitimate south based local knowledge has reduced (Hovland 2003; Jha, *et al.*, 2004).

Another important consideration with the existing knowledge sharing platforms is the dominance of pushing information from top to down, leaving critical bottom up information aside. This affects the performance of implementing agencies at the community level, where they have to face the local conditions and bring development solutions according to local needs (Jha, *et al.* 2004). So the real challenge lies with the leadership of donor agencies whom have to demonstrate the social and economic impacts of knowledge sharing through these platforms on community's wellbeing. Technology dependence has created another challenge as most of the platforms needs reasonable access to internet and telecommunication services, which are not

the same in poor and marginalized communities as compared to northern countries (Jha, *et al.* 2004).

2.4.6 Impeding Factors in Knowledge Sharing Practice

Prusak (1997) identified that there is natural tendency of “reinventing the wheel”, rather than learning from the previous project experiences. Moreover, Novell *et al.* (2006) identified that there is a natural reluctance of documenting problems in knowledge repositories and later on sharing them, as it could suggest that project teams made some kind of mistakes or ignored something important. This means, future teams do not get exposure to those problems, hence not being greatly affected with the positive of knowledge sharing practice.

Ideally, development institutions can freely share information without any concern. Unlike profit firms, development institution do not compete for their market share, or financial gains or profits however, some domestic level NGOs may compete to secure donor funds and this may justify those instances of isolationism in development sector (Clark, 1995) but that remains to less extent. As organizations do not depend heavily on shared information, this hinders allocations of financial resources for knowledge sharing tools, which results in more volunteer tools rather than commercial or professional development of such platforms (Santoro *et al.*, 2006). Earlier research admits that the use of documented knowledge by the future project teams is not adequate (Novell *et al.* 2006). There are issues with the approach of documenting knowledge and sharing it. In most of the cases knowledge is being shared using social informal networks rather than formal networks, and these informal networks do not have organizational support. Where emphasis is on “product knowledge”, representing what was achieved rather than “process knowledge”, which is about how they have achieved such results (Novell *et al.*, 2006). When people do not find how to do something on the basic of previous experiences and lesson learned, it demotivates them from using the shared platform. Teams do not capture important knowledge during the crisis or problematic times; rather they tend to document it at the end of the project or at completion of milestones. From the input point of view, it is also obvious that capturing “softer knowledge”, focusing on “how to”, is more difficult than the hard one which is more of engineering and mechanical details, more of product focused.

2.5 Summary

Theory chapter has presented a diverse historical and conceptual understanding of the literature, and rest of the thesis is positioned according to these concepts. This detailed literature review forms basis for understanding the building blocks of effective knowledge management and sharing practices, particularly in international development organizations.

Peculiar to the nature of development sector, literature has identified several important concepts and critical factors, which are being used to evaluate performance and identify any possible gaps between literature and the existing practices.

In a nutshell, donor organizations are striving to bring change in the underdeveloped part of this global village. However, there are several challenges which have been identified in the literature. Dependence of knowledge sharing culture on organizational structure, culture and information technology infrastructure exist, however, more importantly there are gaps identified at the macro level where North and South have distinct difference in provision of basic facilities. Existence of formal and informal platforms gives every opportunity to development organizations to interact and share knowledge, not only to cope with existing challenges but to create great resilience for upcoming challenges. Overall, knowledge sharing to the community was of the prime interest during the literature review, and platforms were seen from the lens of how much they are contributing to the community at larger scale.

Detail study of donor's organizations practices, understanding of their professional use of existing knowledge sharing platforms, practical contribution of shared knowledge in risk mitigation and identification of impeding factors in the delivery of these systems will come in highlight after the process of proposed methodology.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology chapter shares the process of developing research design, with an objective to start from identifying appropriate data collection instruments, sampling and concluding with suitable methodology of analysis. This will also outline the justification for these opted techniques.

3.1 Research Design

The features present in the study, do not allow using a quantitative design, as the study is to seek information of qualitative nature, where organizations and individuals share their experiences of existing knowledge management practices and sharing platforms, to conceptualize a set of features or characteristics of an ideal platform.

Further qualitative nature of the study can possibly be associated with several research approaches, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), ethnography, phenomenology, narrative research (Cresswell, 2007), however the objectives of discovering new issues along the way in data collection, discovery of in-depth qualitative information, more specific highlight on research matter, tapping into several subjective experiences, purposeful sampling and most importantly selective choice of cases, require a case study approach to be used. Even during the process of data gathering, with respect to usability of existing knowledge sharing platforms, "How" and "Why" type of questions are being asked, and Yin (2003) identifies that case studies are the preferred strategy for these kind of questions, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.

In contrast, possibility of diverse participation impedes the impact of using an ethnographic approach (Cresswell, 2007). Possible unavailability of ground data and emergent nature of the study obstruct from application of grounded theory or phenomenological research. A case study design requires participants to share experiences of particular research matter, and contribute to the generation of a possible new theory or a practise (Cresswell, 2007). The key idea is that it will be worked on the experiences based on data from the participants, rather "off the shelf" development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research design endeavours to generate basic knowledge (features), unearth relevant issues or associated impeding factors (variables), and possibly define alternatives to address research objectives.

3.2 Sampling technique and selected sample

Quota Sampling, a non-random sampling technique, is being used to select sample for this study. A total of 15 different development organizations being selected representing, different types of donor organizations like bilateral (*foreign missions in other countries e.g. DIFD from UK, SIDA from Sweden*), multilateral (*e.g. WB or UNDP*) and private local and international donor agencies (*e.g. Save the Children or OXFAM*) to whom we circulated the questionnaires. In response to the study participation, **33** complete responses were received from different professionals working in these types of donor organizations, and they were used to study for the research findings.

The reason of using quota sampling technique was to select organizations representing each different set of donors. Again during the questionnaire participation request, professionals were selected from different levels of management with different set of experiences to see motivation towards knowledge management and sharing practices at various levels in donor organizations. Moreover, in the second phase of choosing individuals from these selected organizations, the objective was to represent all tiers of management involving professional from top, middle, operational level work in development sector.

3.3 Research Instrument

Case study approach, allows multiple instruments or methods to collect data for the study. Case studies are being used to acquire information about different donor projects, forming part of the selected sample. A unique strength of case study is its ability to include a full variety of evidence – archives, documents, interviews, questionnaires and observations (Yin, 2003). The research instruments designed for the study are comprehensive questionnaire and observation of existing knowledge sharing platforms (web portals).

3.3.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are deigned to gather required information for the research questions. A mix bag of close ended (including Yes/No answers, with multiple options, questions requiring importance from scale of 1(least importance) to 5(high importance)) and open ended questions are included in the questionnaires to every possible perceptions based on their experiences about that the research matter. Questionnaires are best suited to the studies where variables under consideration require personal opinion, discussion of experiences and facts, to measure accurate information (Cresswell, 2007). Questionnaires are divided in four portions: informant categorization, knowledge management, knowledge sharing, and possible contribution of knowledge management in the improved risk management of the project (s). The purpose of the different section is to allow the participants to follow the process, and proceed with possible

development of link to prior answers (De Vaus, 2002), while giving their own ideas and reducing the risk of response biasness. Informant information is collected to segregate use of knowledge sharing platforms and anticipation of the possible benefits.

3.3.2 Observation

This data collection instrument is not given too much weightage, as this raises biasness concerns over the data being collected. Observations are used only to identify existing knowledge sharing platforms, e.g. web portals like Asian Development Bank's DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction Portal). Informants, aware of the knowledge sharing platforms, will find themselves at ease in measuring relative effectiveness between these existing platforms. This will also attempt to decrease the vagueness and enhance understanding of open ended questions. Informants will be able to refer to these existing platforms, in case of their suggestions for an ideal knowledge sharing system.

3.3.2 Follow up Executive Interviews

This data collection instrument was used to seek further in detail feedback from some of the executives of the donor agencies. These were held as one to one interview sessions using Skype and telephone. Information gathered from questionnaires and important trends were discussed to assess the underlying important factors or the driving forces. These interviews also helped in assessing the overall ownership and supportive culture for research activities in donor organizations.

3.4 Validity of Research Instrument

Questionnaires and subsequent executive interviews were planned to cover both horizontal and vertical span in donor organizations. Inside organizations all management levels were included alongwith externally covering different types of donors in the donor community. To enhance the validity of responses from the participants, incomplete responses were discarded, and responses with 100% completeness were only included in the study. Moreover, responses from non-donor organizations were also not included to portray the solely knowledge management and sharing situation of donor community.

Chapter 4

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

4.0 RESULTS & ANALYSIS

This section overall shares the results of the questionnaires, findings from the elite interviews and analysis of the responses based on the theoretical understanding of the knowledge management and sharing in the international development sector.

4.1 Respondents Profile (Questionnaire & Interview)

Initially research team launched a web-based comprehensive questionnaire (Appendix-A) and invited development professionals from different donor agencies and development organizations. Web-based survey allowed participants from different parts of world to participate. Research team shared the questionnaire directly to international organizations working in developing countries (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and India). Predominant representation of questionnaire respondents is from international organizations working in Pakistan. With increasing number of development initiatives in developing countries, 91% of overall respondents were from donor organizations involved in developing country projects.

This significant representation of southern knowledge was desired by earlier research of Jha, *et al.* (2004) and Scarf (2010). Multilateral and bilateral donors, along with private donor agencies were contacted and it was made sure to include professionals from all management levels, including executive or top, middle and operational. Participation from all management levels brings a mix of organizational culture and experiences (Kim & Lee 2004). This is also to show the knowledge management and sharing capabilities at various levels in these organizations. Respondents were given a reasonable time span of 10 days to respond and they were reminded using emails after 5 days of initial circulation.

To further extend the boundaries of seeking information on exiting practices, executive interviews were conducted from some of the donor agencies (WB/UNDP/UNRC/USAID/SC-UK). These interviews helped in finding out underlying important factors that were driving employees' responses, earlier in the questionnaire. These interviews also helped in assessing the overall ownership and supportive culture for research activities in donor organizations. Following are the findings of these data collection activities, and their at length analysis in the light of literature reviewed in the previous theory section.

4.2 Awareness and Practices

Results of the questionnaire have brought this to light that nearly 60% of the professionals working in development organizations have not received any kind formal training or education focused on knowledge management and sharing practices.

This shares the current level of formal initiatives being taken to improve the understanding of employees and harness the knowledge sharing culture inside organizations. The World Bank started with the vision of presenting itself as “Knowledge Bank” and resulted in bringing a culture of preserving and sharing knowledge at various levels (World Bank 1998). Alignment of organizational activities and initiative with overall guiding vision and object is one of the success factors. To understand this in context with knowledge management and sharing practices, this is important to understand that what knowledge sharing means to different development organizations (Ferguson *et al.* 2008:33-34).

One of the possible reasons comes from the research of Meyer (1997), which shared that donor’s practice of cost cutting in trainings and alternately allowing knowledge sharing networks to flourish so that employees can benefit from each other without raising formal training overheads, may cause this trend. To another similar statement of commenting on ability of their colleagues, approximately 45% of respondents considered that their colleagues did not know how to store and share knowledge with other organizations. From this trend it becomes evident that organizations need to realize the potential benefits of knowledge sharing among partner organizations, as identified by Sharp (2003).

Another dimension to this is mismatch in perceived and actual benefits of the knowledge sharing. Improved human resource development efforts can harness knowledge sharing culture in organizations and improve the situation in overcoming the barriers in accepting knowledge sharing culture. Schulz & Blecken (2010) identified, mismatch in perceived and actual benefits of knowledge sharing and different organizational mandates are couple of major barriers in accepting a widespread culture of knowledge sharing. To overcome this mismatch and often a gap in realizing the importance of knowledge sharing, trainings and formal education play important role, and survey started with similar questions to assess the level of support from organizations in the form of trainings provided to their employees.

4.3 Knowledge Sources

Another important finding about the knowledge management and sharing practices came from the questionnaire, which was related the sources of knowledge inside organization. Fig-2, shares a mix of internal and external knowledge sources from the research of Thanurjan and Seneviratne (2009). Respondent were given different options alongwith an open ended field to answer major sources of knowledge being stored in organizational repositories. Results have shown the similar trend of sources as identified in previous empirical studies (Thanurjan & Seneviratne 2009, Novell *et al.* 2006), where minutes of meetings, lesson learned and evaluation

reports are considered as major sources of knowledge (Fig-6¹). This again raises concerns on capturing tacit knowledge which is not really reflective from lessons learned or kick off and sign off meetings in project life cycles. Lesson learned might share that what was achieved and what went wrong, but the details of how it was achieved and how it went wrong can only be captured by process knowledge, as termed by Novell *et al.* (2006).

The use and availability of knowledge systems throughout the life cycle of these projects can efficiently capture valuable tacit knowledge with process level details (Novell *et al.* 2006). Project teams need to interact with knowledge management systems more often and capture all the knowledge of different phases of the project, rather than writing everything down at the end in the form of lesson learned. The tendency to capture knowledge at the end of a project, or at the end of a major milestone may result in late documentation and in the result, when project teams get disbanded or get involved in a new activity, they become less motivated to document their learning (Novell *et al.* 2006). However, an important consideration during this activity is that documenting too early with inadequate experience can lead to misunderstand or documentation of secondary results may need future modification with the primary level of details.

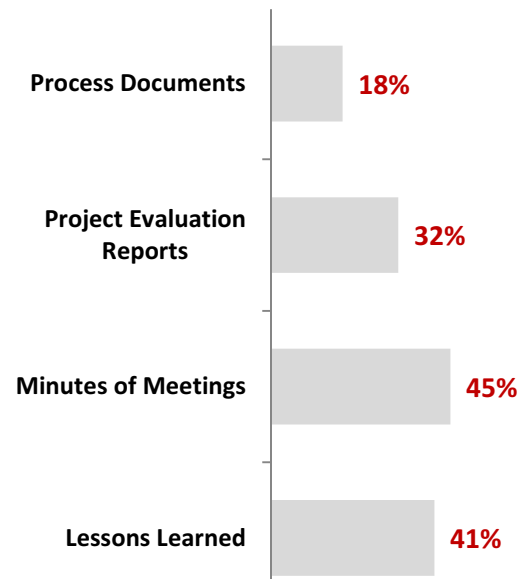


Fig-6: Sources of information in knowledge repositories

4.4 Strategic Alliances (Knowledge Networks)

Another important finding was about the formation of networks or strategic alliances to share valuable information between organizations, where only 38% of the respondents were of the view that they have established a network or formed association with an existing network to acquire or share knowledge. As stressed by Andriessen (2003) and Ruuska & Vartiainen (2005) that organizational support stays central to the formation and success of these networks. For this purpose, during the elite interviews, it was further asked to the executives that how do their respective organization's top managements see employees in forming and joining these kinds of initiatives. Responses were in stark contrast to the questionnaire findings that almost all the interviewees agreed to the central role of organizational support. However, it seems that there

¹ Does not add up to 100% as respondents were allowed to indicate multiple factors.

are some communications or awareness fall-backs, which needs reactiveness from the management to create a sense of urgency in managing and sharing important knowledge.

Participants were also asked to comment on the potential contribution of these alliances in realising the benefits of knowledge sharing, and it was found out that due to the nature of similar activities, geographical work areas and sharing ground resources, these alliances are of some help in implementation phase. However, with these positive contributions, executives realized that timely exchange of accurate information is still a grey area to be looked at. Meyer (1997) also stressed in the similar lines that information may become rapidly obsolete and need to be updated regularly, so its usefulness may also be dependent on time and place of sharing information, and the sharing arrangement between organizations, which is of more importance than the information being shared. As Schulz and Blecken (2010) identified barriers in knowledge sharing, it was discussed that because of different organizational structures, varying IT systems and process, it often delays knowledge dissemination and requires concerned officials to align processes and procedures with partner organizations or alliance members. Novell *et al.* (2006) also shared the similar issue of knowledge dissemination where it becomes late. A possible reason of this concern is because of project teams getting disbanded or getting involved in parallel activities or projects, and they become less motivated to document their learning at different fronts.

4.5 Knowledge Sharing Mediums

Survey respondents responded that Email system predominantly is the major medium of sharing information and making knowledge as reusable resource (Fig-7). This trend is also evident from the decreasing cost of Internet and wider acceptance of email systems in organizations (Meyer 1997). However, due to limited use of email systems and confidentiality or privacy concerns of email systems, it cannot be used as the way professionals can make use of web portals, or other enterprise systems. Web portals can store and present knowledge in a more appealing manner, while giving their members access to a flexible, focused, collaborative, well-coordinated, in-depth and structured platform for knowledge sharing purpose (Santoro *et al.* 2006, Ruuska & Vartiainen 2005).

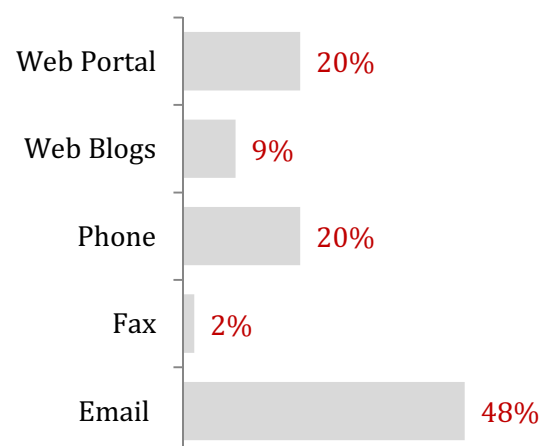


Fig-7: Mediums of making knowledge as reusable resource

Earlier the findings of lack of awareness and inexistence of formal trainings of knowledge sharing platforms might be one of the predominant reasons of email system as the prime medium of knowledge sharing and making it reusable resource. With increased awareness, training programs and alignment of personal and organizational focus on importance of knowledge sharing have potential to improve the situation. Interviewees identified lack of computer savvy nature of professionals in donor agencies and less awareness of web portals as major reasons of using email as knowledge storage space. People value, confidentiality and accessibility the most, and email systems provide these to a greater extent. This links back to the impeding culture of knowledge sharing, where often teams do not share their failures or project life cycle problems publically, to save their prestige and hide progress grey areas (Sharp 2003). In result, future teams come across similar problems and do not benefit from the previous team's experiences.

4.6 Cultural Dilemma

Another important dimension of assessing management's ownership and supportive role, in harnessing the knowledge sharing culture, was considered during the observation, questionnaires and later in executive interviews. During questionnaires, respondents shared varying responses about the guidance provided by the organizations over knowledge management and sharing practices. With 35% of the respondents, unable to find a guidance document in their organizations on knowledge management, and 45% of overall respondents shared the same for knowledge sharing guidance, raise concerns over the management role. Research has shown that how important is the role of supportive organizational culture and support in fostering the knowledge sharing culture (OECD 2001; Kim & Lee 2004). Prusak (1997) also shared that there is natural tendency of "reinventing the wheel" which possibly hinders sharing of information. However, interview findings suggested that policies and documents exist but lack awareness in project teams. This rests responsibility with managers to share these with supervisors or subordinates and supervisors to share it further to operational levels. This level of organizational commitment and managerial guidance can be fruitful in harnessing the knowledge sharing culture.

In knowledge sharing paradigm, external sharing or knowledge sharing with the community holds significant importance (World Bank 1998, Quagli 2001). However, 50% of the respondents were of the view that they do not share information outside their organizations. World Bank (1998) has stressed on the practice of using the top down and bottom of feedback channels to not only collect all possible knowledge artefacts, but to disseminate the importance of individual

contribution. Professional with their existing knowledge, realizing the significance of their contribution, can become more productive, however this requires adequate awareness, feedback channels and management support. Kim & Lee (2004) shared the similar findings in the study to find organizational factors affecting knowledge sharing. Further investigation of the matter during interviews and personal observation revealed that this happens often because of mismatch in organizational mandates, structures and different information technology systems in place (Kim & Lee 2004, Scarf 2010). Schulz and Blecken (2010) shared similar impeding factors of knowledge sharing progress. This absence of knowledge sharing culture has tendency to impede organizational progress, resulting in failures to stimulate creativity in the organizations (Desouza & Awazu, 2006). However, respondents shared adequate understanding and pattern of knowledge sharing inside organization. As seen by Quagli (2001) in four cycles of knowledge sharing, the missing link exists in the last cycle where knowledge sharing with wider community doesn't exist. It can also be inferred as Novell *et al.* (2006) identified that there is a natural reluctance in documenting problems in knowledge repositories and later on sharing them with others. Organizations may feel that other organizations will come to know about their performance shortfalls or they will think of their teams as they have made mistakes or ignored something important.

Further it was important to gauge the perception of the participants in overall importance of knowledge sharing. This perception becomes the driving force in harnessing a culture and

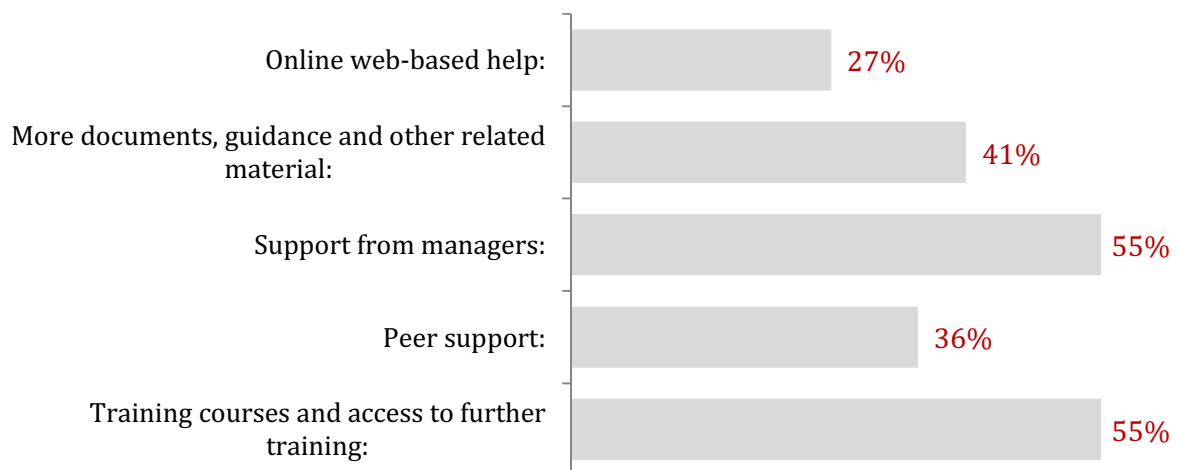


Fig-8: Means to improve knowledge sharing culture

benefiting from new practices. In questionnaires, 77% of the respondents agreed with the importance of knowledge sharing and its potential to be an effective tool of problem resolution in donor funded projects. This links back to the natural urge of seeking a solution to a similar problem, which helps in handling problems at hand. Majority of the respondents with 68% also agreed that sharing knowledge would help to advance the knowledge of the community as a whole. During executive interviews, participants were requested to share the underlying

assumptions or perceived benefits from prevailing knowledge sharing culture. Quite clearly, perceived benefits were aligned with the theoretical basis of seeing knowledge sharing as a medium to share problems, solutions, risks, mitigation strategies, resource optimisation and stakeholders support. In this way it is expected that future project teams or other partner organizations will benefit from the documented information (Sharp, 2003). Respondents also identified that “support from managers”, and “training courses” as two extremely important steps to be taken in organizations to flourish knowledge sharing culture (Fig-8²). This trend is linked back to the initial findings of formal education of knowledge management and sharing in organizations, where 56% of the respondents did not have any formal training. This finding holds more strength with overall supportive feedback from the interviewees where it was shared that support from managers is the driving force and adequate trainings have lasting impact in this process.

4.7 Existing Standards and Knowledge Sharing Platforms

Efforts are being made to standardise and harmonise all donor funded projects in different parts of the world. United Nations along with a consortium of donors have laid a solid platform, in the form of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This was to standardise and coordinate efforts in a similar direction. During executive interviews it was found that MDGs are widely accepted and agreed as a framework for donor organizations, alongwith other standards and accords like Sphere, Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) and Paris Declaration. Several donor organizations have adopted information technology systems and provided platforms to store and analyse project’s information.

Similarly, survey respondents were asked to share their organizational setups for knowledge sharing, and responses showed a variety of systems ranging from email systems to ERP softwares and online portals (Fig-9³). A good sign is the acceptance and utilization of portals for knowledge sharing purpose. This trend has started with the initiative of World Bank followed by UNDP, where they made it necessary for partner

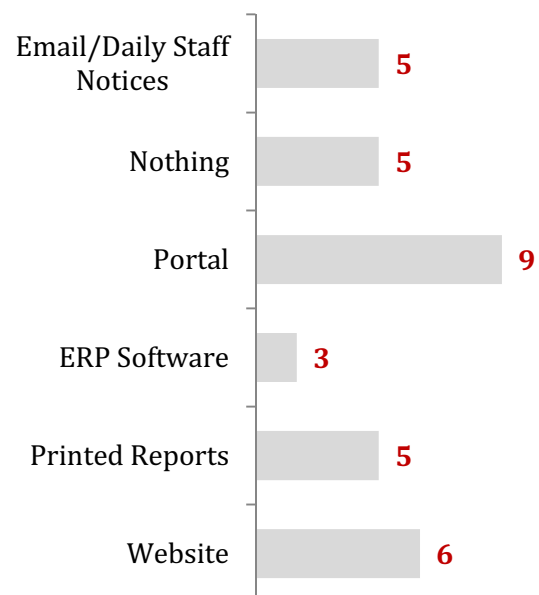


Fig-9: Knowledge Sharing Platforms

² Does not add up to 100% as respondents were allowed to indicate multiple factors.

³ Adds up to the individual responses (33)

organizations of south to use these portals (World Bank 1998, Scarf 2010). After World Bank's initiative of becoming Knowledge Bank, several governments of developing countries have also started opting to portal based dissemination of information (Heeks, 2002). In addition to the portal use, significant representation of respondents also shared that either they do not use any medium to share knowledge, or they prefer printed material over the electronic dissemination. Given the ICT infrastructure in several development countries, it is also possible that in those marginalized developing or underdeveloped areas of operations, knowledge dissemination can only be made possible with printed material. As Santoro *et al.* (2006), Andriessen (2003) and Ruuska & Vartiainen(2005) have laid the core characteristics of the these platforms, so these platforms need to be flexible to the local needs and requires attention from donor agencies to facilitate local staff with ICT infrastructure so that they can bridge the North-South gap, and contribute with their experiences.

Respondents were also asked to share their experiences of using different platforms, particularly in the initiation of new projects. Again, there was less reliance on the external knowledge repositories or knowledge sharing portals. Respondents were more inclined to seek information from the common file system in their organizations (Fig-10)

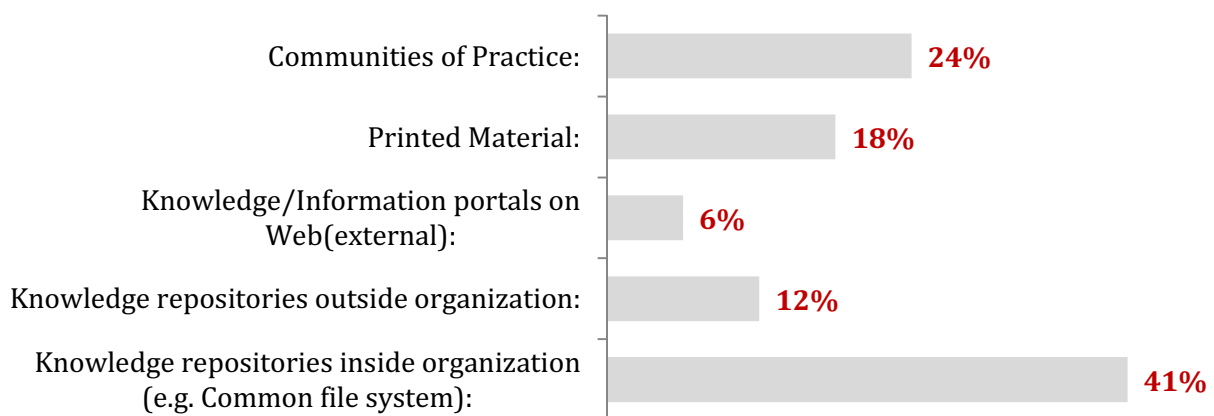


Fig-10: Information sources during initiation of new projects.

Less reliance on existing knowledge sharing platforms should draw attention of knowledge gate keepers or the donor organizations managing these networks. As identified in the research of Scarf (2010) that North-South gap, resulting in the absence of local knowledge from these North-led knowledge platforms can demotivate users of developing countries. For the users, if they do not find practices, guidelines, standards and relevant information from the donor management formal or thematic centred informal networks according to their local conditions, then they will not rely or utilize the content to its potential use. The whole process of optimizing the development efforts and facilitating developing community will be limited.

4.8 Characteristic of Knowledge Sharing Platforms

While commenting on the important characteristics of a knowledge sharing platforms, respondents stressed importance on the online availability of these sharing platforms. This gives aid to the earlier made analysis of the situation that there is a felt need of ICT initiatives in the developing part of the global village, where development professionals themselves have realized the importance of online collaboration networks for knowledge sharing process. In addition to this, comprehensive information about past and current projects and flexibility of content management was stressed. The next point on the risk management comes in the similar paradigm that the ultimate delivery of a knowledge sharing platform or a network is that how much it contributes in the improvement of service delivery (World Bank 1998).

Required level of flexibility is a dire need of most of the platforms, even it was stressed in the interviews, that often sharing platforms are rigid and they curtail the responses in a certain manner. One of the respondent mentioned ADB's knowledge portal of Disaster Risk Reduction, which lets users to identify risk levels according to HFA codes. However it does not give an option, neither any space to the users for the entry of mitigation strategies or the process information. Additionally, build in flexible should not be compromised with the unstructured information on knowledge sharing platforms. This is also because of the varying needs of changing reports for different purposes, and often standard reporting do not suffice. A flexible reporting system becomes an integral part of any knowledge management system. As coined by Novell *et al.* (2006) that there is a need of process knowledge ("How") in repositories rather product knowledge ("What"), participants shared their experiences of existing knowledge systems, highlighted that unavailability of recent information and abstract level of information (lacking comprehensive details and process guidelines) as main challenges to the use of knowledge sharing systems. Moreover, in interviews, professionals have expressed more value to the sharing platforms with in-depth information not only about the projects, but the implementing team and the organizations, to establish a people to people contact (Santoro *et al.* 2006) or Ruuska and Vartiainen (2005) 's personalization approach, rather a mere information exchange using systems.

4.9 Risk Management

The study lightly touched upon contribution of knowledge management and knowledge sharing in improving risk management. To gauge perception and contribution in donor funded projects, development professionals were questioned about the kind of information required to be shared to improve performance in forthcoming projects. This question gave different options ranging

from information resources, work practices, risks of the previous projects and risk mitigation strategies, and on the overall scale of 6, respondents emphasized on the inclusion of "Risk Mitigation Strategies" on these knowledge sharing platforms (Fig-11⁴).

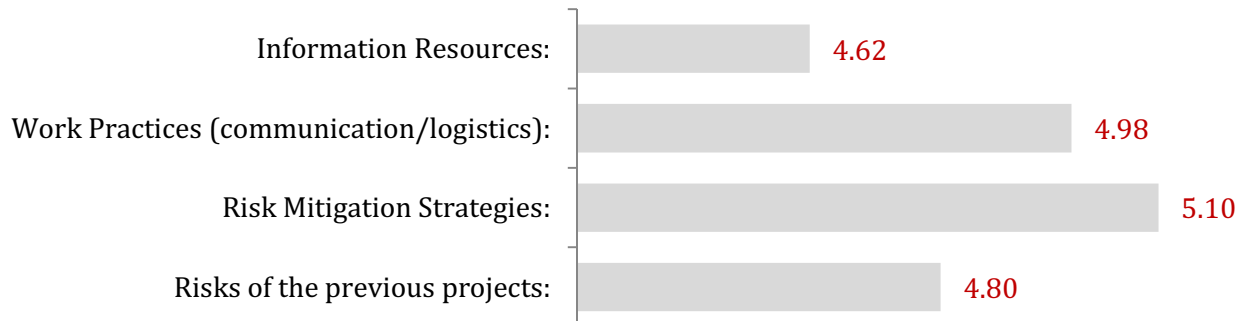


Fig-11: Kinds of Information on Knowledge Sharing Platforms

Further discussion in different elite interview sessions revealed the inadequacy of the existing focus on risk mitigation strategies. It was shared that often project documents only touch the surface of risk assessment portion, rather than going deep inside it and showing a proactive approach not only in the assessment of upcoming risk, but adopting some kind of mitigation strategies on the basis of knowledge perceived from knowledge sharing platforms and personal experiences. Risk management portion, where risk factors are identified and analyses and risk mitigation and management procedures are measured, should incorporate a formal place not only in the project documentation but also in the knowledge sharing platforms. It was shared that log frame planning approach can be one of the strategy to include mitigation strategies in project documents, which will further flow down to different knowledge management and sharing systems. Emphasis of the existing knowledge systems is more on lesson learned and on the achievements, rather the processes and strategies being adopted in realising those achievements (Novell *et al.*, 2006). This leaves the gap of not having the mitigation strategies, rather a list of potential risks, which are of lesser help to the future project teams.

Respondents shared the similar understanding, where work practices and risks of the previous projects were desired important to improve the delivery of donor funded projects. Overall, 90% of the respondents ranked

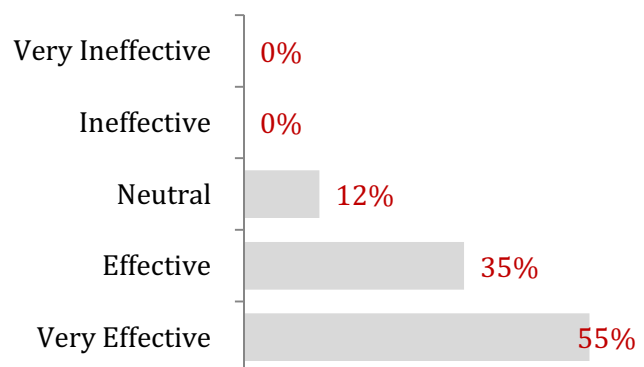


Fig-12: Contribution of knowledge sharing in improving Risk Management

⁴ From an overall score of 6.

contribution of knowledge sharing as effective in improving risk management of donor funded projects (Fig-12). Interview participants were intrigued by the overall questionnaire responses and shared in-depth understand of the risk and the possible contribution of knowledge management. It was observed that donor funded projects require great deal of ownership of local governments and acceptability from the local community, which has tendency to improve this existing usage and delivery of donor funded knowledge sharing initiatives(Scarf 2010).

For several projects, the perceived interests of the community and possible cooperation of governments are to be obtained from previously run projects in the similar environments or possibly from pilot projects. These pilot projects, to perceive the conditions, overruns costs, creating another dilemma for the donor missions. Moreover, in extremely unfamiliar conditions, requiring setups to be made at hazardous situations, emergency conditions or places with insecure surroundings, often raise a lot more concerns even for pilot project activities. However, participants, stressed that if one partner organization has done a similar project in the target locality or in the neighbouring conditions, their project experiences can be of great benefit in assessing the upcoming conditions, geographical risk profiling and in adoption of effective and efficient strategies to mitigate those potential risks. This stresses on the importance of process knowledge (Novell *et al.*, 2006). Executives also gave notion of coupling performance assessment processes to knowledge sharing ability and contribution in capacity development of the community at large. This hints to the development or the building process of supportive organizational culture and management ownership of the transformation from a simple organization to knowledge enriched development organization.

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has unearthed some important considerations, based on the study of scholarly literature, analysis of questionnaire responses and executive interviews. Following are some important recommendations to be considered while developing knowledge management systems and in the dissemination process of knowledge. Recommendations are purely based on the analysis and are categorised in three different sections. Firstly, recommendations are made to the policy makers and to the management in the development organizations to work for harnessing the knowledge sharing culture in these organizations. Secondly, based on the research work of Scarf (2010), Thanurjan & Seneviratne (2009), Santoro *et al.* (2006), Ruuska & Vartiainen (2005), Andriessen (2003) and the respondents' responses, suggestions are made to the developers of such platforms. These suggestions can be seen as critical success factors which can improve the overall acceptability and cooperation among individuals and organizations. Lastly, recommendations are made to the users of the knowledge sharing platforms. They have been identified as key in the whole process of transforming organizations to learning or knowledge organizations.

5.1 Policy Makers and Executive Management

This part covers the strategic level recommendations to the policy makers, executive management or to the decision makers, that how can they promote culture of knowledge sharing in development organizations and bring transform practices to foster culture adaptation.

- Study shares that knowledge sharing culture is not rooted adequately and policy makers need to be more strategic in knowledge sharing perspective, where decision makes need to move to sharing results, opportunities, improve cooperation and stress on concerted actions (World Bank 1998) from the traditional centralized and controlled decision making (OECD 2001). This will help in shifting the focus from outputs to outcomes and constant efforts will lead to reshaping organizations to learning organizations or knowledge organizations, as termed by Work Bank.
- To increase the awareness of knowledge sharing platforms and to ease the acceptance of best practices in this process, individual's personnel development using in service trainings, formal and informal educational programs and refresher courses need to be looked at. Increasing training opportunities may incur extra costs, but it will help in harnessing knowledge management and sharing culture, alongwith creating long term benefits for the donor organizations. Training opportunities will also increase

interaction of the professionals from different organizations, resulting in stronger people to people contact, leading to healthy organizational knowledge exchange (Santoro *et al.* 2006).

- Another important recommendation, based on the theoretical findings and later endorsed by respondents, that policy documentation should be made available and easily accessible to employees working at all levels of the organization. Management should promote formation of strategic alliances and networks to share information.
- Executives should also help employees in gaining a wider view of the organization and its knowledge sharing processes. This wider view comes with a sense of responsibility shared in the organizations to the wider community (Quagli 2001), where individuals see themselves as playing their roles in eradicating harmful diseases or sharing information in the time of emergencies or in similar conditions. However, this vision can only be communicated with strong managerial support alongwith focused information and mentorship.
- Policy makers and executive management should incorporate required procedures to upload recent information. Knowledge sharing procedures should be in practice during the whole project life cycle rather just at the end with lesson learned to be registered in repositories. This will result in more process knowledge for the users and they will benefit in a more informed manner.
- To further nourish the culture, employee performance assessment can be linked with their contribution to the knowledge repositories. They can be incentivized for their efforts which resulted in the wider community learning and development.

5.2 Developers of the Knowledge Sharing Platforms

- Knowledge management and sharing platforms need to be developed with inbuilt flexibility of the content management. Moreover, they should be made more accessible on internet for external users and using intranet arrangements for internal users. There dependency on the technological advancement should be considered as ICT conditions in development countries of South are not the same as developed countries of North (Scarf 2010).

- It was found that more professionals are using email systems as part of their efforts to make knowledge as reusable resource. So, with increasing use of email as sharing platform, developers should implement some sort of data mining concepts in these organizational email systems. These mechanisms have potential to categories information, in several possible categories for search purposes. However, mining or marking algorithms need to consider confidentiality intact. In result, these algorithms will capture or mine knowledge from public contents of email systems.
- Design information entry forms with inbuilt space for the information contributor to enter personal details like contact no, project information to create more people to people contact, which can further result in sharing of tacit knowledge (Santoro *et al.* 2006). As it was identified in the respondent's responses that integrative view of related projects is really important. If a user is working on a disaster relief project, s/he should be able to see other disaster relief projects from the knowledge repositories, so that they can link efforts, results and factors affecting several projects, because often different agencies work in a similar kind of development activity or in response to a natural calamity. Integrative view will help in bringing more integration in the process of knowledge sharing. This also requires advance query management and giving as much options to users to refine and change results of the repositories according to their requirements.

5.3 Users of Knowledge Sharing Platforms

This part has recommendations to the knowledge management and sharing systems' users. There are several kinds of roles which users perform on these platforms, where there are content editors, gatekeepers and other users with different levels of access.

- Donor organizations can implement strategies to monitor content regular and disseminate best practices or the public information to other platforms. OECD(2001) work guides in the similar fashion, so as the research of Scarf(2010) where donor agencies like UN or Work Bank are expected to share country wide information and projects detail at a much larger scale. This could be the task of United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development and could be linked with volunteer or accessible country wide platforms e.g. Development Assistance Database (DAD-PAK). So not even individuals or organizations can benefit from this, even the government can benefits from other countries' success stories, best practices, strategy principles, approaches, and lessons learned (Heeks 2002).

- Users while entering the project level information, in addition to the summary or abstract information, provide comprehensive details and context of the procedures adopted or implementation. This effort to store process knowledge has more use and contribution to the improved performance of platform users, resulting in overall contribution to the community at large (Novell *et al.*, 2006).
- Timeliness of information was another concern, where it is recommended that users should keep these knowledge sharing platforms populated with recent learning, and provide complete information, in an organized manner which will help in making platforms more creditable. The natural tendency of updating the project status and related information at the end of a major phase or at the end of the project results in missing out important working details, which impedes the overall effectiveness of the platform. Moreover, this effort of documenting process knowledge can also improve storing mitigating strategies while individuals are combating different levels of risks and vulnerabilities. Participants shared unanimous urge to have risk mitigation strategies as integral content while storing knowledge on these platforms, and users play central role in documenting information to this level.
- Another important contribution of these knowledge sharing platforms can be in the form of improving people to people contact and harnessing the networking in the development sector. This is also to bridge the gap between North-South practitioners, and submerge local learning and knowledge patterns into the global knowledge (Hovland 2003; Jha, *et al.* 2004). It is recommended that when users enter some kind of process knowledge in these repositories, they should also provide their public accessed contact details for other users, to seek and access the tacit level of knowledge which usually rests with the professionals (Santoro *et al.* 2006; Ruuska & Vartiainen 2005).

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study is carried out to address the topic which was “*Knowledge management and sharing initiatives in development sector: contribution in effective risk management*”. The assessment has been the prime focus which is based on the scholarly literature review, responses of the questionnaire’s respondents and feedback of interview participants, whereas possible contribution of knowledge management and sharing initiatives and practices in effective risk management based entirely on the perception of questionnaire’s respondents and interview participants. For this study, an empirical investigation is carried out by launching a detailed questionnaire, to professionals working in donor agencies at different hierarchical levels, followed by a series of elite interviews. The received responses of 33 development professionals represent a diverse workforce with different levels of experiences and roles in development sector organizations. Although each response is of a unique importance, however study has focused on the common issues, either an impeding factor or the encouraging aspect of these knowledge sharing practices. Intention is to explore that what practices have been adopted, what initiatives have been taken, how well progress has been made in establishing sharing practices, and to identify obstacles in fostering knowledge management and sharing practices.

Main findings of the study are that knowledge sharing culture rests central to the greater delivery of these initiatives.

Research identifies that a supportive culture can improve overall effectiveness of the knowledge sharing platforms and can benefit to the participating individuals, organizations and countries at large (OECD 2001; Kim & Lee 2004). In donor funded projects, knowledge sharing culture needs more managerial support to en route itself to submerge in the organizational culture.

Harmonisation across the board (e.g. *among donor funded projects, between donors (North) and partner development organizations (South)*) will improve people to people contact which can play pivotal role in collective learning (Santoro *et al.* 2006). Where existing platforms need flexibility in content presentation, incorporation of user level details to foster people to people is also a felt need. Platforms need to be designed according to the technological capabilities of South, rather the recent technological advancements in North (Scarf 2010).

The absence of knowledge sharing culture has tendency to impede organizational progress, resulting in failure to stimulate creativity in the organizations (Desouza and Awazu, 2006). Respondents identified *trainings, peer support, increased access to the policy documentation,*

support to the formation of strategic alliances or partnerships and communication of organizational vision to the operational level professionals as important factors which can help in overcoming impeding factors.

Study also showed that the organizations can increase the efficiency or impact of the overall operations through greater collaboration and knowledge sharing among other organizations, but do not execute this appropriately because of the several other impeding factors like:

- *lack of awareness of the knowledge sharing systems,*
- *less dissemination of guidance material inside organizations about knowledge sharing,*
- *insufficient capacity development of employees,*
- *rigidity of IT systems and*
- *less intriguing peer support.*

Overall, it appeared that knowledge sharing has become a desirable behaviour in organizational context. Desire to be more productive, with effective knowledge management and sharing practices and strategies, has emerged in development sector (OECD 2001; Chowdhury *et al.* 2006). To bridge the gap between North-South development sector organizations and individuals, knowledge sharing platforms can play an important role, provided local knowledge is given similar importance as the global one (Hovland, 2003; Jha, *et al.*, 2004). Importance of process knowledge (Novell *et al.* 2006), flexible reporting (Ruuska & Vartiainen 2005), online accessibility, personalized information and integrative view of projects, flexible participation and disconnection (Santoro *et al.* 2006) have been realized, and suggested to be incorporated in knowledge sharing platforms. These possible inclusions can harness the practice of using knowledge management systems during the whole project life cycle, rather only at the project close off, merely for lessons learned.

It is believed that the study presents valuable insights to improve progress of knowledge sharing systems. The contribution in improving the situation of risk management requires an empirical study and more comprehensive research to claim, however, to the extent of study participants, it is agreed that knowledge sharing systems have potential to contribute in the overall improvement of risk management of the development projects, provided the platforms being used and managed diligently. This perception requires more rigorous research efforts to phase its way in practices, and it requires other empirical evidences to support the perception based argument.

Chapter 7

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.0 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the findings of this research study brought some important considerations for the greater delivery of knowledge management and sharing initiatives, however, there are number of limitations exist, which have previously been acknowledged and considered throughout this thesis study work. These limitations and directions for future research are outlined below.

A limitation of the research programme is that it heavy relies on experiences and responses of the respondents. Where this approach presents firsthand knowledge and creditable information, but lacks generalization and representation of the wider community of the donor organizations.

Another shortcoming is the quota sampling technique, where only few organizations were contacted out of a large population of not-for-profit organizations and development agencies. However, it was made sure to still represent a mix of donor organizations (bilateral/multilateral /private) and individuals from all levels of management (executive/middle/operational).

A causal relationships between several factors of improving knowledge management and sharing have been shared, which are entirely based on experiences of respondents, however, more rigorous research efforts and comprehensive responses of wider sample size will present more informed findings.

Another limitation, is evaluating knowledge systems contribution in risk management, which is also quite casual and lacks generalization due to the nature and limited scope of this study. However, future research can extend the findings of this study, by obtaining actual data on projects performances with and without knowledge management systems and can provide empirical evidence of the contribution it may provide in improving risk management.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

INFORMANT INFORMATION:

What organization you belong to: -----

Which country you are working: -----

What is your role in the company?

- Executive or Top
- Middle management
- Operational

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT:

How aware you are about the organizational polices about the Knowledge Management:

- Very aware, have read and understand it
- Aware, have to read it though
- Have heard of it
- Not aware

How available is the knowledge management guidance document

- Easy available
- Available but I struggle to find them
- I have yet to get a copy
- Unavailable or I am not sure how to get them

How do you agree with the following statement?

- Everybody knows how to store knowledge/information
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

Are you aware of where knowledge /Information are stored in your organization and who has access?

- Very aware
- Aware
- Unclear
- Not aware

Where do you store knowledge/information

- Online/Electronic
- Print version
- Remote (USBs, DVDs, CDs)

Does your organization has a written knowledge management policy or strategy

- Yes
- No
- Plan to have
- Don't know

Your firm or organization uses partnerships or strategic alliances to acquire knowledge?

- Yes
- Now
- Plan to have
- Don't know

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

How aware you are about the organizational polices about the Knowledge Sharing:

- Very aware, have read and understand it
- Aware, have to read it though
- Have heard of it
- Not aware

How available is the information sharing guidance document

- Easy available
- Available but I struggle to find them
- I have yet to get a copy
- Unavailable or I am not sure how to get them

How do you agree with the following statement?

- Everybody knows how to share knowledge/information with others
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

Do you know who to go to in your organization to get further advice on knowledge management and sharing?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

Do you know who to go to in other/partner organizations to get information?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

How often do you collaborate /share knowledge with staff from outside your organization?

- Very regularly
- Often
- Rarely
- Never

How do you make your knowledge/information available to others as a reusable resource?

- Email
- Fax
- Phone
- Web Blogs

- Web Portal

What do you think, would help to improve knowledge/information sharing?

- ✓ Training courses and access to further training
- ✓ Peer support
- ✓ Support from Managers
- ✓ More documents, guidance and other related material
- ✓ Online web-based help
- ✓ Other: _____

I believe that the shared knowledge can help other members within community to solve problems

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe that sharing knowledge, would help to advance the knowledge of the community as a whole

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree
- Strongly Agree

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PLATFORMS

What knowledge and information sharing platform(s) are being used in your organizations to disseminate information internally and externally (please list if any):_____

Rank from 1(Least Important) to 5(Extremely Important)

Where do you look for information when starting a new project?

- Knowledge repositories inside organization ___
- Knowledge repositories outside organization ___
- Knowledge portals on Web ___
- Printed Material ___
- Communities of Practice ___

What characteristics make a knowledge sharing platform more use full to its members:

- Comprehensive information about past projects___
- Analytical Information on previous statistics___
- Online Accessibility___
- Insights (expert contacts)___
- Easy to use___

What are the challenges you are facing when you are using knowledge sharing platforms:

- Unavailability of recent information ___
- Complex functionality, requiring technology savvy users___
- Platforms have only abstract information, lacking comprehensive details___
- Unorganized Information:___

- Cultural Barrier:___
- Others (please list):___

What do you think are the main benefit(s) for the members of a knowledge sharing platform?

- Members get access to valuable information
- Members get access to a large network
- Members will be better experts
- Members work more efficient
- Members will be more productive
- Members will have better exposure
- Members learn permanently
- Members have fun
- Other please specify:_____

Please indicate the level of importance you attribute to each reason for using the knowledge management practices currently in use in your firm or organisation.

Check ONE response for each item.

To help integrate knowledge within your firm or organisation					
To improve the capture and use of knowledge from sources outside your firm or organisation					
To improve sharing or transferring of knowledge with partners in strategic alliances, joint ventures or consortia					
To increase efficiency by using knowledge to improve production processes					
To protect your organisation from loss of knowledge due to workers' departures					
To train workers to meet strategic objectives of your firm or organisation					
To identify and/or to protect strategic knowledge present in your firm or organisation					
To ease collaborative work of projects or teams that are physically separated (i.e. different work sites)					

What kind of information is needed and should be shared for forthcoming projects?

- Risks of the previous projects
- Risk Mitigation Strategies
- Work Practices (communication/logistics)
- Information resources
- Others:_____

How do you see the contribution of shared knowledge in improving risk management in donor projects?

- Highly Effective
- Effective
- Less Effective
- Least Effective