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THE INTERACTIVE EFFECT OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA CHOICE AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON TACIT KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

The transfer of tacit knowledge can be facilitated by personal relationship strength and by choosing appropriate communication media. However, the interactive effect of personal relationships and media choice on tacit knowledge transfer success has not been studied. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how relationship strength and media choice affect tacit knowledge transfer, and most importantly, how media choice interacts with relationship strength.

Data were collected via a questionnaire survey of New Zealand university teachers in the disciplines of human health and medicine. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were used to analyse the survey data and to test the model. Then, follow-up interviews were carried out with six participants, to collect in-depth qualitative data focusing on the mechanisms behind the relationships to be found statistically significant in the model.

Fitting the model by using partial least square structural equation modelling suggested that a higher level of closeness between individuals lead to better tacit knowledge transfer success, the relationship was stronger when individuals use both synchronous media and asynchronous media than when they use only synchronous media. Qualitative results were used to help interpret the quantitative findings by highlighting the importance of the development of common understanding, and by pointing out the fact that individuals adjusted their communication styles to be more suitable for each other.

This study contributes to theory by testing Media Synchronicity Theory in the field of tacit knowledge transfer, and by exploring the mechanisms of the change of individuals’ media choice over time.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE : Average variance extracted
CMV : Common method variance
EFA : Exploratory factor analysis
EM method : Expectation-maximisation method
ICT : Information and communication technology
MRT : Media richness theory
MST : Media synchronicity theory
PLS : Partial least squares
SECI : Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) of knowledge creation model
       which consists of four modes: socialisation, externalisation,
       combination, and internalisation
SEM : Structural equation modelling
TIP : Time, interaction, and performance theory