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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in Business Studies

in

Business Information Systems

At Massey University

Manawatu Campus

New Zealand

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2014

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Keri Logan and Dr Alexei Tretiakov, for their patience, knowledge, and continuous support throughout my study. This thesis would not have been possible without their guidance.

A special thanks to all the respondents, who spent their valuable time and efforts to complete the survey and participant in the interviews.

Finally, my utmost recognition and acknowledgement goes to my family. To my mother and father, whose love, wisdom and support have helped me to find myself and become the person who I am today. To my partner Ivy, whose love, inspiration and encouragement have opened my heart and enriched my life. Thank you for giving me the best years in my life and for your support in everything. I can't wait for our journey ahead.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF FIGURES	XII
LIST OF TABLES	XIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	XV
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the study.....	1
1.2 Problem statement.....	2
1.3 Research questions.....	2
1.4 Scope of the study	3
1.5 Significance of the study.....	3
1.6 Summary of research method.....	4
1.7 Structure of the thesis	4
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 Knowledge	6
2.3 Tacit Knowledge	10
2.3.1 Conceptualisation of tacit knowledge	10
2.3.2 The tacit and explicit dichotomy.....	11
2.3.3 The tacitness of policy knowledge	12
2.4 Factors that influence tacit knowledge transfer	14
2.4.1 Tacit knowledge characteristics.....	15
2.4.2 The knowledge provider/source.....	17
2.4.3 The knowledge recipient.....	18

2.4.4	Similarities between the knowledge provider and knowledge recipient.	18
2.4.5	Relationship strength between the knowledge provider and knowledge recipient	19
2.4.6	Organisational context.....	21
2.5	The effect of communication media on tacit knowledge transfer.....	21
2.5.1	Media Richness Theory and Related Studies	22
2.5.2	Media Synchronicity Theory and related studies	26
2.5.3	The effect of media use on tacit knowledge transfer.....	34
2.6	Interactive effect of media choice and relationship strength	39
2.7	Summary.....	40
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT		41
3.1	Introduction.....	41
3.2	Conceptual foundation.....	41
3.3	Research model	41
3.4	Factors hypothesised to affect tacit knowledge transfer success.....	42
3.4.1	Relationship	42
3.4.2	Interacting role of media use.....	43
3.5	Refined model	44
3.6	Summary.....	46
CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHOD		47
4.1	Introduction.....	47
4.2	Overall research approach	47
4.2.1	Positivism and Interpretivism	47
4.2.2	Mixed research method.....	48
4.2.3	Overview of research method	51
4.2.4	Overview of research procedures.....	51
4.3	Quantitative data collection	53
4.3.1	Procedures of quantitative data collection.....	53

4.3.2	Unit of analysis and population	53
4.3.3	Overview of research instrument	54
4.3.4	Operationalization of Variables	55
4.3.5	Tests for readability	63
4.3.6	Survey description.....	63
4.4	Approach to quantitative data analysis.....	63
4.4.1	Data entry	64
4.4.2	Preliminary data analysis	64
4.4.3	Checking for common method bias.....	65
4.4.4	Model refinement.....	66
4.4.5	Approach to model testing	67
4.5	Qualitative data collection.....	70
4.5.1	Open-ended questions in the survey.....	70
4.5.2	Interview questions	70
4.5.3	Interview description	71
4.6	Approach to qualitative data analysis	71
4.7	Ethical considerations.....	72
4.7.1	Quantitative study	73
4.7.2	Qualitative study.....	73
4.8	Summary.....	73
CHAPTER 5	QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS	75
5.1	Response rate	75
5.2	Preliminary analysis.....	75
5.2.1	Normality and outliers	75
5.2.2	Missing values	76
5.2.3	Non-response bias	76
5.2.4	Representativeness of the population.....	78

5.3	Descriptive statistics	79
5.3.1	Media choice	79
5.3.2	Relationship strength	81
5.3.3	Tacit knowledge transfer success	82
5.3.4	Communication patterns	84
5.4	Checking for common method bias	87
5.5	Group separation	87
5.6	Testing the measurement model - exploratory factor analysis on the construct of relationship strength	88
5.7	Testing the measurement model - PLS	91
5.7.1	Convergent validity	91
5.7.2	Discriminant validity	95
5.8	Testing the structural model	98
5.8.1	Path coefficient and model testing	98
5.8.2	Effect size	100
5.8.3	Group comparison	100
5.9	Summary	102
CHAPTER 6 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS		104
6.1	Introduction	104
6.2	Knowledge about interpreting and implementing policy	104
6.2.1	Difficulties of policy interpretation and implementation	104
6.2.2	Transfer of policy knowledge	107
6.3	The effect of personal relationships	108
6.4	Communication media	109
6.4.1	The use of face-to-face communication	109
6.4.2	The use of email	111
6.4.3	The use of multiple media	113
6.5	Personal relationship affects communication media use	113

6.6	Success factors in the implementation of policy.....	114
6.7	Summary.....	115
CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....		116
7.1	Introduction.....	116
7.2	Discussion of the results.....	116
7.2.1	The effect of relationship strength on tacit knowledge transfer.....	116
7.2.2	Interaction between media use and relationship strength	118
7.2.3	Further insights	119
7.3	Contributions of the study.....	122
7.3.1	Contributions to theory	122
7.3.2	Significance for practice	125
7.3.3	Contributions to methodology	126
7.3.4	Directions for future research.....	126
7.4	Limitation of this study.....	127
7.4.1	Population.....	127
7.4.2	Relied on university website.....	127
7.4.3	Self-report questionnaire.....	128
7.4.4	Small size of datasets and low response rate	128
7.5	Conclusion	128
REFERENCES		130
APPENDICES.....		145
Appendix A. Survey questionnaire		145
Appendix B. Invitation Letter.....		164
Appendix C. Information Sheet		166
Appendix D. Reminder Letters		169
Appendix E. Interview Invitation Letter.....		171
Appendix F. Acknowledgement of the Low Risk Notification		172

Appendix G. An example of interview schedule..... 173

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. A hierarchy consists of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom	7
Figure 2.2. Knowledge creation model.....	16
Figure 2.3. Communication media capabilities.	34
Figure 3.1. The initial research model	42
Figure 3.2. The revised research model	45
Figure 4.1. Overall research procedure.....	52
Figure 4.2. Procedures leading to quantitative data collection	53
Figure 4.3. Procedures of qualitative analysis.....	71
Figure 5.1. The structural model testing result for group 1 (the participants used synchronous media).	99
Figure 5.2. The structural model testing result for group 2 (the participants used both synchronous and asynchronous media).....	99

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 <i>A comparison of explicit and tacit knowledge</i>	11
Table 2.2 <i>Factors that influence tacit knowledge transfer</i>	15
Table 2.3 <i>A comparison of selected media and their capabilities</i>	31
Table 4.1 <i>A comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research methods</i>	49
Table 4.2 <i>Strengths and weaknesses of mixed research method</i>	50
Table 4.3 <i>Number of potential participants in New Zealand universities</i>	54
Table 4.4 <i>Items measuring Communication Media Choice</i>	56
Table 4.5 <i>Items measuring Relationship Strength</i>	57
Table 4.6 <i>Items measuring tacit knowledge transfer success</i>	59
Table 4.7 <i>Items measuring the pattern of synchronous media use</i>	61
Table 4.8 <i>Items measuring the pattern of asynchronous media use</i>	62
Table 5.1 <i>Result of non-response bias test based on items used to measure tacit knowledge transfer success</i>	77
Table 5.2 <i>Result of non-response bias test based on items used to measure constructs related to relationship strength</i>	78
Table 5.3 <i>Comparison of gender and age percentage between data set and overall population</i>	79
Table 5.4 <i>Participants' choice of communication media</i>	81
Table 5.5 <i>Items measuring relationship strength</i>	82
Table 5.6 <i>Items measuring tacit knowledge transfer success</i>	83
Table 5.7 <i>The pattern of synchronous media use</i>	85
Table 5.8 <i>The pattern of asynchronous media use</i>	86
Table 5.9 <i>Exploratory Factor Analysis result</i>	87
Table 5.10 <i>KMO and Bartlett's Test result</i>	89
Table 5.11 <i>Factor analysis for measures of relationship strength</i>	90
Table 5.12 <i>Item loadings and AVEs before removing items with low item loadings</i>	92

Table 5.13 <i>Item loadings and AVEs after removing items with low item loadings</i>	94
Table 5.14 <i>AVE, Composite reliability, and Crobach's Alpha</i>	95
Table 5.15 <i>Item loadings and crossloadings in Group 1</i>	96
Table 5.16 <i>Item loadings and crossloadings in Group 2</i>	97
Table 5.17 <i>Square root of AVE and latent variable correlations for Group 1</i>	98
Table 5.18 <i>Square root of AVE and latent variable correlations for Group 2</i>	98
Table 5.19 <i>Path coefficient, standard error, and sample size</i>	100
Table 5.20 <i>Measurement invariance test result</i>	101

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