

**Knowledge sharing in an international law firm –
A case study examining practice, barriers and motivation**

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A dissertation submitted to Aberystwyth University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister in Scientia Economica (MSc Econ) under Alternative Regulations

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2015

Acknowledgments

I very much thank the interviewees who were so kind to help me by participating in this research project.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my dissertation supervisor David Ellis for his very useful comments and suggestions throughout this project.

Finally, I am very grateful to my family and friends for their encouragement and support along the way.

Abstract

Purpose

The aim of this research project was to investigate the knowledge sharing behaviour of lawyers in an international law firm. For this purpose a literature review was carried out with a special focus on knowledge sharing in the legal sector. Barriers to knowledge sharing within organisations were identified. The theoretical basis to encourage knowledge sharing and the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to share were examined. This allowed the author to develop suggestions for improving knowledge sharing in the case study organisation.

Methods

For the research project a case study approach on the basis of a qualitative research strategy was used. Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed, analysed and coded. The interviewees were lawyers in the case study organisation. To obtain a variety of views lawyers at different positions and different stages in their careers were chosen as participants. They were questioned on the basis of themes developed from the research questions.

Results

The results showed that lawyers produce a large amount of client-specific knowledge, which is difficult to share despite being in writing. In general, the lawyers prefer personal communication over use of electronic repositories. In accordance with the literature the most prominent barriers to knowledge sharing are time constraints and the billable hour. The current system of incentives is not suited to encourage the sharing of tacit knowledge.

Conclusion

As a conclusion it is recommended to provide guidance on the submission of documents to the electronic repository. In addition, an agenda point on lessons learned from previous cases should be integrated into the regular meetings. It is suggested that such sharing of knowledge is linked to a group-based reward. Finally, facilities to provide feedback on submissions and a tool providing information on experts in various offices would be useful.

Contents

Contents.....	1
List of Figures and Tables	4
Abbreviations	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
1.1. Background.....	6
1.2. Nature of the problem to be investigated.....	7
1.3. Research questions.....	8
1.4. Research objectives.....	9
Chapter 2: Literature review.....	12
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Knowledge in organisations.....	12
2.2.1. The knowledge-based view of the firm	12
2.2.2. Types of knowledge in organisations.....	13
2.2.3. The creation of knowledge	14
2.3. Knowledge management in law firms	15
2.4. The process of knowledge sharing	17
2.5. Barriers to knowledge sharing	17
2.6. Theoretical basis for encouraging knowledge sharing	19
2.6.1. Theory of reasoned action.....	19
2.6.2. Exchange theories	20
2.7. The role of motivational factors	21
2.7.1. Extrinsic motivation	22
2.7.2. Intrinsic motivation	23
2.8. Summary.....	24
Chapter 3: Methodology	27
3.1. Introduction	27

3.2.	Search strategy for literature review	27
3.3.	Methodological approach	28
3.4.	Data collection method.....	30
3.4.1.	Interviews.....	30
3.4.2.	Sampling.....	32
3.5.	Ethical issues	33
3.6.	Data analysis.....	33
3.7.	Validity and reliability.....	34
3.8.	Summary.....	35
Chapter 4:	Findings	36
4.1.	The interviewees	36
4.2.	The practice of knowledge sharing	36
4.2.1.	Sharing of codified knowledge.....	37
4.2.2.	Sharing knowledge orally	40
4.2.3.	Mentoring and training of junior colleagues	41
4.3.	The barriers to knowledge sharing	43
4.3.1.	Work-related challenges.....	43
4.3.2.	Challenges in personal relationships	44
4.3.3.	Existence of silos	45
4.3.4.	The role of management	46
4.3.5.	Organisational culture	47
4.4.	Ways to encourage knowledge sharing.....	47
4.4.1.	Self-efficacy and altruism	47
4.4.2.	Organisational rewards	48
4.4.3.	Expectations on reciprocity	50
4.4.4.	Attitude regarding knowledge sharing	51
4.5.	Conclusions	52
Chapter 5:	Discussion.....	54

5.1. Introduction	54
5.2. Reliance on tacit and context-dependent knowledge.....	54
5.3. Work-related obstacles and communication challenges	56
5.4. Encouragement through incentives and sharing norms	58
5.5. Summary.....	60
Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations	61
6.1. Introduction	61
6.2. Conclusion	61
6.3. Recommendations for the knowledge strategy	62
6.4. Recommendations for future research	63
Bibliography	64
Appendix A: Interview schedule.....	82
Appendix B: Interview transcript	85
Appendix C: Information sheet	88
Appendix D: Consent form	90
Appendix E: Coding framework with definitions	92

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 2.1: SECI model of knowledge creation (adapted from Gourlay, 2006).....	14
Figure 2.2: Model of TRA and motivational factors (adapted from Lin, 2007).....	21
Figure 4.1: Interviewees' positions in the CSO	36
Figure 4.2: Interviewees' years of work experience	42
Figure 4.3: Differing degrees of knowledge sharing depending on participants	46
Figure 4.4: Expectation of reciprocity by knowledge sharer	51

Tables

Table 3.1: Themes, subthemes and interview questions	31
Table 4.1: Types and categories of written products.....	37

Abbreviations

CSO:	Case study organisation
KIH:	Knowledge Investment Hours
LISA:	Library and Information Science Abstracts
LISTA:	Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts
PSF:	Professional Service Firm
SECI:	Socialization, externalization, combination and internalization
TRA:	Theory of Reasoned Action

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

This research project is a case study on knowledge management, in particular on knowledge sharing, in an international law firm. Knowledge management comprises those work practices that allow organisations to benefit from members sharing experience and creating innovative solutions (Alvesson, 2004, p.168). The field of knowledge management has continuously developed as a reaction to the need for companies to remain competitive (Serenko, 2013, p.777). Especially in the corporate sector undertakings constantly aim to expand the knowledge of their employees to stay ahead of their competitors (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990, p.81). Businesses such as law firms are therefore increasingly interested in making the best use of their employees' knowledge (Fombad, Boon, & Bothma, 2009, 2.1 Changing legal environment).

Knowledge management has attracted the interest of academic researchers as well (Witherspoon, Bergner, Cockrell, & Stone, 2013, p.252). Its qualification as a separate field has been disputed though with the argument that it is only a synonym for "information management" (Wilson, 2002, Conclusion). This is understandable considering that, at the outset, knowledge management focused on information technology solutions to discover and store knowledge. Knowledge differs from information, however, in that it is created through addition of individual experience (Vasconcelos, 2008, p.427). Over time this recognition led to increasing efforts to connect people and to encourage the exchange of knowledge in groups as opposed to focusing solely on technology (Earl, 2001, p.229; Serenko, 2013, p.778).

The process of sharing knowledge has been recognised as an essential research issue in the area of knowledge management (Alavi & Leidner, 2001, p.114). In an

organisation the creation of knowledge is dependent on the willingness of its members to share their knowledge (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006, p.94). This goal of making individual knowledge available to others was described as a challenge for law firms (Gottschalk, 1999a, p.205). Researchers have examined the various external and internal factors that affect the process and thus either hinder or support knowledge sharing. The organisational culture can, for example, influence the motivation to share knowledge (Dalkir, 2011, p.234). Various other motivational factors, for example trust or incentives, affect knowledge sharing as well (Wang & Noe, 2010, p.119). In a law firm it is essential to gain the lawyers' acceptance of knowledge management to implement it successfully (Schulz & Klugmann, 2005, p.387). This can be challenging though because lawyers often have to focus on urgent client demands and the number of billable hours they achieve is very important. These particularities justify research examining knowledge sharing in relation to law firms.

1.2. Nature of the problem to be investigated

The case study organisation (CSO) is part of an international law firm, which has offices around the globe in various jurisdictions. The legal staff in the office comprises four partners, one Of Counsel, two senior associates and six associates of different nationalities. They are supported by a local knowledge manager who is working together with the central knowledge team in the head office. The CSO could derive great benefits from a successful knowledge management strategy. Law firms depend on their knowledge assets to provide excellent client service (Forstenlechner, Lettice, Bourne, & Webb, 2007, p.147). Knowledge management can support the lawyers in providing this service (Zeide & Liebowitz, 2012, p.34). The sharing of knowledge resulting from work experience has been identified as a very important issue in law firms (Kabene, King, & Skaini, 2006, p.9). In addition, knowledge management is useful to control risks and to keep knowledge in the organisation should employees leave (Kabene et al., 2006, p.11).

In the CSO various knowledge sharing initiatives have been implemented. Lawyers are requested to submit documented knowledge to the firm's knowledge database so that it can be retrieved and used again. The level of contributions is not satisfactory though. Often lawyers have to perform tasks that have already been dealt with by a colleague but where the resulting knowledge is not readily available. This leads to duplication and inefficiencies. Whereas explicit knowledge is easy to document tacit knowledge is personal and difficult to express (Dalkir, 2011, p.10). This latter form of knowledge is, however, of great importance for an organisation (Lam, 2000, p.491). In the CSO, tacit knowledge is shared informally from time to time but not to a sufficient degree. Lawyers in the CSO recognised the issue and suggested that new means have to be found to enhance knowledge sharing. This study will therefore investigate how knowledge is shared between the lawyers in the CSO and how this process could be improved. For the knowledge management team it will be useful to know why the lawyers share or do not share knowledge. This will allow it to support and facilitate the process better.

1.3. Research questions

The "knowledge management cycle" describes the activities that an organisation needs to undertake to benefit from the knowledge of its individual members (Dalkir, 2011, p.31). The sharing of knowledge is an essential component of this cycle of activities. By participating in this process employees can make a substantial contribution to achieving the organisation's goals (Gurteen, 1999, *Creating a knowledge sharing culture*). Despite a large amount of research having been done on knowledge sharing, only a limited amount focused on the legal sector. Even as regards the topic of knowledge management as a whole, relatively few studies have been published in the area of business and finance (Winston, 2014, p.178). This project therefore addresses a gap in previous research and in so doing uses one of the recognised methods to construct research questions (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011, p.31). It will be useful to

understand whether knowledge sharing is influenced by the special conditions of a law firm environment.

Theories form the basis for developing research questions (Agee, 2009, p.437). In knowledge management research theories were developed, for instance, on knowledge creation and the importance of organisational culture (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006, p.87). The theory of reasoned action (TRA) has been used to explain how a person's attitude and intention to share knowledge influence the actual behaviour (Olatokun & Elueze, 2012, p.3). Finally, theories on motivation are helpful to understand under what circumstances knowledge sharing is seen as a worthwhile activity (Quigley, Tesluk, Locke, & Bartol, 2007, p.72).

On the basis of these theories the case study will therefore investigate the following research questions:

1. How does knowledge sharing take place in the small office of an international law firm?
2. Why do these lawyers adopt a certain knowledge sharing behaviour?
3. How could the knowledge sharing behaviour in the office be improved?

1.4. Research objectives

The aim of the research is to find ways to improve and support knowledge sharing by lawyers in the CSO. To answer the research questions the lawyers' knowledge sharing behaviour will be examined as well as the factors leading to it. Moreover, the implications of these findings for the knowledge management

strategy of the CSO will be analysed. It is hoped that the findings will benefit the CSO and the individual lawyers.

The objectives of this research project are therefore:

1. To review the literature surrounding knowledge sharing, with a special focus on the legal sector.
2. To find out which tools and means of communication the lawyers use to share knowledge in the course of their daily work.
3. To examine what prevents the lawyers from sharing knowledge and to identify ways by which to encourage knowledge sharing.
4. To make recommendations to the knowledge management team.

The literature review as described in objective one will allow the researcher, firstly, to identify previous research already conducted into the issue of knowledge sharing. Secondly, specific research concerning knowledge sharing in the legal sector will be retrieved. Thereby the literature review about knowledge sharing will lead to the identification of common research themes. This will make it possible to assess the context in which knowledge sharing by lawyers takes place.

The second objective will be achieved through the collection of empirical data. For this purpose semi-structured interviews will be conducted. These will provide an insight into what kind of knowledge the lawyers share and what communication tools they use. In this context the literature review could, for example, give indications on whether lawyers prefer face-to-face communications or facilitation of sharing through technology.

The third objective will be attained by collecting empirical data through semi-structured interviews. The aim is to discover external factors, such as the organisational culture, which incentivise or create barriers to knowledge sharing. The intention is also to explore the underlying motivation of lawyers in relation to their knowledge sharing behaviour. This will provide valuable insights, which can assist the knowledge management team in supporting knowledge sharing.

Finally, the purpose of the fourth objective is to use the findings resulting from the literature review and from the analysis of the empirical data to formulate practical recommendations. There have been suggestions of a gap between practice and theory in knowledge management research (Grant, 2011, p.129). This research attempts to provide useful, practical suggestions, which are nevertheless developed out of theoretically based academic research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

In the following chapter the literature most relevant to each of the research objectives will be examined. The review will provide the basis for conducting the research project and will allow the identification of gaps in previous research. The first research objective requires a review of the literature on knowledge in organisations. Researchers have examined the significance of knowledge for competitiveness, the types of knowledge that can be distinguished and how organisations create knowledge. The review will then present the core literature on knowledge management in the legal sector and introduce research on how knowledge is shared. Organisations find it difficult to instil a knowledge sharing culture and lawyers face specific barriers for sharing knowledge. For the third research objective it is therefore necessary to understand the barriers that have been identified in the literature. Finally, the recognition of the importance of knowledge sharing has brought with it increased interest in the question of how to encourage it. The review examines the theoretical basis used in the literature in this regard and presents the literature on increasing the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. The search strategy for compiling the literature will be described in the chapter on methodology.

2.2. Knowledge in organisations

2.2.1. The knowledge-based view of the firm

The increasing interest in knowledge sharing arose when researchers realised that knowledge is an important asset for organisations. In a seminal article Prahalad and Hamel argued that firms could gain a competitive advantage by harnessing their “core competencies” (1990, p.81). Afterwards other researchers emphasised that organisations should focus on the knowledge in their

organisation to increase their competitiveness (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender & Grant, 1996). The knowledge-based view is rooted in Penrose's theory of the firm who argued that firms should be assessed in terms of the resources they have at their disposal (1968, p.25). A resource was defined as anything "which could be thought of as a strength or weakness of a given firm" (Wernerfelt, 1984, p.172). According to Nanda, Wernerfelt was "among the first to explicitly focus on strategic management of firm resources" (1996, p.97). Nonaka and Takeuchi took the resource-based view forward by emphasising the value of knowledge and criticising the lack of attention it was given (1995, p.48). The recognition of knowledge sharing as an important research issue grew. Grant stipulated in an influential article that the ability to move knowledge within an organisation was critical for a firm's competitive position (1996, p.111). Spender and Grant held that "if knowledge is the primary resource upon which competitive advantage is founded, then its transferability determines the period over which its possessor can earn rents from it" (1996, p.7). In the following the literature relating to the different types of knowledge will be introduced.

2.2.2. Types of knowledge in organisations

Knowledge can be described as information enhanced by individual experiences (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p.5). The literature review showed that it will be necessary to distinguish between tacit and explicit knowledge to understand how lawyers share knowledge in the CSO. Lam pointed out that "the learning and innovative capability of an organization is thus critically dependent on its capacity to mobilize tacit knowledge and foster its interaction with explicit knowledge" (2000, p.491). The distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge goes back to Polanyi who claimed that all knowledge is of a personal nature (1966, p.23). This categorisation was later taken up by other authors (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nelson & Winter, 1982). Tacit knowledge is hard to express or write down whereas explicit knowledge is easier to articulate and store (Lam, 2000, p.490). Knowledge can exist at the individual or the collective level of an organisation.

The existence of organisational knowledge was recognised by Kogut and Zander in an influential article (1992, p.384). It develops out of individuals interacting with each other (Alavi & Leidner, 2001, p.116). Grant questioned the concept of organisational knowledge and emphasised the need to focus on the individual (1996, p.112). Nahapiet and Ghoshal found that the process of individual employees sharing knowledge is essential for creating knowledge that benefits the whole organisation (1998, p.248). Despite the diverging views on the existence of organisational knowledge it is therefore appropriate to focus on the individual lawyer when examining the knowledge sharing processes in the CSO.

2.2.3. The creation of knowledge

To understand the significance of knowledge sharing it is important to examine how new knowledge is created in an organisation. The most widely acknowledged model of knowledge creation comprises the activities of *socialisation*, *externalisation*, *combination* and *internalisation* (SECI). It was developed by Nonaka who wrote about it extensively together with other authors (Nonaka, 1991, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka, Von Krogh, & Voelpel, 2006). The SECI model shown in Figure 2.1 describes the process of “making available and amplifying knowledge created by individuals as well as crystallizing and connecting it with an organization’s knowledge system” (Nonaka et al., 2006, p.1179).

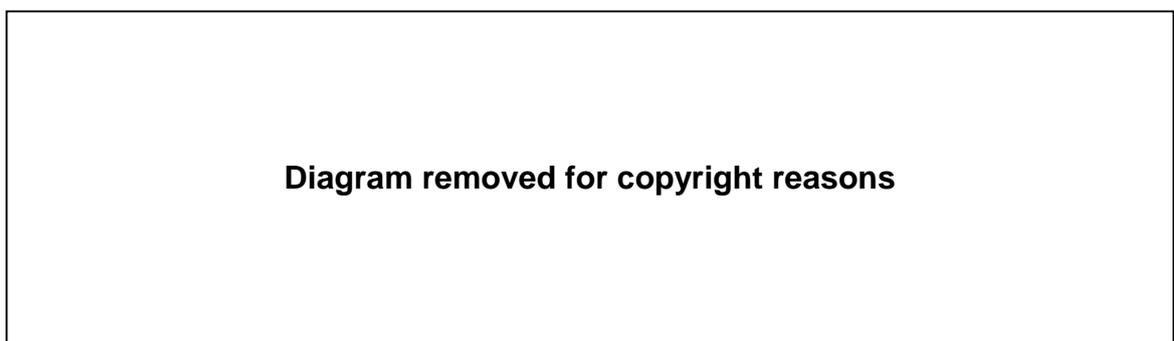


Figure 2.1: SECI model of knowledge creation (adapted from Gourlay, 2006)

The knowledge creation process consists of four types of interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, which are *socialisation* (tacit to tacit), *externalisation* (tacit to explicit), *combination* (explicit to explicit) and *internalisation* (explicit to tacit). Knowledge creation “takes place when all four modes of knowledge creation are ‘organizationally’ managed to form a continual cycle” (Nonaka, 1994, p.20). The theoretical assumptions of the SECI model were relied upon in empirical research (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001; Chou & He, 2004). As the literature review revealed, the theory has, however, been subject to criticism (Gourlay, 2006; Hildreth & Kimble, 2002; Ribeiro & Collins, 2007; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). Nonaka and von Krogh responded to the criticism by acknowledging the very influential concept of “communities of practice” and by stating that “social practices may be necessary, but not sufficient, for understanding organizational knowledge creation” (2009, p.646). “Communities of practice” describe groups of individuals learning and innovating through coming together at work (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p.41).

2.3. Knowledge management in law firms

Law firms can benefit greatly from knowledge management because lawyers use their knowledge to in turn create a knowledge product for their clients (Hunter, Beaumont, & Lee, 2002, p.8). Therefore successful knowledge management can contribute to the delivery of excellent work (Terrett, 1998, p.72). The literature review revealed that law firms have been the subject of empirical knowledge management related research (du Plessis, 2011; du Plessis & du Toit, 2006; Lustrì, Miura, & Takahashi, 2007; Olatokun & Elueze, 2012). One of the main benefits of knowledge management in law firms is increased efficiency (Forstenlechner et al., 2007, p.148). The importance of knowledge for law firms has been supported empirically by proving that it is perceived as a valuable asset (Broady-Preston & Williams, 2004, p.9). Initially, researchers focused on the use of IT in law firms for knowledge management purposes and a very influential author in this regard has been Gottschalk (Gottschalk, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Gottschalk & Karlsen, 2009; Gottschalk & Khandelwal, 2002, 2003,

2004). Researchers, however, began to argue for the integration of the technological and social aspects of managing knowledge (Hunter et al., 2002, p.6). In a survey conducted among senior executives it was found that social factors affect knowledge sharing much more than IT capabilities (Lin & Lee, 2006, p.84). To perform their work lawyers rely on explicit and tacit knowledge (Forstenlechner & Lettice, 2007, p.825). Researchers confirmed the importance of explicit knowledge for lawyers by finding that materials produced in previous cases would often be used to support new solutions in current matters (Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2003, p.847). Organisations such as law firms rely as well on tacit knowledge, which leads to the danger of losing capabilities when employees leave (Lam, 2000, p.497).

The literature search was broadened to include research that has been conducted on knowledge management in professional service firms (PSF). There is consensus that law firms are prime examples of PSF's (Forstenlechner et al., 2007, p.147; Von Nordenflycht, 2010, p.156). This line of research can therefore provide valuable indications how and why lawyers share knowledge (Alvesson, 2004; Fink & Disterer, 2006; Hsiao, 2008; Løwendahl, Revang, & Fosstenløyken, 2001; Morris, 2001; Rusly, Sun, Corner, & Chase, 2014). PSFs are well suited to implement knowledge management systems because of their distinctive features (Brivot, 2011, p.490). They are characterised by "knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and a professionalized workforce" (Von Nordenflycht, 2010, p.159). On the one hand, professionals in such firms enjoy a large degree of discretion on how they conduct their work (Robertson et al., 2003, p.846). On the other hand, research has identified a trend towards increased acceptance of controlling knowledge in PSFs (Brivot, 2011, p.503). The SECI model of knowledge creation was applied in research into knowledge sharing in a PSF where it was found that in such a firm knowledge is shared predominantly through direct interaction between individuals (Beaverstock, 2004, p.161). A case study in a large Australian PSF examined how knowledge sharing can be positively influenced and what the main challenges are (Nguyen, Smyth, & Gable, 2004). The literature discussing the process for sharing knowledge will be presented in the next section.

2.4. The process of knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is a key activity in knowledge management (Huysman & de Wit, 2002, p.27). In the legal environment as well the sharing of knowledge is of great importance (Apostola & Lodder, 2005, A taxonomy of knowledge processes). *Socialisation*, it has been argued, is in turn an essential component of sharing knowledge (Fernie, Green, Weller, & Newcombe, 2003, p.180). It occurs, for example, when mentoring takes place (Dalkir, 2011, p.66). Van den Hooff and de Ridder have described knowledge sharing as the process “where individuals mutually exchange their (implicit and explicit) knowledge and jointly create new knowledge” (2004, p.118). This is in line with the assumption that people are essential for the knowledge sharing process (Ruggles, 1998, p.88). In an influential article it was postulated that companies emphasise either a codification or a personalisation strategy for knowledge sharing (Hansen, Nohria, & Tierney, 1999, p.3). Based on this distinction knowledge can be shared through contributions to databases, formal or informal interactions and in communities of practice (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002, p.73). There has been only a limited amount of empirical research into the particular issue of knowledge sharing in law firms. Olatokun and Elueze, for example, recently analysed lawyers’ knowledge sharing behaviour with regard to the level of IT usage (2012, p.6).

2.5. Barriers to knowledge sharing

The aim of the third research objective is to uncover why lawyers in the case study organisation are at times reluctant to share knowledge. Researchers have attempted to identify the various barriers that the knowledge sharing process can face. Szulanski wrote a seminal article on the process of knowledge transfer in which he used the term “internal stickiness” to characterise tacit knowledge (1996, p.28). Problems arise, in particular, because knowledge sharing is a voluntary behaviour and cannot be forced (Davenport, 1997, p.87). In a conceptual paper on “knowledge-sharing hostility” it was argued that, in principle, an individual will be opposed to offering knowledge and will tend to withhold it

(Husted & Michailova, 2002, p.64). As an explanation various authors have pointed to the fear of losing a privileged position through sharing knowledge (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.694; Husted & Michailova, 2002, p.65; Szulanski, 1996, p.31). In addition, the potential knowledge sharer might face time constraints or be afraid to be judged on the quality of the contribution (Husted & Michailova, 2002, p.66). Ipe developed a conceptual framework according to which important factors for knowledge sharing include culture, organisational structure, technology and motivation (2003). In a comprehensive article the various obstacles that can hinder knowledge sharing were grouped into individual, organisational and technological barriers (Riege, 2005, p.23). The technological infrastructure can be improved to promote knowledge sharing (Riege, 2005, p.31). As pointed out by Ruggles, such efforts will, on their own, not resolve the challenges though (1998, p.88). Empirical research confirmed this assumption (Hsu, 2006, p.336; Nguyen et al., 2004, "4.1 Organisational Factors"). The prime importance of communication skills for knowledge sharing has to be taken into account (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p.91).

Researchers have also examined the specific barriers arising for knowledge sharing in law firms. The organisational culture is an important factor for successful knowledge sharing (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p.96; De Long & Fahey, 2000, p.116; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000b, p.73). In a case study conducted in a large Canadian law firm the relevance of culture was empirically confirmed by Choo et al. (2006, p.507). In an early article on knowledge management in law firms it was remarked that the culture in law firms is characterised by the special time constraints lawyers face and the imperative to focus on the client (Terrett, 1998, p.75). In law firms clients are traditionally charged by the number of hours spent to fulfil their request. According to Weiss this model leads to the wrong incentives because lawyers are forced to focus on their target of billable hours (1999, p.69). Lawyers are therefore unlikely to increase efficiency and thus reduce the number of hours that can be charged to the client (Gillies, 2005, p.4). Muir has identified the billable hour as a major obstacle to knowledge sharing in law firms due to the pressure to achieve a set target of hours (as cited in Forstenlechner & Lettice, 2007, p.829). A case study

conducted in a consulting firm confirmed the difficulties caused by the billable hour (Nguyen et al., 2004, 4.3 Challenges to effective knowledge management). Mergers between law firms pose an additional barrier to knowledge sharing because they make the personal interaction between individual lawyers more difficult (Schulz & Klugmann, 2005, p.387).

2.6. Theoretical basis for encouraging knowledge sharing

One aim of the research is to find out how the knowledge sharing behaviour of the lawyers in the CSO could be improved. The following theories have been widely used to understand the factors affecting knowledge sharing and to suggest potential improvements.

2.6.1. Theory of reasoned action

Ajzen and Fishbein developed the TRA and postulated that attitude and subjective norms influence intention that in turn determines behaviour (1980, p.8). Various authors have since studied knowledge sharing using the TRA (Bock & Kim, 2002; Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Lin & Lee, 2004). When applying the TRA it is necessary to identify the factors that affect a person's attitude towards sharing (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005, p.721). In an influential article it was argued that sharing is more likely to happen when members perceive the information to belong to the organisation and not to them (Constant, Kiesler, & Sproull, 1994, p.404). This theory was confirmed and expanded through a quantitative survey in a university setting (Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001, p.165). Empirical research supported the assumption that the more favourable the attitude towards knowledge sharing is, the greater the intention to share the knowledge will be (Bock & Kim, 2002, p.18). Lin and Lee used the TRA in their research on knowledge sharing and confirmed the influence of a positive attitude on the intention to perform a behaviour (2004, p.120). The influence of subjective norms on attitude and intention was confirmed as well (Bock et al., 2005, p.98). Such a norm describes the "perceived social pressure

to perform or not perform the behaviour” (Gagné, 2009, p.572). The link between the intention to share knowledge and the actual behaviour was not confirmed in recent research into the sharing behaviour of lawyers in Nigeria (Olatokun & Elueze, 2012, p.10). This result is, however, inconsistent with research conducted by Bock and Kim (2002, p.18).

2.6.2. Exchange theories

Researchers have attempted to explain knowledge sharing behaviour on the basis of exchange theories. These assume that individuals will aim to obtain a maximum benefit for the lowest cost possible (Hall, 2003, p.288). Four different approaches can be distinguished. The economic exchange theory assumes that knowledge sharing is determined by “rational self-interest” (Constant et al., 1994, p.401-402). In a survey of public sector organisations economic incentives did have a positive effect on knowledge contributions (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005, p.130). The benefits of economic rewards were not confirmed in other research though (Hung, Durcikova, Lai, & Lin, 2011, p.422). Davenport and Prusak took an economical perspective as well by describing knowledge sharing as taking place on a market with a buyer and a seller (1998, p.25). According to Hung et al., the price in such an exchange consists of rewards such as reciprocity and altruism (2011, p.416). The social capital theory emphasises the importance of personal relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p.243; Wasko & Faraj, 2005, p.38; Widén-Wulff & Ginman, 2004, p.449). Empirical research found that a lack of social capital among lawyers hindered knowledge sharing but could be alleviated through the use of the right technology (Brivot, 2011, p.500). The social exchange theory assumes that behaviour is based on the expectation of intangible benefits and that trust is an essential factor in this regard (Blau, 1964, p.93). In a conceptual paper Ipe emphasised the importance of trust for successfully sharing knowledge (2003, p.347). Empirical work on the basis of social exchange theory came to the conclusion that the attitude towards knowledge sharing was more important than the expectation of a reward (Bock &

Kim, 2002, p.20). Several motivating factors that influence knowledge sharing can be deduced from these theories.

2.7. The role of motivational factors

Motivational factors have a significant influence on knowledge sharing behaviour, which was confirmed in empirical research building on the framework developed by Ipe (Eaves, 2014, p.81). They can counter the “social dilemma” potential knowledge sharers are faced with that consists in benefitting from the knowledge of others without making a contribution (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.693). As shown in Figure 2.2, Lin developed a valuable model that combines motivational factors and the TRA (2007).

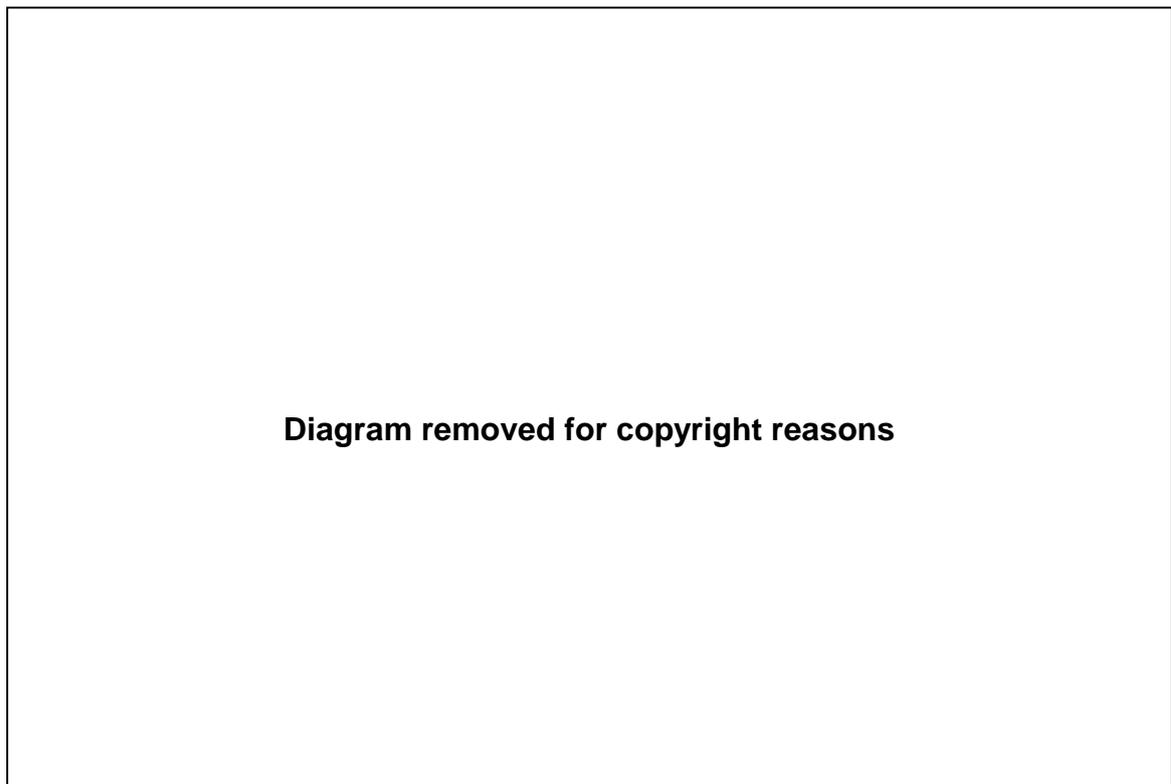


Figure 2.2: Model of TRA and motivational factors (adapted from Lin, 2007)

The essential role of motivation has been acknowledged in the literature on knowledge sharing (Akhavan, Rahimi, & Mehralian, 2013, p.372; Kalling, 2003, p.123). Wang and Noe identified motivational factors as an area that has been studied in knowledge sharing research (2010, p.116). Motivation can be described as the “employees’ propensity and willingness to share knowledge” (Rusly et al., 2014, p.690). It is important to make the basic distinction between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.55). Extrinsic motivation is based on desired external results that the activity leads to whereas intrinsic motivation arises because of interest in the relevant activity (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p.331). It has been argued that whereas extrinsic motivation is more appropriate for sharing explicit knowledge, intrinsic motivation could be suited for exchanging tacit knowledge (Osterloh & Frey, 2000, p.545). For the achievement of the research objectives it will therefore be important to examine both types of motivation. The research on knowledge sharing motivation conducted in law firms and PSF’s will be especially relevant (Forstenlechner & Lettice, 2007; Olatokun & Elueze, 2012; Rusly et al., 2014; Schulz & Klugmann, 2005; Weiss, 1999).

2.7.1. Extrinsic motivation

A frequent suggestion to increase knowledge sharing motivation, based on the economic exchange theory, is to offer extrinsic rewards such as salary increases, promotion or bonuses. In an important conceptual paper Bartol and Srivastava argued that the effectiveness of such rewards depended on the manner in which knowledge is shared (2002, p.73). In empirical research there has been no conclusive result as regards the effectiveness of economic rewards. On the one hand, economic rewards were shown to have a positive effect on contributions to knowledge management systems (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.131). In a survey conducted in two Korean manufacturing companies the positive effect of such rewards was confirmed even though the authors suggested that this effect could be only temporary (Choi, Kang, & Lee, 2008, p.749). On the other hand, the insignificance of economic rewards for the continued usage of a knowledge

management system was confirmed as well (He & Wei, 2009, p.834). The expectation of rewards can even have a negative effect on attitudes towards knowledge sharing (Bock & Kim, 2002, p.19). This finding was confirmed for the legal sector (Olatokun & Elueze, 2012, p.9). In the literature rewards granted to a group were found to be more beneficial than rewards granted to individuals (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000b, p.79; Quigley et al., 2007, p.80). Hsu discussed the resulting problem of free-riding, arising when employees receive rewards without making sufficient contributions (2006, p.336).

Extrinsic motivation to share knowledge can be based on the expectation of reciprocal behaviour (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p.32). Reciprocity is the expectation by an individual that sharing knowledge will lead to corresponding rewards in the future (Hung, Durcikova, et al., 2011, p.418). In a large survey of employees from 50 companies in Taiwan Lin showed that expected reciprocal benefits have a substantial influence on the attitudes and intentions to share knowledge (2007, p.144). Likewise, a survey conducted among employees enrolled in business school classes confirmed that such benefits have a significant effect on knowledge sharing attitudes (Chennamaneni, Teng, & Raja, 2012, p.1107). According to the social exchange theory an increase in reputation and the achievement of an expert status motivate knowledge sharing as well (Wasko & Faraj, 2005, p.38). Moreover, the reputation as a knowledgeable person is linked to expectations on reciprocity (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p.32). Empirical research proved that an improvement in reputation positively affected knowledge sharing motivation (Hung, Durcikova, et al., 2011, p.423; Lucas & Ogilvie, 2006, p.18).

2.7.2. Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is required to initiate the knowledge creation process foreseen in the SECI model (Osterloh & Frey, 2000, p.546). Intrinsic knowledge sharing motivation is linked to altruism and to the enjoyment of helping others. Altruism was defined as “unconditional kindness without the expectation of a reward”

(Hung, Durcikova, et al., 2011, p.424). Empirical research into the relevance of altruism has delivered equivocal results. Altruism can have a positive effect on the motivation to share (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.131; Lin, 2007, p.145). In research conducted by Wasko and Faraj it was found that that the quality but not the quantity of contributions was linked to the enjoyment in helping others (2005, p.49).

Self-efficacy signifies the belief of individuals that they have the competence to achieve a certain work-related task (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.698). The results of a large survey among KM executives from public organizations in Singapore confirmed that knowledge self-efficacy had a positive impact on the usage of an electronic knowledge repository (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.131). In a survey among fifty large Taiwanese firms Lin found that the belief in having a valuable contribution to make had a positive effect on knowledge sharing (2007, p.143). Recently, in research on lawyers' attitudes towards knowledge sharing in Nigerian law firms, this result was confirmed since "the expected contribution was significantly related with the attitude of lawyers (...) towards their knowledge sharing" (Olatokun & Elueze, 2012, p.10).

2.8. Summary

The literature review described how knowledge came to be acknowledged as a competitive advantage for firms (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender & Grant, 1996). In the wake of this development, the importance of moving knowledge within organisations was recognised (Grant, 1996). After an initial focus on IT based solutions and knowledge management systems the attention has been shifting to the social aspects of knowledge sharing (Earl, 2001; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The existence of tacit and explicit knowledge influences the knowledge creation process (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Lam, 2000). It was found that Nonaka's SECI model has become the dominant framework explaining the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1991, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka et al., 2006). This

model has been supplemented by the influential concept of “communities of practice” (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Conceptual papers provided insight into knowledge management in PSFs and, in particular, in law firms (Schulz & Klugmann, 2005; Terrett, 1998; Von Nordenflycht, 2010). As regards the knowledge sharing process organisations can pursue different strategies depending on the type of knowledge they produce (Hansen et al., 1999).

Researchers have identified various barriers that can hinder knowledge sharing in an organisation. The conceptual frameworks developed point to individual, organisational and technological barriers (De Long & Fahey, 2000; Ipe, 2003; Riege, 2005). The characteristics of tacit knowledge make it difficult to share (Szulanski, 1996). Knowledge sharing is voluntary and cannot be forced. Hence, an inherent reluctance to share can constitute an important barrier (Davenport, 1997; Husted & Michailova, 2002). Apart from the fear of losing an advantage through sharing knowledge or about the quality of the product, a lack of time can also be relevant. Law firms exhibit special characteristics that hinder knowledge sharing, among them the dominance of the billable hour (Parsons, 2004; Terrett, 1998; Weiss, 1999).

As regards the encouragement of knowledge sharing the literature review has revealed the importance of the TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory has been used frequently as a basis for examining the connections between attitude, intention and knowledge sharing behaviour (Bock & Kim, 2002; Bock et al., 2005; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Lin & Lee, 2004; Olatokun & Elueze, 2012). Researchers have applied exchange theories to explain the relevant motivational factors that influence knowledge sharing and a useful model integrated the motivational factors with the TRA (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002; Hung, Durcikova, et al., 2011; Lin, 2007). The extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors that have been found to be relevant include reciprocity, altruism and self-efficacy (Hung, Durcikova, et al., 2011; Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Olatokun & Elueze, 2012; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). A debate is ongoing regarding the usefulness of economic rewards, which have been introduced by numerous companies to encourage knowledge sharing. A positive effect has indeed been found in research (Choi et

al., 2008; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). However, the irrelevance or even negative effect of rewards was confirmed as well (Brock & Kim, 2002; He & Wei, 2009; Olatokun & Elueze, 2012).

The next chapter will describe the methodology used to conduct the research project. This will include elaborations on the research design, the data collection methods and possible limitations of the project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The following chapter describes the methodology used in this research project. A purposive literature review allowed the researcher to build a collection of the literature relevant to the research questions. Considering the type of research questions a qualitative approach was deemed to be the most suitable for the project. Furthermore, the reasons for choosing a case study as the appropriate research design will be set out below. The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and the resulting data was coded and analysed. The ethical issues and limitations of the research that needed to be taken into account are described as well.

3.2. Search strategy for literature review

The literature review was based on a purposive search of the literature most relevant to the research objectives. In a first search the online database Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA) was used. The researcher conducted a search, limited to scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals, for articles with the words *knowledge sharing* in the title. This led to a list of 241 results, which then needed to be filtered for the most relevant results. This was done by going through the list of results and selecting the 27 articles that seemed most relevant to the topic of knowledge sharing in law firms. Then the database Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) was searched. The search was also limited to scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals. A first search for articles with *knowledge sharing* in the title led to 344 results. To limit the great number of results the articles with 10 or more citations were extracted. This then provided a more manageable list of 66 results. By reviewing these articles the researcher gained an overview of the most widely cited articles. It proved

particularly useful to read those articles providing reviews and meta-analysis of knowledge sharing research. This process led to the identification of the seminal articles in the field of research.

After a first review of the articles it was evident that, apart from the literature dealing specifically with law firms, the literature on PSFs could also be of relevance. The searches in LISA and LISTA were repeated and limited to articles containing the term *professional service firm* and either the words *knowledge sharing* or the term *knowledge* in the title. These searches did not provide new, relevant results. Therefore two further searches were conducted in Google Scholar to find articles treating the issue of knowledge in PSFs. From the resulting list of 49 articles the most cited articles were selected. In the course of the literature review further articles were retrieved dealing with the TRA and motivation theories. As regards books dealing with topics relevant to the research questions the online catalogue of the University library close to the researcher's place of work provided valuable references.

3.3. Methodological approach

Due to the nature of the research questions a qualitative research strategy was chosen. In this project the aim was to find out why certain knowledge sharing behaviours occur and how improvements can be made. Therefore a qualitative approach, which seeks to discover the participants' views and their opinions, was suitable for answering the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p.380). The literature review showed that the intention to behave in a certain manner is linked to the actual behaviour. Agee has pointed to the usefulness of qualitative research for questions focusing on a person's intentions (2009, p.432). In a quantitative study, on the contrary, the aim would be to collect data that can be converted into numerical, measurable evidence (Bryman, 2012, p.35). The data that needed to be collected for this research did not concern measurable

phenomena though but subjective views of the participants. The usefulness of qualitative studies has even been acknowledged in the context of knowledge sharing. It was found that “qualitative studies provide a rich and in-depth examination of the organizational context in which knowledge sharing occurs” (Wang & Noe, 2010, p.126).

The research was designed as a case study. The emphasis of a case study can be to examine a particular organisation in-depth (Bryman, 2012, p.67). Case study research is particularly relevant for questions seeking to explain how and why processes take place (Yin, 2014, p.29). A case study design was therefore suitable to allow the in-depth investigation of the office environment. Yin has emphasised the need for precisely determining the unit of analysis that will constitute the case (2014, p.31). In this research project the unit of analysis was the group of lawyers in the CSO. The research project therefore constituted a single case study, which can be justified, for example, because a case has common characteristics with other settings (Yin, 2014, p.52). The selection of the CSO as the unit of analysis is appropriate when considering that it is part of a large organisation. The research findings could alleviate the difficulties of knowledge sharing in large and geographically wide spread companies (Leidner, Alavi, & Kayworth, 2006, p.22). Beaverstock adopted a case study approach in an investigation of knowledge management in a large UK law firm (2004, p.167). It has been suggested that case studies could be appropriate, in particular, to examine organisational knowledge sharing (Ipe, 2003, p.355). Case studies help to explain why certain things happen and are therefore appropriate to investigate the reasons why certain knowledge sharing behaviours occur (Vissak, 2010, p.374). Finally, a case study on knowledge management has the potential to connect academic research and practice in this field (Serenko, 2013, p.786).

3.4. Data collection method

3.4.1. Interviews

For this research project semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method. For such an interview the interviewer prepares an interview guide listing the specific topics and corresponding questions to be covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.130). The examination of a single case through interviews was considered more useful than the employment of a survey technique. Even though surveys are likely to reach a much larger number of participants the response rates can be very low (Vissak, 2010, p.374). The researcher therefore found it preferable to collect the data through interviews. Interviews were appropriate for this research project because they are flexible and allow a discussion on topics important to the interviewee. When conducting semi-structured interviews the interviewee has flexibility in how to reply to the questions. The relevant themes and subthemes that emerged from the literature review were used as a basis for constructing the interview schedule (Appendix A). To obtain a second view the researcher discussed the questions beforehand with a former colleague now working as a Senior Knowledge Lawyer at another law firm. This discussion provided valuable additional input. The interviews were prepared beforehand but open questions were used to encourage the conversation. Open questions enabled the interviewees to answer freely without having to choose from a set of limited responses (Bryman, 2012, p.246). Where necessary the researcher asked follow-up questions to receive further clarifications or elaborations on the answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.135). Table 3.1 shows the themes, subthemes and corresponding interview questions.

Table 3.1: Themes, subthemes and interview questions

Themes and subthemes	Interview questions
Theme 1: Practice of knowledge sharing	
a. Sharing of explicit knowledge (documents)	1, 2, 6, 10, 11
b. Knowledge sharing through collaboration between colleagues (interactive)	3, 4, 5, 10, 11
c. The passing on of knowledge from experienced to more junior colleagues	7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Theme 2: Barriers to knowledge sharing	
a. Organisational and technological barriers	12, 13, 14, 15
b. Individual barriers	16, 17
c. Work-related barriers	18, 19, 20
Theme 3: Ways to encourage knowledge sharing	
a. Attitude and intention	21, 29, 30
b. Intrinsic motivational factors (altruism, self-efficacy)	23, 24, 25
c. Extrinsic motivational factors (reciprocity, organisational rewards)	22, 26, 27, 28

Ten interviews were conducted with four associates, two senior associates, one Of Counsel and three partners. By selecting interviewees in different positions and at various levels of seniority a variety of views and opinions was ensured. The interviews lasted on average 44 minutes and were recorded with the participant's permission. The researcher transcribed the interviews subsequently. Permission was obtained from one interviewee to attach an extract of the respective interview to this report (Appendix B).

3.4.2. Sampling

In qualitative research a commonly used approach described as “purposive sampling” is the selection of a case with reference to the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p.418). Case studies require two levels of sampling since the case needs to be selected followed by the selection of the case study participants (Bryman, 2012, p.417). It was appropriate to select the CSO as the study subject because it was the focus of the research questions. Even though this approach can lead to issues of credibility it is acceptable for the present research project since the main goal is in-depth investigation of a case and not the generalisation of findings. The sampling size amounting to a number of 10 interviewees was appropriate considering that currently only 13 lawyers are working in the CSO (Bryman, 2012, p.425). As participants, lawyers at associate, senior associate and at Partner/ Of-counsel level were interviewed to obtain different views on the issues (Bryman, Becker, & Sempik, 2008, p.264). For a qualitative case study it is necessary to select those participants that are likely to provide the most information (Pickard, 2012, p.104). The short time and the limited resources available for the study had to be taken into account, which did not make it possible to conduct further interviews.

3.5. Ethical issues

Before each interview began the purpose of the research and the use of the data were explained to the individual interviewee and an information sheet was handed out (Appendix C). In addition, the required consent was obtained by means of a consent form (Appendix D). Through this procedure the researcher provided information about the purpose and scope of the research and received the voluntary agreement of the participant to take part (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.70). The head partner of the CSO had been informed beforehand about the research project. After the interview each participant had the opportunity to ask additional questions or make further comments. In transcribing interviews it is important to observe confidentiality requirements (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.186). This involved deleting any references in the transcripts that could allow identification of individuals. To comply with data protection requirements the interview transcripts were anonymised and stored in a secure place only accessible to the researcher. For confidentiality reasons the interviewees were not individually identified by their role in the description of the findings. After use the tapes and transcripts were destroyed.

3.6. Data analysis

According to Bryman the central process in qualitative data analysis involves coding the collected data and thus identifying specific themes (2012, p.568). The researcher therefore analysed the data collected through the interviews by labelling text segments with a specific code (Creswell, 2009, p.186). The coding process allowed the identification of common, reoccurring themes in the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.88). It has been recommended in the literature to develop and document a definition for each code (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.202). The coding framework with categories and their definitions is attached as Appendix E. The process of categorisation enables an assessment how often certain themes occur (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.202). In qualitative research

coding can be achieved through specific software. For this research project NVivo10 software was used, which facilitated, for example, the process of assigning multiple codes to one text segment or the revision of codes in the course of the analysis. The findings made in this way were then interpreted and led to theoretical conclusions.

3.7. Validity and reliability

Qualitative research can be judged in terms of its validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012, p.390). The degree of internal validity of a case study depends on the rigour of the data analysis procedure (Yin, 2014, p.45). To increase internal validity all participants were provided with a transcript of their interview and invited to comment. It is admitted, that the conduct of the research project by a researcher internal to the CSO could lead to concerns about possible bias. The issue of bias in case study research can be partly addressed by taking contrary evidence into account (Yin, 2014, p.76). During the analysis phase the researcher took care not to disregard evidence contradicting the dominant themes. To counter the issue of bias the researcher made the transcripts anonymous before the data analysis. In addition, each interview was allocated a random number from one to ten, which did not correspond to the order in which the interviews were conducted.

External validity concerns the possibility to generalise the research results (Yin, 2014, p.48). A generalisation is difficult to achieve in qualitative research (Bryman et al., 2008, p.266). It is not even the aim of qualitative research, however, to produce findings that can be generalised and applied to other circumstances (Creswell, 2009, p.193). A case study does not lead to findings that can be generalised to other settings (Bryman, 2012, p.70). This assumption is especially valid for “single case study” designs (Vissak, 2010, p.377). In case studies the use of theory is of importance with regard to external validity (Yin,

2014, p.48). The new findings can be used to develop the existing theoretical knowledge (Vissak, 2010, p.371). Brivot pointed to the particular value of qualitative organisational research in the form of a case study:

Although the research strategy excludes the possibility of generalizing the findings to other types of organization or contexts, it is believed that this limitation is offset by the study's ability to provide insights into an organisational process which is not well understood, thereby providing directions for future research. (2011, p.495)

The criterion of reliability signifies that another researcher can do the same case study again and then arrive at the same conclusions (Yin, 2014, p.48). In qualitative research reliability can be enhanced by documenting the procedure as closely as possible (Creswell, 2009, p.190). To observe this requirement the coding framework included definitions for each category to avoid overlapping codes. Moreover, the researcher ensured accuracy of the transcripts by providing them to the individual interviewees to allow them to suggest corrections if necessary. Finally, the interview questions, coding framework and definitions have been documented and attached to this report.

3.8. Summary

This chapter described the methodology used for the research project. It included a description of the search strategy for the literature review, the reasons for choosing the research design and a discussion of possible limitations. The next chapter will present the findings of the case study that emerged from the analysis of the interviews.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. The interviewees

In this chapter the findings derived from the interviews are presented in relation to three themes: the practice of knowledge sharing, barriers encountered by the interviewees and possible ways to improve knowledge sharing. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of the interviewees in order of hierarchy according to the positions they occupy in the CSO.

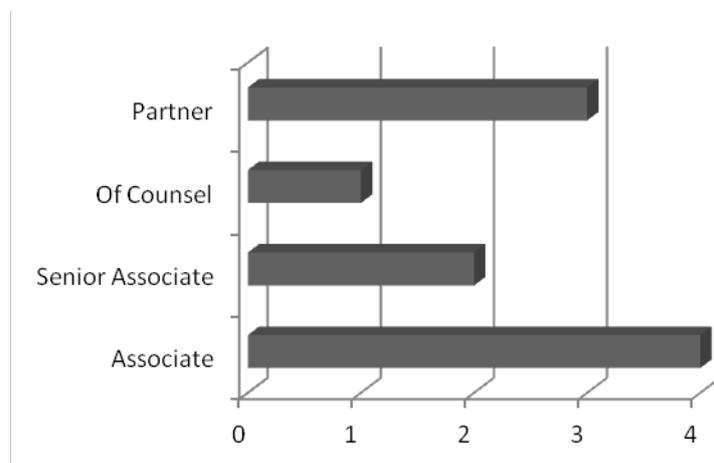


Figure 4.1: Interviewees' positions in the CSO

4.2. The practice of knowledge sharing

As regards the practice of knowledge sharing in the office and possible shortcomings, the interviewees described the types of documents that they frequently shared. Afterwards they were asked about the ways in which they share knowledge orally, for example, in meetings or personal discussions. The interviewees then explained how mentoring and trainings take place in the CSO.

4.2.1. Sharing of codified knowledge

The interviewees were asked to identify the various types of written documents that could be suitable for sharing with their colleagues. A variety of different types of documents were mentioned and the responses show that they can be grouped into three categories. Table 4.1 sets out the various types of documents mentioned as suitable for sharing and the categories they belong to.

Table 4.1: Types and categories of written products

Categories	Types of documents
Client-related output	Email advice
	Memoranda
	Checklists
Marketing-related output	Publications
	Briefings
	Practice development papers
	Presentations
Output useful for internal purposes	Training materials
	Manuals

The interviewees found the marketing-related output the most suitable for sharing. Interviewee eight pointed out *“most suitable for sharing are presentations”*. Another respondent said *“all the briefings are put on the website as well and sent to the clients”* (Interviewee 5). In their responses all of the interviewees mentioned the client-related output as well, which shows the importance of this type of documents. This group comprises documents that are directly addressed to clients as advice in the form of emails or memoranda. Memoranda are written documents in Word format containing advice for clients. According to interviewee three *“the classic form is a memo like a short note”*. As regards the client-related output, which constitutes the main part of a lawyer’s work, the participants put the suitability of these documents for sharing into perspective though. Interviewee one stated *“those that are more general could be shared”*. One respondent pointed out that *“most advice nowadays is in email form but this would of course require that you anonymise it”* (Interviewee 3). Interviewee seven considered, in relation to email advice, that *“you have less general content that might be of interest more broadly”*. One lawyer stated that know-how derived from client matters *“would always require additional work so it is more difficult to produce”* (Interviewee 6). These findings indicate that the interviewees consider the main part of their work output only partially suitable for sharing.

When the interviewees were asked in what way they shared documents with colleagues the majority replied that they would share a document when asked in person. It emerged that the dominant means of providing documents is by giving them directly to a colleague in need. Interviewee five said *“I would share when somebody asks me”* and another lawyer replied *“It is on a demand basis so if someone comes and asks”* (Interviewee 6). Another method mentioned by several interviewees is to contact the CSO’s Knowledge Manager to assure storage of the document in the internal knowledge database. In their replies the respondents made clear, however, that this was not a regular occurrence. Interviewee three replied *“in theory I would forward it to the Knowledge Manager”* and interviewee two considered this possibility only for *“really very general”* documents. For briefings additional sharing was not considered necessary

because *“if you have a briefing they are published on the website so everybody has access already”* (Interviewee 3). Finally, one respondent mentioned the internal document management system as a sufficient means to share when stating *“Everything I work on I usually save on the system”* (Interviewee 10). The findings led to the conclusion that interviewees preferably share by giving a document directly to a colleague when prompted. This applies, in particular, to client-related output. For the majority of the output the possibility to store documents in a database is therefore either not considered necessary or not a suitable option.

When describing the practice of knowledge sharing in the office the interviewees were asked about issues in relation to the sharing of codified knowledge. The codification of knowledge does not happen systematically. Interviewee four was of the opinion that it is a matter of discipline *“when associates go to the conferences at least to share the slides or to make a short note of that”*. Furthermore, there is a lack of guidance on how to share documents once they have been drafted. Interviewee two suspected that *“if you knew a couple of easy steps how to go about it you may be more tempted to do it”*. The same interviewee remarked that *“people are responsive and that is appreciable but it is not done in a very coordinated manner”* (Interviewee 2). Finally, the lack of awareness of what is available was mentioned as a major issue. Interviewee two remarked *“the biggest thing that is lacking is awareness of what is available for everyone”*. Two participants mentioned that they had even developed their own system to store and retrieve documents. Interviewee three said *“I have, due to the lack of a system, developed my own system, where I have my own know-how email folder system”*. In relation to what to do with a useful document worth keeping another respondent stated *“I save it on my own folder for each matter”* (Interviewee 10).

4.2.2. Sharing knowledge orally

The participants were then questioned about the opportunities for sharing their knowledge orally, either formally or informally. The monthly team meetings and the, recently initiated, regular presentations by lawyers were mentioned as the main formal opportunities in the CSO to discuss new legal developments. Interviewee eight said *“We have the monthly lunch meeting where we discuss cases and developments”*. The purpose of the regular presentations is *“to really have a certain topic presented within 15 to 20 minutes and to have a short discussion on it”* (Interviewee 3). The researcher’s expectation that interviewees might express a need for further formal meetings of this kind in the office was not confirmed. Interviewee eight remarked in relation to the number of meetings in the office *“in my opinion that is enough”* and another participant said *“The meetings are monthly now and I think it is okay”* (Interviewee 6). The interviewees then answered questions about the frequency of discussions on closed cases in the office and interviewee one remarked *“that these are discussed on a very random basis”*. Asked about who would take part one lawyer replied they *“would be with those that have been involved on the case”* (Interviewee 7). They were considered useful though and interviewee two pointed out that matter reviews did not take place *“as often as I would like it to be”*.

It is noteworthy that a number of interviewees stressed the importance of informal conversations in the hallway or in the kitchen as a means to exchange knowledge. The kitchen was referred to in the remark that *“you learn quite a lot there over a coffee”* (Interviewee 1). In relation to knowledge sharing interviewee four found that *“It is just when going for a coffee break or when you are together you give the feedback on what is happening”*. Few interviewees mentioned opportunities to have discussions with colleagues from other offices. One participant pointed out that *“at broader level within the group we have also the videoconferences”* (Interviewee 7). Interviewee five remarked that calls were happening between lawyers from various offices to share *“details about transactions and who is working for whom, which contacts we have”*. When

asked about the tools for cross-office communication one respondent held that *“everything is done over the phone”* (Interviewee 7). The responses indicate that there are a limited but sufficient number of formal meetings whereas more matter reviews would be welcomed. The focus is on meetings inside the office as opposed to cross-office exchanges, which is in line with the previously found preference for direct social interaction.

The interviewees commented on the conduct of the formal meetings in the CSO. According to interviewee three there is *“no forum to discuss cases in detail”* and another lawyer remarked that results of cases are only discussed *“on a very random basis”* (Interviewee 1). This shows that there is a perceived lack of possibilities to discuss concrete cases the lawyers have worked on and their resulting experiences. In the words of interviewee four *“at the moment very often we do not say anything”*. Interviewee nine introduced a different aspect by emphasising the need *“to really have a bit of an academic discussion on certain topics”*. It is interesting that two interviewees remarked that even when initiatives were launched they tended to quickly lose momentum. One participant stated in relation to new initiatives *“it lasts for a few months and then it dies a bit of a death because people either run out of ideas or time or inclination to do it”* (Interviewee 7). In the words of interviewee four the presentations by lawyers *“come and go”*. A common theme emerging is thus the lack of a system for making experience explicit in a coordinated manner. There is also a need for more continuity in relation to knowledge management initiatives.

4.2.3. Mentoring and training of junior colleagues

The findings show that the interviewees appreciate the benefits of mentoring but they rely on providing informal guidance to more junior colleagues as opposed to conducting formal internal trainings. The participants described the way in which they gain knowledge by observing seniors work. Interviewee three said *“they work on the basis of prior knowledge”*. The participants were then asked about

the way in which they pass experience on to more junior colleagues. Interviewee eight confirmed having *“just started to give an introduction to our trainees”*. Another lawyer stressed that training *“is all through external conferences and seminars”* (Interviewee 7). As regards the transfer of knowledge from seniors to juniors it was qualified as *“a bit of a daily practice”* (Interviewee 8). It emerged that the main method for mentoring more junior lawyers is through giving instructions when delegating a task and later providing feedback on the work they had done. When describing the process of giving instructions interviewee two said *“in that case it is usually done orally”*. One lawyer explained that *“we might ask trainees or a junior lawyer to do a first draft of something and then you give them feedback”* (Interviewee 7). It has to be remarked that interviewee six pointed to recent improvements when stating *“we have benefitted from a lot of useful trainings in the past years”*. This comment did, however, not relate to the passing of experience from juniors to seniors. The analysis of the mentoring practice corresponds to the findings on how knowledge is generally shared orally in the office. Rather than through a systematic provision of internal training it seems to happen on an ad-hoc basis where required. The potential for mentoring in the CSO is illustrated in Figure 4.2, which shows the lawyers’ years of work experience.

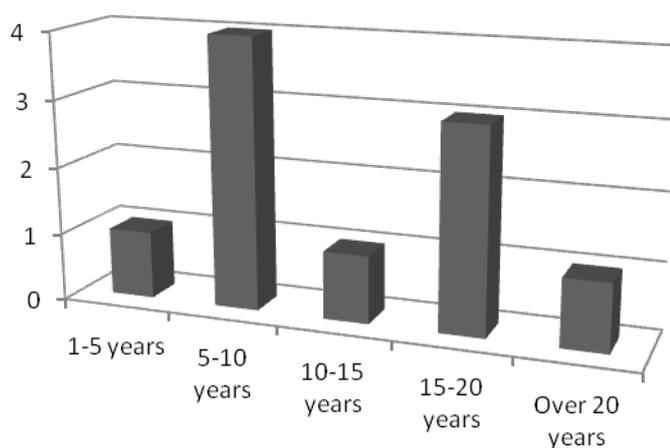


Figure 4.2: Interviewees’ years of work experience

4.3. The barriers to knowledge sharing

The second part of the interviews concerned the barriers that prevent knowledge sharing. The findings revealed that the barriers existing in the case study organisation can be grouped into the categories set out below.

4.3.1. Work-related challenges

The barriers preventing knowledge sharing result, firstly, from the characteristics of the work as a lawyer. The findings show that the problems belong to two groups. On the one hand, the type of content lawyers typically produce can hinder knowledge sharing, for example, for confidentiality reasons. The findings revealed that the typical content of the advice lawyers produce can raise issues. Interviewee four identified the problem as occurring when *“the know-how is very closely linked to client-related information”*. This is in line with the findings on documents found suitable for sharing where client-specific content was considered more difficult to share. One lawyer suggested a means to overcome this obstacle by saying *“we could produce more documents to be shared but it is time consuming and I think you need either a dedicated person for that who really has the time”* (Interviewee 5). This statement leads to the next group of barriers that were discussed.

These barriers arise, on the other hand, due to the priority of billable work in a law firm and the time pressure the lawyers face. Participants stressed that, as a business, a law firm has to prioritise billable work. Interviewee three pointed out that *“ultimately we are also a business firm, which earns money with work for clients”*. Interviewee nine qualified this view, however, by stating that *“only those people who have knowledge can get billable work”*. All participants mentioned time constraints as one reason that prevents them from knowledge sharing. In relation to a possible conflict between knowledge sharing and client work it was

remarked that *“in practice it is more the day to day obstacles of time management that are preventing me from doing it”* (Interviewee 2). Several participants mentioned that a specific mentoring behaviour, for instance giving feedback, tends to be neglected due to time constraints as well. Interviewee seven, for example, said *“I think there are certainly occasions, particularly when work is busy, where you forget or you may not find the time to actually give the proper feedback on something”*. The majority of interviewees though referred to the fact that busy periods can be followed by less busy times so that there is a certain fluctuation, which should allow at least for some knowledge sharing activities. Interviewee five said in this regard *“sometimes you are totally busy with billable work and sometimes you have more time”*.

4.3.2. Challenges in personal relationships

Secondly, interviewees referred to barriers that resulted from the challenges of dealing with different individuals and their personalities. In this context the obstacles can originate on the knowledge sharer's or the knowledge seeker's side. The mentoring of junior colleagues can, for example, be hindered by miscommunication or a lack of clarity when explaining a task. In the words of one lawyer *“the person that is receiving my task does not fully grasp the problem that I am trying to explain”* (Interviewee 3). Hesitation about the quality of the work to be shared is an issue as well. Interviewee two pointed out that *“sometimes matters are complicated and you don't want to share wrong information”*. Sharing can be prevented by the fear of someone else obtaining an advantage. According to interviewee three some people might be reluctant to share because then *“there is not one expert but there are two experts”*. The same interviewee remarked in relation to asking questions that *“very often people don't want to do it because they are unsecure. They think that's not worth asking. It could be considered as a weakness”*. In the opinion of one participant *“some people have a problem with showing that they are not knowledgeable in certain areas”* (Interviewee 9).

4.3.3. Existence of silos

The interviews demonstrated that a third type of barrier is due to the existence of silos on several levels partly caused by the work allocation among associates in the CSO. Although information is shared freely among members of the case team sharing with other members of the office is less frequent. In this context interviewee five said that *“within the case team I would share anything”*. Knowledge sharing in the CSO is viewed as being dependent on personal relationships. In one participant’s view it is *“always the same people you are talking to”* (Interviewee 8) and interviewee nine assumed that knowledge sharing might be hindered because of *“clusters of people working together”*. One participant emphasised the need to know about where expertise can be found when stating *“I tell you that I know something about that and three months later you will remember that I know about that”* (Interviewee 4). Cross-office knowledge sharing is apparently even more difficult. Interviewee seven saw an issue in *“the offices each being their own individual silo”* and named insufficient IT capabilities as one of the reasons. The importance of personal relationships was made evident through the statement *“All in all I think the system is fine if you know people”* (Interviewee 6). As regards the possibility to share documents across offices participants commented upon the current document management system, which makes it difficult to work on documents together. Interviewee seven pointed out that *“each office has its own set of files”*. Contrary to the researcher’s expectations only interviewee seven commented on the need to have new technology to also facilitate the oral sharing of knowledge across offices. In this participant’s words this could consist in a tool *“more instant and perhaps less formal than an email”*. The circles inside which information is shared to differing degrees can be distinguished as shown in Figure 4.3.

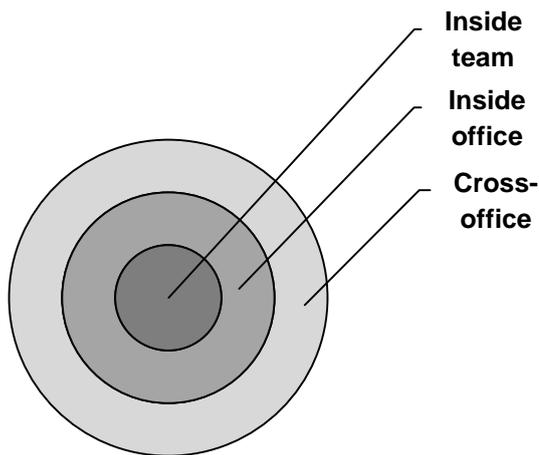


Figure 4.3: Differing degrees of knowledge sharing depending on participants

4.3.4. The role of management

As can be seen from the participants' responses they view the management and the partners as having an essential role in promoting knowledge sharing. Two interviewees stated that even though knowledge sharing was happening there was a lack of guidance from the management level on the issue. Regarding the existence of a policy on knowledge sharing interviewee three said *"I must say this is not really the case"*. According to interviewee two *"there are no detailed guidelines on how to actually do it"*. Two interviewees emphasised the need for partners as role models. Interviewee eight took the view that *"they should be an example"*. Interviewee two found that *"leading by example is a real thing and it is not just about promoting it but also doing it"*. There is also recognition that knowledge sharing depends on the level of partner support and the authority they provide. In this context one participant pointed out that knowledge sharing *"is the responsibility of the partner"* (Interviewee 4). This finding was, however, qualified by interviewee seven when emphasising the importance of a *"firm-wide policy shift"*.

4.3.5. Organisational culture

The findings have revealed diverging views on whether the organisational culture has a positive or negative effect on knowledge sharing in the CSO. Several interviewees found that, in cases where colleagues ask questions on a personal level, the respondents are helpful and that an open atmosphere exists. According to interviewee three it is *“open doors”* and according to interviewee five *“everyone is happy to answer questions”*. This positive view is qualified by criticism that the willingness to proactively share knowledge varies. According to interviewee seven *“some people are better at sharing than others”*. The interviewees relate this, in particular, to the behaviour observed at the meetings taking place regularly. Interviewee four stressed that it was necessary to understand *“that it is something positive to have those events”*. Interviewee nine remarked that at the meetings *“people do not have a discussion”*. A high level of autonomy and a focus on individual targets was described by one participant who referred to *“a system where everyone is depending on their own success”* (Interviewee 4). It can be concluded that even though there is, at least on the personal level, a positive culture regarding sharing there seems to be a culture acting as an obstacle regarding the more formal arrangements. This corresponds to the ways described above in which the interviewees currently prefer to share knowledge.

4.4. Ways to encourage knowledge sharing

4.4.1. Self-efficacy and altruism

The intention to share can be intrinsically motivated by self-efficacy, which signifies the belief to be able to contribute. The large majority of the interviewees answered the question whether they had valuable knowledge to contribute positively. Interviewee one said *“Yes, definitely. In the form of email sometimes and in the form of word documents”*. Interviewee eight replied that *“there are*

situations where I think what I am working on now could be useful also for other colleagues". A qualification was made though when the need for redaction of documents was stressed because *"otherwise they are too tailor-made for the client"* (Interviewee 5). The knowledge sharing behaviour in the CSO is also motivated by altruism. The interviewees mentioned the satisfaction of being a nice colleague through helping others by sharing knowledge. Interviewee three, for instance, mentioned *"being a nice colleague who is prepared to help others"* as a reward for sharing. Knowledge sharing was also brought in connection with working together and being in a team. The incentive to share knowledge for one participant is to work *"in an environment where we work together"* (Interviewee 4). Interviewee nine viewed knowledge *"as a reward in itself"* and stated that it is *"fun and interesting to do it"*. Another participant explained, as regards the activity of teaching, that *"it gives me a very positive feeling"* (Interviewee eight). Interviewee six said *"it is the satisfaction of helping someone else"*. Since these motivating factors are most effective in personal relationships they can serve to explain the dominant method of sharing knowledge in the CSO.

4.4.2. Organisational rewards

Organisational rewards can consist in social but also monetary recognition. Several questions in the interviews explored the importance of financial rewards for the promotion of knowledge sharing. In particular, the interviewees expressed their views on a recently introduced policy in the office whereby a limited amount of time spent on knowledge work can be counted towards the billable hours the individual lawyer achieves. So-called knowledge investment hours (KIH) are allocated and treated as billable time. The policy requires that the resulting work product is shared through submission to the internal knowledge database. Interviewee two expressed a positive view by answering that *"if you are not extremely busy with billable matters it is a good incentive to spend time on something useful for everyone"*. In their large majority, though, the interviewees expressed a sceptical view on financial incentives in general and the KIH policy in

particular. The suitability of financial incentives was questioned in the response that *“it is part of our job description to gather knowledge, to bring knowledge forward [...]. It is fun and interesting to do it. You should not get rewards for that, specifically”* (Interviewee 9).

The interviewees' concerns, moreover, related to the difficulty of measuring the value of knowledge produced and shared through financial rewards. In this context interviewee three saw a problem in the variety of knowledge produced and said *“know-how can be so many things”*. Interviewee seven stated that with know-how as opposed to billable work *“it is much harder to put a value on it”*. In relation to the KIH policy the participants described the problem that the amount of additional hours granted annually was too low to be an incentive. One respondent said that it was a *“small recognition”* (Interviewee 10). Another lawyer remarked that *“you use up your hours too fast”* (Interviewee 7). The findings show a divergence between some interviewees finding financial rewards generally unsuitable and others criticising the design of the reward policy. The findings suggest that even if the financial rewards were enhanced they would not create a sufficient amount of extrinsic motivation to share knowledge.

The interviewees were asked about the influence of knowledge sharing on their reputation, which constitutes a social reward. The possibility of showing expertise in a certain area was described as a positive effect. Interviewee three, for example, pointed to the advantage that *“you can establish yourself as an expert”*. In line with the limited sharing of knowledge across offices interviewee one stated that on a possible increase of reputation *“in the wider firm this is, for sure, not the case”*. One participant described the indirect manner in which reputation is built up across offices by saying that *“it is really indirect and by luck”* (Interviewee 2). Interviewees one and seven explained that the role of marketing-related know-how was important in this regard because it received more recognition than other material. According to interviewee six it is beneficial *“to have a bit of personal satisfaction because obviously people see you as someone knowledgeable”*. The

interviews show that systematic feedback on and recognition for knowledge sharing is limited though. Several interviewees linked this to the dominant role of billing targets that have to be achieved. It was stated that what counts in appraisals *“is turnover and profitability”* (Interviewee 4). Interviewee six said *“your reputation is much higher by personal inter-human recognition than by uploading something in the system”*. This suggests that social rewards could have a motivating effect but that their effect is largely limited to the office boundaries.

4.4.3. Expectations on reciprocity

The interviewees were asked about the expectations with regard to the knowledge they shared and the pursuant behaviour of the knowledge seeker. The analysis of the responses revealed that the act of sharing is indeed linked to certain expectations. The findings could serve as a further explanation why personal interaction is the preferred means of sharing as described above. Extrinsic motivation based on reciprocity arises mainly in personal interactions. One group of responses mentioned feedback on the content of the knowledge shared. For interviewee eight feedback on *“whether the information was useful for their own work and whether the information was correct”* would be important. Another participant would welcome also negative feedback, for example *“I do not like this or I have a different opinion here”* (Interviewee 9). In the words of interviewee seven it would be ideal *“that they may come back to you and have a discussion about it”*. The expectation of getting involved in the respective case was mentioned by interviewee nine by expressing the hope that *“one works together on certain issues where you can combine knowledge”*.

Expectations exist as well on behaviour the knowledge seeker should not engage in. Interviewee three expressed this when saying that if *“you have a certain expertise in one area and someone else comes and asks for your expertise then afterwards sells it as its own expertise I would be rather angry”*. The interviewees

also talked about their expectation that knowledge recipients would offer their knowledge in the future in return. Interviewee two remarked that *“you would expect people then to take the time for you when you come with a question in the future”*. It is relevant for the motivation to share that contributions to a database seem to be accompanied by low expectations of reciprocity. Interviewee two said in relation to reciprocal behaviour *“if it is just in general like feeding a database I think I would not expect it from people”*. Interviewee seven remarked in this context *“so it goes into a kind of black box and it is gone. You don’t actually see it being put to any use often”*. These diverging expectations are illustrated in Figure 4.4.

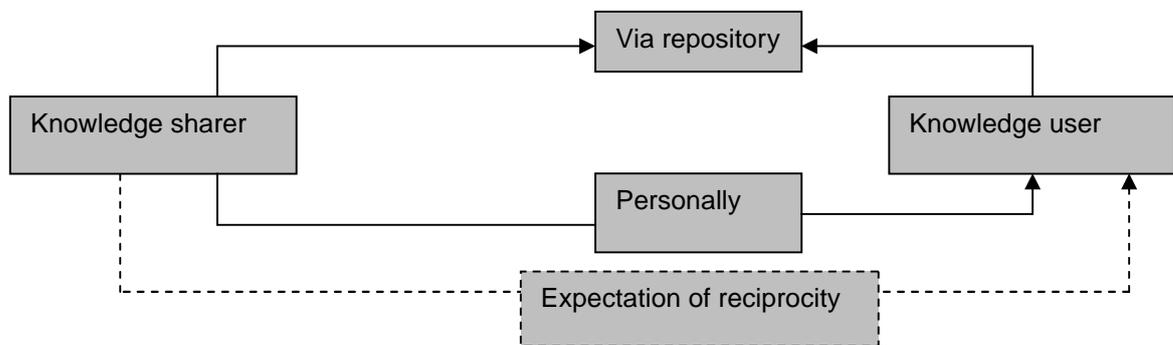


Figure 4.4: Expectation of reciprocity by knowledge sharer

4.4.4. Attitude regarding knowledge sharing

The interviewees were asked about their attitudes towards knowledge sharing. All the interviewees, with one exception, viewed knowledge sharing as generally positive. Interviewee three expressed reservations by responding that *“if you ask someone to do something this person should try it first alone with the proper introduction but alone to have to form his or her own view on a certain problem”*. Four interviewees pointed to the work-related benefit of increased efficiency. Interviewee eight found that *“it increases efficiency if you have information*

available that you don't have to research or to draft" and for interviewee two *"it definitely saves some time"*. Interviewee five stated *"you do not have to reinvent the wheel every time"* and another respondent remarked that *"someone saves a huge amount of time doing a memo because they could base it on yours"* (Interviewee 7). Access to prior experience of more senior lawyers was also mentioned as a major benefit. As interviewee ten put it *"if you work with a good senior partner or lawyer they give you lots of guidance"*. This is related to the advantages of "learning by doing". According to interviewee nine *"there is nothing better to build up knowledge than doing it yourself for the first time"*. The findings suggest that a positive attitude prevails but mostly in relation to the benefits it brings to the interviewee when someone else has shared knowledge.

4.5. Conclusions

The findings revealed that lawyers in the CSO rely a great deal on their work experience and would benefit from the sharing of this tacit knowledge. It can be seen that work products are highly context dependent, which makes sharing more difficult. This can explain the finding that knowledge sharing in the CSO happens to a large part through personal interactions. Even though there are a sufficient number of formal opportunities to exchange experience inside the office these formal meetings are criticised, however, for their content and for not constituting real discussions. Mentoring is done primarily in an informal manner through case work and there are few formal training opportunities in the office. Cross-office exchanges are even rarer and this leads to the prime importance of informal talks among colleagues. Among the barriers to sharing that were identified, the lack of time and the importance of the billable hour were the most significant. It is noteworthy that even though the attitude towards knowledge sharing is positive, knowledge is not captured in the optimal way. This leads to the conclusion that the barriers to knowledge sharing, the existing norms set by the management and the organisational culture must have a significant influence and act as major factors constraining actual sharing behaviour.

Conclusions can also be drawn regarding the effects that extrinsic and intrinsic motivators could have on improving the situation. The findings suggest that economic rewards would be only of limited value. This is even more so considering the importance of non-documented knowledge and work experience. The organisational reward of an increase in reputation was mentioned frequently as a benefit of knowledge sharing. According to the interviewees reciprocity can constitute another benefit of sharing knowledge. Currently reciprocity expectations decrease the less personal exchange situations become though. This could serve as an explanation for the low number of contributions to the internal database. The interviewees demonstrated a high level of altruism and self-efficacy, which should have a positive effect on their knowledge sharing intention and behaviour. Since the enjoyment of helping and making a contribution is much more effective when assisting someone directly the effect on intention and behaviour seems to be limited, however, as regards sharing with the wider group.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the conclusions that were derived from the findings will be discussed in light of previous research and literature. The conclusions can be summarised under the three headings set out below. The aim of the first research question was to ascertain what type of knowledge lawyers share in the CSO and in what manner. The second research question dealt with the reasons underlying the knowledge sharing behaviour. The possibilities to encourage knowledge sharing were the topic of the third research question.

5.2. Reliance on tacit and context-dependent knowledge

In the CSO lawyers rely on tacit and explicit knowledge in their daily work. The discovered strong reliance on tacit knowledge was proposed for such an organisation in previous research (Lam, 2000, p.496). Tacit knowledge is accumulated in the form of experience gained through working on cases. Explicit knowledge is frequently produced in the form of presentations or written client advice. This corresponds to the types of knowledge described in the literature (Kogut & Zander, 1992, p.388). The knowledge sharing activities in the CSO reflect the knowledge creation processes described by Nonaka (1994, p.19). *Socialisation* occurs through a process of mentoring when lawyers observe seniors in client meetings and benefit from their experience (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001, p.25). The process of *combination* is initiated when lawyers give a presentation to a colleague who then adapts it and creates new explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p.67). The process of *internalisation* through “learning by doing” was mentioned by several interviewees as well (Dalkir, 2011, p.69). As predicted in previous research the process of *externalisation* is very cumbersome and therefore less frequent (Becerra-

Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001, p.48). This poses a problem because if tacit knowledge is not made explicit it cannot be used by the organization as a whole (Chou & He, 2004, p.148). Finally, to achieve the creation of organizational knowledge, the processes have to be properly managed (Nonaka, 1994, p.20). Difficulties in this regard in the case study organisation mean that knowledge created through the various interactions is not properly captured and put to use.

The knowledge produced in the CSO is typical for that of a PSF because it is highly client-specific and customized (Empson, 2001, p.814). As the interviewees confirmed, the majority of a lawyer's work is about giving client advice. The task of advising clients requires the development of new ideas that are based on previous experience (Lam & Lambermont-Ford, 2010, p.57). Informal communication can be a preferred means of sharing in certain settings (Rusly et al., 2014, p.702). In a PSF the key mechanism for knowledge sharing is through direct contact with colleagues (Beaverstock, 2004, p.161). The nature of the knowledge produced explains why lawyers in the case study organisation prefer to share through such personal interactions (Hansen et al., 1999, p.2). Advice provided in written form is often linked to a specific matter which poses additional challenges. The findings in this research confirmed the assumption that even written knowledge can be difficult to share in a PSF because it is linked to individuals (Weiss, 1999, p.69). Such knowledge cannot be easily transferred independent of its source (Fernie et al., 2003, p.184). In addition, the delivery of customized products to clients, as opposed to standard documents, is a sign of good service (Morris, 2001, p.833). The findings thus confirmed previous research according to which lawyers prefer talking in person to submitting documents to a database (Forstenlechner, Lettice, & Bourne, 2009, p.66). It is difficult to capture this knowledge for the benefit of the organization (Huysman & de Wit, 2002, p.90).

In the CSO the sharing of knowledge occurs to varying degrees depending on the participants involved and their relationships. Knowledge sharing decreases as

the distance to the recipient in the organisation increases. This can be explained by previous research according to which the feeling of belonging to one team positively affects the intention to share (Bock et al., 2005, p.99). In addition, stable relationships with other team members support the sharing of tacit knowledge (Hansen, Mors, & Løvås, 2005, p.790). A situation where there is no relationship between receiver and sender was described as a hindrance to knowledge sharing (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p.41). In such circumstances the cost of making knowledge available to a colleague is perceived as higher than the benefits derived from the act of the sharing (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.694). It is worth noting that the CSO, through its parent organisation, has been involved in a series of mergers lately. Mergers can pose additional challenges because they make personal interaction more difficult (Forstenlechner & Lettice, 2007, p.825). It can be assumed that the level of trust among colleagues that do not know each other is relatively weak. According to previous research a low level of trust can inhibit knowledge sharing (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.117).

5.3. Work-related obstacles and communication challenges

The findings revealed that the lawyers in the case study organisation experience work-related difficulties when sharing knowledge. The interviewees mentioned a lack of time as the main factor that prevented them from sharing. In the literature it has been suggested that a lack of time hinders knowledge sharing because the costs of the activity outweigh the benefits (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.696). Costs for sharing can increase, for example, through the efforts needed to codify knowledge for submission to a repository (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.116). Due to the special kind of context-dependent knowledge produced in a law firm the costs of sharing are especially high. The issue of time has been identified as characteristic of the law firm organisational culture (Terrett, 1998, p.75). In a law firm, knowledge sharing reduces the opportunity to accumulate billable hours. The findings in the present case study confirm empirical research according to which the billable hour constitutes an important barrier (Nguyen et al., 2004, 4.3. Challenges to effective knowledge management). Already in 1999, Weiss argued

that the billable hour is a disincentive for knowledge sharing in professional service firms (p.74). Tasks that are not chargeable to clients are rated as being of only minor importance (Fink & Disterer, 2006, pp.384-385).

It was shown that knowledge sharing in the CSO faces personal and technological obstacles. The research identified communication deficits as one reason why knowledge sharing fails. The ability to communicate effectively has indeed been identified as an important factor for knowledge sharing (Parsons, 2004, p.179). Previous research found that a lack of previous knowledge of the recipient can lead to difficulties (Szulanski, 1996, p.36). The existence of silos revealed communication barriers typical for a PSF (Fink & Disterer, 2006, p.383). Providing information to the lawyers about where knowledge is located could be an appropriate solution (Gottschalk & Khandelwal, 2003, p.94). Doubts about the quality of the knowledge that one could share appear as a further theme in the findings. This barrier has been identified in the literature as an obstacle to sharing (Husted & Michailova, 2002, p.66). The findings confirm the importance of personal interactions in the area of knowledge sharing as predicted in the literature (Ruggles, 1998, p.88). Even though insufficient technological capabilities were mentioned they did not constitute a dominant theme. This might be explained by the importance of tacit knowledge and is in line with previous empirical research (Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006, p.261). The findings showed as well that formal meetings were not used to their full potential. Such occasions would, however, be suitable to share knowledge derived from past work experience (Weiss, 1999, p.72). The existing barriers affect the knowledge sharing activities in the CSO (Riege, 2005, p.23). Influencing these could therefore have a positive effect on the knowledge sharing behaviour.

5.4. Encouragement through incentives and sharing norms

As has been shown in the literature review appropriate rewards could be a suitable tool to support knowledge sharing. When aiming to encourage knowledge sharing it will be necessary to differentiate between explicit and tacit knowledge though. Depending on the kind of knowledge to be shared different rewards are appropriate (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002, p.73). The CSO's current incentive system follows a strategy aiming to capture codified knowledge by providing an economic reward in the form of billable hours (Hansen et al., 1999, p.3). Financial rewards can increase the motivation to share explicit knowledge (Osterloh & Frey, 2000, p.546). This type of rewards is hence suited for contributions to a repository because these can be measured. The present findings have not confirmed the positive effects of a provision of a charge code though as assumed by other researchers (Forstenlechner & Lettice, 2007, p.829). This could be explained by the fact that due to the typical knowledge produced the codification process is very time consuming in the CSO. The incentives currently offered are apparently not sufficient to offset the effort required. Moreover, they do not encourage the sharing of tacit knowledge.

The extrinsic motivation to share is low due to a lack of expected reciprocity. Reciprocity can constitute a reward in a knowledge exchange. In the literature it has been suggested that a strategy focusing on personal contacts could be useful for an entity such as the CSO, which relies to a large part on tacit knowledge (Hansen et al., 1999, p.7). The findings have indeed shown that the expectation of reciprocity is greatest in personal exchanges but decreases with distance. Researchers found that the attitude on knowledge sharing is driven by expected reciprocity (Bock et al., 2005, p.99). Knowledge sharing brings with it the positive effect of increasing reputation and establishing someone as an expert, which is in line with the theory that exchange is based on the expectation of a "social reward" (Blau, 1964, p.17). As found in previous research increased reputation has a positive effect on the amount and the quality of the knowledge shared (Hung,

Durcikova, et al., 2011, p.423; Wasko & Faraj, 2005, p.49). Supporting the expectation that knowledge sharing will increase reputation could be helpful to encourage sharing behaviour.

The attitude towards knowledge sharing is positive in the CSO. The findings did not support a general hostility towards knowledge sharing as suggested in the literature (Husted & Michailova, 2002, p.61). One of the benefits of knowledge sharing is seen in increased efficiency, which confirms previous research findings (Forstenlechner et al., 2007, p.149). In a model for knowledge sharing motivation, a positive attitude was linked to a high level of intrinsic motivation (Gagné, 2009, p.577). The findings confirmed that the knowledge sharing behaviour could be improved by focusing on intrinsic motivational factors. In the literature it was remarked that the enjoyment of helping others influences knowledge sharing (Hung, Lai, & Chang, 2011, p.224). The respondents consider their knowledge to be valuable for others. Self-efficacy could therefore be used as a driver for knowledge sharing despite research that suggested only an indirect effect through the subjective norm to share (Bock et al., 2005, p.98). Feedback on knowledge sharing activities is rarely provided in the CSO. It has been suggested, however, that the provision of positive feedback on knowledge contributions can increase self-efficacy (Lin, 2007, p.145). The fostering of personal relationships can also increase intrinsic motivation and thereby encourage knowledge sharing (Osterloh & Frey, 2000, p.543).

The intention to share does not always lead to the corresponding sharing behaviour (Olatokun & Elueze, 2012, p.10). In the CSO the findings show that the subjective norm to share is weak outside of face-to-face interactions. Sharing norms describe the expectations in the organisation to engage in knowledge sharing (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.117). The findings confirm the essential role of the management in promoting knowledge sharing, which is in line with suggestions made in the literature (Beaumont, 2011, p.230). The interviewees suggested that increased authority and direction from seniors could influence their

behaviours. Research in relation to law firms found that authority exercised by seniors could be an effective means to encourage knowledge sharing (Forstenlechner & Lettice, 2007, p.828). When managers encourage knowledge sharing they also positively influence the organisational culture in this regard (Lin & Lee, 2004, p.120). This approach does not contradict the assumption that knowledge sharing needs to be voluntary (Ipe, 2003, p.342). Management will need to provide encouragement by acting as an example and not through sanctions because these do not affect the contribution of tacit knowledge (Osterloh & Frey, 2000, p.545). Managers acting as role models strengthen the subjective norm to share knowledge (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005, p.728). In addition, a high degree of autonomy and the focus on individual targets in the CSO impedes sharing. These characteristics do not lead to a feeling of organizational ownership of knowledge, which was identified in the literature as a factor supporting knowledge sharing (Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001, p.174). Even strong sharing norms might, however, not be able to outweigh the difficulties regarding the production of codified knowledge (Kankanhalli et al., 2005, p.130). The issues of time pressure and the billable hour remain problematic. The findings can, nevertheless, provide ideas for tackling the “non-cooperating deficient equilibrium” (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.694).

5.5. Summary

This chapter related the research conclusions to previous findings and discussions in the literature. In the following chapter the results for each research objective will be set out and recommendations will be made for the future knowledge strategy.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

6.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion in how far the purpose of the research project was achieved. The conclusion on the research objectives will be supplemented by recommendations as regards the future knowledge strategy and by suggestions for further research in the field.

The research objectives formulated at the outset were:

1. To review the literature surrounding knowledge sharing, with a special focus on the legal sector.
2. To find out which tools and means of communication the lawyers use to share knowledge in the course of their daily work.
3. To examine what prevents the lawyers from sharing knowledge and to identify ways in which the conditions for knowledge sharing could be improved.
4. To make recommendations to the knowledge management team.

6.2. Conclusion

The first research objective was to review the literature surrounding knowledge sharing, with a special focus on the legal sector. In the literature knowledge has been identified as an important component of a firm's competitiveness. As one element of knowledge management the issue of sharing knowledge is particularly important for PSFs such as law firms. Nonaka's SECI model has become the dominant framework to explain the creation of organisational knowledge by the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. By reviewing the literature it was found that different types of knowledge, such as tacit and explicit knowledge, require different approaches based either on codification or personalisation. In

previous research various barriers that can hinder knowledge sharing were empirically tested. For law firms, apart from time constraints, the obstacle of the billable hour is typical. The literature review has revealed the importance of the TRA as a framework to explain knowledge sharing behaviour. In subsequent research on how to encourage sharing this framework was combined with motivational factors such as organisational rewards, reciprocity, altruism and self-efficacy.

As regards the remaining research objectives semi-structured interviews provided valuable detailed information from individual lawyers. It can be concluded that personal relationships are very important for knowledge sharing to succeed. As is typical for law firms, lawyers in the CSO prefer to share via personal interactions. Tacit and context-dependent knowledge are dominant in their daily work and electronic repositories are used only to a limited degree. Mentoring is taking place but it is in general very informal. These circumstances can lead to silos of knowledge depending on the distance between the participants. The case study confirmed previous findings that the billable hour and time pressure are the biggest barriers to sharing in a law firm. The TRA delivered the framework to analyse how the knowledge sharing behaviour could be improved. An approach emphasising the connections between lawyers and the personal exchanges between them will be beneficial. As regards the methodology a lesson learned is that supplementing the open questions with survey-type questions might elicit more specific suggestions from interviewees as to necessary improvements.

6.3. Recommendations for the knowledge strategy

To encourage knowledge sharing in the CSO it will be necessary to increase the benefits of this activity for the individual lawyer and to reduce its costs at the same time. Four specific recommendations were derived from the findings. Consistent with the needs of the CSO the majority of these recommendations deal with the encouragement of knowledge sharing through personal exchanges.

- The lack of guidance on how to make submissions of written knowledge could be easily rectified by providing a checklist and training to guide lawyers through the process. This would facilitate submission of documents and reduce the effort required to make a contribution.
- The sharing through formal interactions should be enhanced by including an agenda point in the team meetings that covers lessons learned from previous matters. The case team having worked on the case would be rewarded for this contribution.
- A feature could be added to the electronic repository that allows lawyers to give feedback on specific contributions. Connections between individual lawyers could thus be strengthened and contributors would receive information on the value of their knowledge.
- Knowledge sharing by communities of lawyers can be encouraged by establishing a database of experts in various offices. Lawyers having similar areas of expertise could connect and exchange experiences.

6.4. Recommendations for future research

The research has provided further evidence for the importance of communication in knowledge sharing as opposed to the reliance on databases. The case study therefore made a useful contribution to the understanding of knowledge sharing activities in law firms. Since the case study was limited to one small organisation the results cannot be generalised though. Despite a lack of transferability comparable organisations could still benefit from the findings for their knowledge sharing efforts. A multiple case design involving a comparison of several law firms could provide further support to the findings (Vissak, 2010, p.373). Such a design could clarify the question whether the results in the present case study can be explained by the special area of law that the lawyers in the CSO deal with. It could also be helpful to conduct further quantitative research to explore the issues raised.

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Appendix A: Interview schedule

Interviewee reference:

Age:

Years work experience:

Position and number of years employed in the firm:

Theme 1: Practice of knowledge sharing

1. What kind of knowledge do you produce in your daily work that could be shared?
2. How do you make your written knowledge, for example letters of advice or presentations, available to others?
3. How common is it in the office to discuss results of cases after they have been closed?
4. Do you regularly attend meetings to discuss new legal developments with colleagues?
5. How often do you give presentations in client seminars or external conferences?
6. Which tools do you use to share knowledge with colleagues, for example email, electronic repositories or the intranet?
7. In what instances have you passed your experience to a less experienced colleague?
8. What trainings of other lawyers do you conduct?
9. Can you describe any benefits of observing a more senior lawyer work?

10. Describe instances where you were able to resolve a problem by sharing your knowledge.

11. What specific experiences have you made when attempting to pass on knowledge to a colleague?

Theme 2: Barriers to knowledge sharing

12. What do you think of the IT tools used in this office to share documents?

13. How would you rate the possibilities for lawyers to collaborate online?

14. How frequently do you exchange knowledge with colleagues from other offices?

15. Describe any measures taken by the management to encourage knowledge sharing.

16. What negative experiences, if any, have you had with knowledge sharing?

17. Do you consider that you have valuable knowledge to contribute?

18. How much time does your billable work leave you for knowledge sharing activities?

19. What is the relationship between knowledge sharing and client work?

20. How would you describe the level of cooperation among lawyers in the office?

Theme 3: Ways to encourage knowledge sharing

21. What use does knowledge sharing have in your opinion?

22. What kind of personal rewards do you expect for sharing knowledge?

23. What positive feedback have you received for sharing knowledge, for example in appraisals?

24. Explain in how far this has influenced your inclination to share knowledge.
24. Do you enjoy sharing knowledge with colleagues?
25. In how far has the sharing of knowledge influenced your reputation within the firm?
26. What do you expect from a colleague when you provide him with useful knowledge?
27. In what way could financial rewards be an incentive for you to share knowledge?
28. What do you think of the policy of counting time spent on knowledge as billable?
29. How important is it that senior lawyers and partners share their know-how?
30. What suggestions do you have to encourage knowledge sharing?

Appendix B: Interview transcript

Interviewee reference: 8

(Demographic and confidential details removed)

Interviewer

What kind of knowledge do you produce in your daily work that could be shared?

Interviewee

First of all most suitable for sharing are presentations, for example, an introduction to a field of law for clients. I think that is easy to share because it is quite general. Moreover also some memoranda. That is what I use on a daily basis. I think that is also suitable for sharing with other people. **[Knowledge sharing practice/ Work suitable for sharing]**

Interviewer

How do you make your written knowledge, for example letters of advice or presentations, available to others?

Interviewee

First of all sometimes just in a personal discussion with some colleagues. If someone comes up and says actually I have a question with regards to [] and I had a case and I just remember a memorandum I have written I of course try to offer this memorandum or just to share my experience with the colleague. **[Knowledge sharing practice/ Ways of sharing documents] [Knowledge sharing practice/ Opportunities for sharing orally]**

Interviewer

How much time does your billable work leave you for knowledge sharing activities?

Interviewee

As I am quite busy it's sometimes difficult. Sometimes I have to restrict how to gain more knowledge by for example attending conferences. Sometimes it is not easy to have a balance because the billable work is so much and someone has to deal with it. **[Barriers to knowledge sharing/ Work-related challenges]**

Interviewer

How would you describe the level of cooperation among lawyers in the office?

Interviewee

In my opinion it is depending on the one hand on the colleagues and how your personal relationship is with these colleagues. Usually in my case I also try to share knowledge. If I see, ok, someone is looking for information I try to give information if I have it. It could be better and be improved, that's for sure. **[Barriers to knowledge sharing/ Existence of silos]**

Interviewer

What use does knowledge sharing have in your opinion?

Interviewee

It increases efficiency if you have information available that you don't have to research or to draft. It gives you some confidence because you know that you can rely on former experiences and I can just verify whether this experience or this piece of work is still up to date. **[Ways to encourage knowledge sharing/ Attitude]**

Interviewer

What kind of personal rewards, not financial rewards, do you expect for sharing knowledge?

Interviewee

Well, if you share knowledge and it helps another colleague it is always good. It shows also your own expertise. It is just nice to help a colleague, that's already

almost rewarding enough. It is also about how you define being colleagues and how you consider team members and working within the team. So if you have a positive attitude it should be normal to share knowledge within the team. **[Ways to encourage knowledge sharing/ Altruism] [Ways to encourage knowledge sharing/ Social non-economic rewards]**

Interviewer

What do you expect from a colleague when you provide him with useful knowledge?

Interviewee

Maybe whether it was useful or not, so whether the information was useful for their own work and whether the information was correct. If I made a mistake and my colleagues discover that it is very important to get this feedback saying for example that I did not see a case. **[Ways to encourage knowledge sharing/ Reciprocity]**

Interviewer

What positive feedback have you received for knowledge sharing, for example in appraisals?

Interviewee

In appraisals maybe not. For example just a short thank you by mail from the person I sent a presentation to. I received a thank you email. **[Ways to encourage knowledge sharing/ Social non-economic rewards]**

Appendix C: Information sheet

Research project for Master's Dissertation (MSc Econ Information and Library Studies, Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University):

Case study – Knowledge sharing in an international law firm

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide whether to take part, please take the time to read this information sheet carefully since it outlines the nature of the research and your rights as a participant.

I am a postgraduate student at the Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University and I will be conducting the study. The research will involve taking part in an interview which should last about thirty minutes. Information from the interviews will be used in a written report to be submitted to Aberystwyth University.

The results of this research will also be used to improve knowledge sharing opportunities in the case study organisation.

The purpose of the interview is to obtain your views on knowledge sharing in the office, the barriers to sharing knowledge, and how knowledge sharing could be improved. A number of lawyers from the office have been selected as interviewees to get a good insight into the issues.

With your permission, an audio recorder will be used to record the interviews. The recording will be used only for this piece of research. Audio files and interview transcripts (written records of the interviews) will be kept securely and destroyed at the end of the study.

The study has been designed in accordance with Aberystwyth University Policy for Ethical Practice in Research and the Department of Information Studies Ethics Policy.

This is based on the Code of Professional Practice set out by the British Sociological Association. Confidentiality will be maintained. Your name will not be mentioned in the report, and any names or places mentioned in the interview will be deleted and replaced with pseudonyms.

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time if you choose, before the final report is submitted. If you have any concerns or questions feel free to contact me at sah11@aber.ac.uk.

Appendix D: Consent form

Title of project: Master's Dissertation: Case study – Knowledge sharing in an international law firm

Name of researcher: Sabine Holinde

Project authority: This research project is being undertaken as part of a Master's in Library & Information Studies from Aberystwyth University.

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for participants and the researcher has explained the study to me.

2. I have received enough information about what my role involves.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

5. I agree to the interview being recorded.

6. I agree that the data I provide may be used by Sabine Holinde, within the conditions outlined in the information sheet.

q

Name of participant (IN BLOCK LETTERS)	Signature Date
Name of researcher (IN BLOCK LETTERS)	Signature Date

Appendix E: Coding framework with definitions

Theme 1: Knowledge sharing practice	
Work suitable for sharing	<i>Types of documents that have been identified as suitable for sharing by interviewees.</i>
Ways of sharing documents	<i>Methods by which interviewees make documents available to others.</i>
Opportunities for sharing orally	<i>Occasions at which interviewees share knowledge orally by communicating with each other.</i>
Shortcomings of knowledge sharing practice	<i>Deficiencies of the way knowledge is shared (excluding deficiencies of IT and mentoring).</i>
Mentoring and training behaviours	<i>Actual mentoring/ training behaviours and characteristics of practice (excluding the benefits that interviewees derive from being mentored/ trained).</i>
IT tools used	<i>The IT tools and technology/ software used for knowledge sharing by the interviewees.</i>
Theme 2: Barriers to knowledge sharing	
Functioning of IT system	<i>The characteristics and deficiencies of the IT tools and technology/ software used for knowledge sharing.</i>
Existence of silos	<i>References to boundaries limiting knowledge sharing to case teams and departments.</i>

Work-related challenges	<i>Challenges for knowledge sharing interviewees face that relate to the work as a lawyer or to the workplace.</i>
Personal challenges	<i>Challenges in relation to knowledge sharing that result from personal behaviours or personality traits.</i>
Organisational culture	<i>References to the organisational culture in relation to knowledge sharing.</i>
Management role and practical behaviour	<i>The role that management (including senior lawyers and partners) have in relation to knowledge sharing.</i>
Theme 3: Ways to encourage knowledge sharing	
Attitude to sharing	<i>Work-related benefits that interviewees see in sharing knowledge and the downsides they see (including benefits from being mentored).</i>
Altruism	<i>The altruistic benefits that interviewees obtain from sharing their knowledge.</i>
Self-efficacy	<i>The interviewees' views on the value of their knowledge.</i>
Economic rewards	<i>The interviewees' views on the provision of financial incentives.</i>
Social non-economic rewards	<i>Personal rewards the interviewees obtain from sharing their knowledge and possible limits to those rewards.</i>
Reciprocity	<i>Expectations of the interviewees regarding the behaviour of the receiver of the knowledge shared.</i>