CHAPTER: 4

RESEARCH GAPS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on a review of literature on knowledge sharing, three important gaps appear as,

(a) There is no substantial literature on knowledge sharing among the members of cross-functional teams in the Indian context. In India, the focus has been given to knowledge management perspectives or initiatives broadly but knowledge sharing has received little attention. However, there are studies focusing upon IT firms and they have been undertaken taking only the technological factors into consideration. Whereas, other than technology, there are numbers of antecedents like organization structure, culture etc., impacts extent of knowledge sharing.

(b) Secondly, very few studies have been made in studying human aspects in relation to the knowledge sharing behavior. Scant attention has been directed toward understanding the role of personality traits or emotional intelligence in relation to the knowledge sharing behavior among the members of cross functional teams.

(c) Thirdly, the focus on task characteristics (especially job design) and its linkage on knowledge sharing are neglected.

Thus, this proposed research is intended to fill the research gap and to examine how the organizational characteristics, task characteristics and individual characteristics affect the knowledge sharing behavior in cross functional teams perspective as the current state of knowledge sharing and team performance in the Indian context is limited.
The novelty of the study lies with examining the moderating role of mutual trust between knowledge sharing and team performance of cross functional teams as trust constructs a healthy environment for knowledge sharing and acts as a moderator (Nonaka, 1994). Till date the mediating role of mutual trust has been studied.

Makela and Brewster (2009) suggested that the different interaction contexts may be associated with differing levels of trust that are built on the relative extensiveness of shared experience and richness of inter-unit interaction that characterize them. Previous research has shown shared experience i.e., joint hands-on working together, to be an effective interpersonal trust builder (Levin, Whitener, & Cross, 2006; Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996). Project group/teams typically do more joint hands-on work than inter-unit meetings because the group work toward a clearly defined mutual objective, and this is likely to build a stronger shared experience base. It is even more so for cross-border teams that are working toward a broader and more ambiguous objective, combined with a joint reporting structure for their teamwork; therefore, the common experience base on which to build interpersonal trust is likely to be wider. Cross-border teams, necessitate richer interaction because their task is more novel, complex, and ambiguous than that of project groups, and their interdependence is higher due to joint reporting. Previous research has associated this type of mutual investment with strong embedded ties characterized by interpersonal trust or mutual trust (Krackhardt, 1992; Uzzi, 1997, Makela & Brewster, 2009).

Previous research has overwhelmingly suggested that interpersonal trust can be a powerful facilitator of knowledge sharing in interaction relationships (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Levin & Cross, 2004; McEvily et al., 2003; Uzzi, 1997). Zaheer et al. (1998) maintained that trust facilitates knowledge exchange by making interaction partners more willing to share their
respective knowledge. Further, Uzzi (1997) and later Uzzi and Lancaster (2003) reported that embedded interpersonal relationships characterized by a high level of trust are more important carriers of knowledge than arm’s length ones. Trust is a key component in MNCs’ effective operation and that it is built through the kind of collaboration found in cross-border teams and expatriation (Makela and Brewster, 2009).

Further, Foss, Minbaeva, Pedersen and Reinholt (2009) examined the relationship between three job characteristics and the extent of knowledge sharing behavior in the context of Danish firm. They mentioned that there is a need for further empirical studies using individual data gathered from a wider variety of firms to generalize the findings further. They conceptualized a motivating job design along the lines of Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), which recommended that workers use a variety of tasks and skills, do an entire piece of work from beginning to end, have direct contact with stakeholders, have some decision-making power, and receive performance feedback. Researchers have related these characteristics to feelings of empowerment (Gagné, Senécal, & Koestner, 1997; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), which is similar to need satisfaction.

In the studies relating to job design, the structuring work to promote employee autonomy, relationships, and the use of one’s full competencies likely have positive effects on motivation and work outcomes such as knowledge sharing which is needed to be tested empirically (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Knippenberg & Schie, 2000; Wall, Kemp, Jackson, & Clegg, 1986). Moreover, a motivating job design or the use of autonomous work groups could influence the development of norms about sharing knowledge. Because such design usually enhances interdependence and often uses teamwork, it implies greater communication between coworkers and greater opportunities and need to share knowledge in order to accomplish
organizational goals. Kelloway and Barling (2000) indeed argued that job design can influence workers’ ability, motivation, and opportunities to use knowledge.

The proposed research work has following research objectives namely, (a) to identify and examine the antecedents of knowledge sharing, (b) to examine the effect of knowledge sharing on team performance among the members of cross-functional teams and (c) to study the moderating role of mutual trust on the knowledge sharing behavior and team performance.

We identified the research question as,

What are the antecedents of knowledge sharing and how they are related with the consequences of knowledge sharing (outcomes) in the context of cross functional teams?

Based on the above research question, we identified our research framework and subsequent research model along with the proposed hypothesis.