

## Chapter 72

# Chinese Cultural Values and Knowledge Sharing

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### ABSTRACT

*In order to address the growing economic and social pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Chinese must build solid foundations for a knowledge-based economy. However, knowledge sharing is relatively uncommon in Chinese communities and there has been little success in understanding the motivations and barriers of knowledge sharing in the Chinese context and thus there appears to be no systematic way to analyze the obstacles to information sharing among Chinese. In possession of Chinese cultural values has been commonly regarded as the reason for knowledge hoarding among Chinese. The present study examines whether or not Chinese's Confucian philosophy is responsible for the reluctance of knowledge sharing.*

### INTRODUCTION

The moral educations that Chinese children receive during their primary education and from parents are often related to the manners of speech and how these manners would determine their life. The following Chinese mottos and sayings provide examples summarizing part of the related moral education. ‘*Chen mo shi jin*’, the direct translation is ‘*silence is gold*’, which means speaking deserves no praise and it is equivalent to ‘Speech is silver, silence is gold’; ‘*Shao shuo hua duo zuo shi*’, the direct translation is ‘*Few words, more works*’. It advocates working instead of talking and is

equivalent to ‘*Walk the walk instead of talk the talk*’; ‘*Shou kou ru ping*’, the direct translation is ‘*keep one's mouth shut like a sealed bottle*’. It advocates keeping secrets and is equivalent to ‘*dumb as an oyster*’. ‘*Da zhi ruo yu*’ the direct translation is ‘*like an old fool but actually smart*’. It suggests clever people should hide their intelligence and it is similar to ‘*Still waters run deep*’.

All these mottos and sayings encourage knowledge hoarding instead of knowledge sharing. Thus, one shall not expect Chinese to be very enthusiastic about knowledge sharing. Indeed, common belief has it that hoarding rather than sharing knowledge is the predominant social norm

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in China (Lu & Leung, 2006). Furthermore, one stereotype many Westerners hold about Chinese is that Chinese are quiet, not very talkative, and has a lot secret to keep. In reality, many studies have found that Chinese have been reluctant to share their knowledge. However, knowledge sharing does take place, among people, but with a lot of conditions and unique Chinese characteristics. Researchers have suggested that because Chinese are influenced by their own Chinese cultural values, so their knowledge sharing behaviors are less aggressive. Most importantly, this particular suggestion has not been empirically tested. By using sample data of over 100 working adults, this study attempts linking Chinese cultural values to knowledge sharing behavior. It helps verifying the reasons for knowledge hoarding.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the studies in the area of knowledge sharing among Chinese. These studies explain the knowledge sharing behavior among Chinese and they attribute their findings to the Chinese cultural values but it is observed that no empirical link has been established between Chinese values and knowledge management behavior. Next, the data collection process and research methodology are presented. Finally, results are interpreted and the study is concluded.

## **LITERATURE**

### **Values Predict Behaviors**

By understanding people's individual and collective value orientations, their decision making process can become more predictable. For decades, researchers from a variety of disciplines have been interested in studying values, value systems and value orientations because of their roles in one's decisions and behaviors. Vinson et al. (1977) suggest that values can be best characterized as the first in a three-stage model linking values, attitudes and behavior. Adler (2002) developed a similar

model and provided an example to elaborate the values-attitudes-behaviors link: 'Japan values social harmony, which in turn creates an attitude, and behaviors of cooperation and subsequent behavior in which disagreements are rarely openly expressed'. Although demographic variables like age, income, gender and geographic information can also help decision makers in understanding individual behavior, values of an individual provides a deeper understanding of a decision making process (Blackwell et al., 1995). Marketers contend that if one understands people's values, one can better predict their behavior in the market place (Kindra et al., 1994). Indeed, the predictability of values provides a wide range of applications, not limited within the areas of marketing.

In general, values are often used to predict many individuals' attitudes and behaviors. There is a strong case to believe that values have some influences on individuals' knowledge sharing behaviors. In other words, we may conceive that when some individuals find a particular set of values (e.g. intellectual, wisdom, and etc.) important, they are relatively willing to sharing their knowledge.

It is commonly believed that the world's societies are differentiated by their core traditional values. Hofstede (1980) pointed out that the characteristics of people are defined by their prevailing value systems. Conventional wisdom suggests that in East Asia, Confucianism oriented values are deeply embedded in people's mindset such that a shared value system seem to dominate societies in places like mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore. If there is such a common value system, similar patterns of behaviors, motivations, and expectations among people in these societies supposedly exist. It has been proven that the Chinese are collectivistic, situation-centred, and emphasize the greater self, implying that the Chinese are inclined to endorse the social/collective causes (Ho, 1979; Hsu, 1972, 1985; Li & Yang, 1974; Tak & King, 2004; Chan, 2008). These research findings suggest that some

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