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Why should I share my knowledge? A multiple foci of commitment perspective

Introduction

Knowledge assets are at the heart of the competitive advantage of knowledge intensive firms such as Professional Service Firms (PSFs) (Alvesson, 2004; Drucker, 1993; Swart, 2007). These assets can take the form of explicit knowledge ('know what') and tacit knowledge ('know how'). We focus on the tacit, experienced-based assets because they are difficult to copy and substitute and vital to deliver solutions to clients. Individual tacit knowledge is, however, insufficient on its own to create competitive advantage and it is only when knowledge is shared, at the collective level that the organisation can leverage the knowledge held by individuals. The process of knowledge sharing is directed and controlled by individual employees rather than the organisation. Previous research indicates that employee attitudes, such as their level of commitment, are central to their willingness to share knowledge (Hislop, 2003; Lin, 2007; Chan and Mauborgne, 1998). An experienced lawyer is, for example, more likely to share her knowledge with her team if she is committed to that team.

The impact of employee commitment on knowledge sharing behaviour is especially important in contemporary organisations such as PSFs. Work within these firms takes place both within and across organisational boundaries. Professional employees interact with a whole series of parties such as specialist internal teams and clients, suppliers and partners who are outside the firm. Some of these parties provide additional, and possibly competing, foci of commitment (Becker, 2009). Professionals face a series of tensions when their personal control over their knowledge is combined with cross-boundary working and the subsequent multiple foci of commitment. Their willingness to share knowledge with colleagues may be limited when they feel torn between their commitment to different internal and external parties with whom they

interact. The lawyer who is highly committed to her clients may develop such client-specific knowledge that she feels little incentive or need to share her knowledge with colleagues.

This paper draws on empirical data from a medium-sized global PSF to ask: how does the commitment of employees influence their willingness to share knowledge with employees in their organisation? In doing so it makes two contributions to existing knowledge: first it examines not only the various types of employee commitment to the organisation but also their commitment to other important parties – their team, profession and client; second we consider two types of knowledge sharing – providing and obtaining knowledge with the organisation. We find that for three of these foci (organisation, team and profession) commitment is positively related to both types of knowledge sharing, while commitment to the client is negatively related to knowledge sharing in the organisation.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin by outlining the relevant previous research and generating various hypotheses. We then outline our data collection and analysis methods and the measure we have used. Finally we discuss and analyse our results before considering the implications of our work for further research.

Previous Research

PSFs are classified as knowledge intensive firms (Alvesson, 2004) which place knowledge assets at the heart of their competitive advantage. It is therefore important to be clear about what we mean by knowledge. We emphasize the tacit dimensions of knowledge, i.e. know-how and experience and therefore differentiate between knowledge and information (Swart, 2011). This is of particular importance given that we study PSFs who translate the skills and experience of their employees into client

solutions. Our definition of knowledge is the fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organisations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices and norms (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). There are particular aspects of this definition that are worth noting, i.e. the emphasis on experience and the multi-level nature of knowledge. That is to say, it exists at the individual and collective levels. It is this very aspect which emphasizes the fact that knowledge (experience) per se is not a valuable strategic resource but it is only once the knowledge is shared (at the collective level) that the organisation can leverage its knowledge assets.

We define knowledge sharing as multi-level phenomenon that can be realized at the individual, intra-organisational and inter-organisational level (Wilkesmann, 2009). In this process organisational actors such as individuals, teams and units exchange, receive and are influenced by the experience of others (Argote and Ingram, 2000). The very act of sharing knowledge is always directed and controlled by individuals (who may act on behalf of a unit or team) which make this a highly interpersonal process (Empson, 2001:843). That is to say, the sharing of knowledge cannot be ‘controlled’ by the organisation and the emphasis should therefore be on facilitating knowledge sharing via contextual factors such as organisational culture and by adopting human resource management practices which are likely to generate positive attitudes which support knowledge sharing.

Hislop (2003) finds that commitment substantially affects the employees’ willingness to share tacit knowledge. Building upon this work Lin (2007) finds that organisational commitment and trust in co-workers are important mediators in the

sharing of tacit knowledge. She finds that low levels of tacit knowledge sharing are likely to be attributed to a lack of organisational commitment and trust in co-workers (2007: 421). Likewise, Chan and Mauborgne (1998) argue that attitudes of trust and commitment are likely to contribute to the sharing of ideas whereas a lack of commitment may translate into 'hoarding of ideas and people dragging their feet' (1998: 324). They postulate that the willingness to share knowledge is also likely to contribute to the quality of strategic decisions which in turn impact upon the team's performance. Ultimately it is both the intellectual and emotional recognition that enables knowledge sharing. Thus, the very act of sharing what we know is intertwined with our attitudes and previous research indicates that commitment is a significant predictor of the willingness to share knowledge.

At the inter-organisational level of analysis Im and Rai (2008) examine explorative and exploitative knowledge sharing and its impact on the performance of long-term relationships. They theorize that both contextual ambidexterity (organization design) and ontological commitment (IT design) will enable knowledge sharing. Their collected data from both account managers at customer firms responsible for the relationship with a leading supply chain vendor and account managers at the vendor firm responsible for relationships with customers. Their findings suggest that both exploratory and exploitative knowledge sharing lead to relationship performance improvements.

This interpersonal quality of knowledge is also related to the bi-directional nature of knowledge sharing, i.e., obtaining and providing. It is important to note that as knowledge is shared it develops and is changed, hence, it has dynamic qualities and is adopted through a process of interpretation by both the provider and the receiver of knowledge (Watzlawick, 1976). When we add something which we have experienced

to our existing knowledge we do so in a super-additive way. We integrate the newly-known into the already-known by seeking connections between them; it is only when we have explored the implications of the impact of the newly-known that we are aware of our new state of knowing. The cognitive sciences refer to this process as representational re-description (Karmiloff-Smith, 1992), i.e. the process of integrating new knowledge into existing knowledge which then re-orders, or re-describes, the existing knowledge sets. Moreover, within an organisation knowing is not established at a single place, it is a product of the interconnections between people under a framework of social organisational structure, embodied in the ideas of social capital and organisational social capital (Kang, Snell and Swart, 2012).

It is important to recognize that we focus only on knowledge sharing within the organisation. The reason for this is that once knowledge sharing is enabled in the organisation then the synergistic resource can be used to create competitive advantage. Only at this stage will the firm be able to maximize the return on the investment in its human capital. This is such a critical process given the firm's dependence on individual and collective knowledge which is used to solve client problems and secure the future success of the firm. We are particularly interested in how the various foci of commitment impact on the competitive advantage that is derived from professionals sharing their knowledge within the organisation.

Commitment Foci in the PSF context

We define commitment as 'a force which binds an individual to a course of action relevant to one or more targets' (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001: 301). Recent studies examine various internal, or micro, and external, or macro, level *foci* of commitment which emerge as employees work within and across organisational boundaries as in the PSF context (Becker, 1992; 2009; Redman and Snape, 2005; Reichers, 1985;

Stinglhamber *et al.*, 2002; Vandenberghe, 2009). Research into micro-level foci usually involves examining commitment to teams and supervisors, with fewer studies evaluating the commitment to top management and customers (Becker, 2009; Swailes, 2004). Macro-level research commonly includes commitment to organisation, profession/occupation, career and union (Vandenberghe, 2009). We concentrate on commitment to four foci of commitment, organisation, team, profession and client because we argue these are central to improving our understanding of employee attitudes within PSFs.

Extensive previous work has identified the antecedents, correlates and outcomes of organisational commitment (OC) (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Three types of OC have been identified (Meyer and Allen, 1991): *affective commitment (AC)* refers to an employee's emotional attachment to an organisation; *continuance commitment (CC)* concerns the costs of leaving the organisation, and *normative commitment (NC)* is a feeling of obligation to continue employment.

The second internal focus of commitment is that of the team. This research highlights that team commitment (TC) is particularly important for individual and organisational performance (Becker, 1992; Bishop *et al.*, 2005). This is significant for PSFs given that professional work tends to be organised into project teams or practice groups (Bishop *et al.*, 2005) where members work together to generate, transfer and integrate knowledge to maximise client benefits (May *et al.*, 2002; Swart, 2007). Indeed, teams may be the principal way in which employees experience the organisation as they interact frequently with their team members and have less contact with others (Redman and Snape, 2005). PSF employees can build up strong

relationships with their team leader and members, especially when they are physically located together, either in the PSF or on the client site (Reed, 1996).

Most of the research into external foci has examined the impact of commitment to the employee's profession. Over 50 years ago Gouldner (1957) distinguished between 'locals' who were committed to the organisation and 'cosmopolitans' who displayed a stronger commitment to their profession. As employees invest more in their development in their profession to stay competitive they develop a stronger commitment to their profession (Greenwood and Empson, 2003). Commitment to the profession is especially important in PSFs because employees draw on a professional knowledge base, they are involved in self-regulation and are subject to a professional code of practice (May *et al.*, 2002, Swart, 2007). They also have a high degree of ownership over their knowledge and skills through which they develop external professional networks to share knowledge.

Relatively few studies have examined the extent of employee commitment to the client (Vandenberghe, 2009). Some research has been carried out in 'non-traditional' work settings where contract and agency staff are present (Liden *et al.*, 2003; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow, 2006). However, we argue that particular attention needs to be given to this focus of commitment because the client can be regarded as the *raison d'être* of the PSF (Fosstenlokken *et al.*, 2003). Most PSF activity is devoted to meeting client needs especially in highly competitive markets where knowledge is commoditised, there are alternative suppliers and the costs of switching jobs are low (Swart and Kinnie, 2003).

Multiple Foci of Commitment and knowledge sharing

The combination of personal control over tacit knowledge sharing and a multiple foci of commitment has important potential implications for knowledge sharing. In

particular we need to know more about how employee commitment to different foci affects their willingness to share knowledge within the organisation. A professional who is highly committed to one party, such as their team or their client, may be unwilling to share their knowledge with their organisation.

For us the key implication is how employee commitment to these different foci affects their knowledge sharing behaviours within the organisation. Drawing on the previous research in the field we therefore put forward the following hypotheses. First, there is an established literature on the link between commitment to the organisation and knowledge sharing (Storey and Quintas, 2001; Scarbrough and Carter, 2000). The clear view here is that high levels of organisational commitment are associated with increased willingness to share knowledge (Hislop, 2003: 192; Lin, 2007: 459). Further research has then considered what kinds of HR practices might be used to encourage this commitment and knowledge sharing behaviour (Scarbrough and Carter, 2000). This prompts our first hypothesis:

H1: Affective, normative and continuance employee commitment to the organisation is positively related to knowledge providing and obtaining.

Research into the links between the other foci of commitment and knowledge sharing has been much more limited (Hislop, 2003). These influences will be affected by both the direct and interaction effects of commitment to these various foci. In terms of the direct effects, some have argued that high levels of trust and commitment to a work group or team may make employees less willing to share their knowledge with others outside their team in their organization (Newell and Swan, 2000). In practice they will seek to hoard their knowledge to maximise their power and influence. In a similar way a high level of commitment to the profession may reduce

the willingness to share knowledge within the organisation (Alvesson, 2004; Scarbrough, 1999).

However, a different picture emerges when we look at the interactions between the foci of commitment. Overall, the research in the field (Becker, 2009; Vandenberghe, 2009; Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow, 2006) reveals that the interactions between the foci of commitment, especially between the organisation, team, profession and customers and clients can be positive. If the organisation is able to establish synergies between the foci of commitment it may have a positive impact on the knowledge sharing and subsequent competitive advantage of the firm. For example, if the PSF has prestigious clients then the professional may be committed to the organisation (given its reputation), to the client (given their brand) and to the profession (because they are able to develop cutting edge skills). The alignment between the various foci of commitment may therefore encourage the professional to obtain knowledge from and provide knowledge within the organisation. This prompts the following three hypotheses:

H2: Affective, normative and continuance employee commitment to the team is positively related to knowledge providing and obtaining;

H3: Affective, normative and continuance employee commitment to the profession is positively related to knowledge providing and obtaining;

H4: Affective, normative and continuance employee commitment to the client is positively related to knowledge providing and obtaining.

We provide a description of the case study organisation followed by a detailed discussion of the measures and methods which we used to test our hypotheses.

Methods

The survey data was collected from a global Professional Service Firm, (referred to as ProClient). This organisation has its headquarters in United Kingdom and employs

953 professionals. ProClient provides outsourced business services and consulting advice in HR field. Our questionnaire was sent to all ProClient employees as a part of the semi-annual company based survey in Spring 2011. Out of the 953 employees, 645 employees responded to the survey, a response rate of 59%. Due to missing data, mainly because of employees who do not work for clients, the sample size varies from 353 to 559 in the final analyses. Analysis of missing values revealed no specific pattern.

Measures

Commitment

This study distinguishes between affective, normative and continuance commitment, following the three component conceptualization developed over a series of studies by Meyer and Allen (1991). Gellatly, Meyer and Luchak (2006) have analysed the interactive effects of affective, normative and continuance commitment on focal (staying intentions) and discretionary (citizenship) behaviour. We have adopted the nine-item measure of the three commitment components which was developed in the Gellatly *et al.* (2006) study. This measure is based on the three items with the highest loadings on their respective commitment factor adapted from Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993).

As suggested by Klein *et al.* (2009) another approach to the measurement of the multiple foci of commitment may be taken, in adjusting the commitment items to the foci of commitment that is measured. This approach is followed by Stinglhamber *et al.* (2002), however this study measures commitment to customers rather than a client organisation. Following interviews with employees of ProClient, this study developed a set of commitment items specific for each of their foci of commitment based on both Gellatly *et al.* (2006) and Stinglhamber *et*

al. (2002). The items for affective and normative commitment are adapted from Gelattly *et al.* (2006). To benefit from the adjustment of the measurement per foci the ‘high sacrifice’ continuance commitment measure is adapted from Stinglhamber *et al.* (2002). The items are measured by a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree).

The exploratory factor analysis indicates that the three types of commitment (affective, normative and continuance) are separate constructs (See Appendix A and Table 1). A confirmatory factor analysis shows a good fit with the data ($X^2 = 1391.76$ (563), CFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA .05.)¹. All factor loadings of the indicators are statistically significant, $p < .001$, ranging from .66 to .96 (Mdn = .84). The complete measures of the three types and the four foci of commitment including factor loadings are displayed in Appendix A. Cronbach’s alpha for the three types and four foci of commitment are displayed in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is measured by an eight-item measure developed by Wilkesmann (2009). This measure consists of two parts, ‘providing knowledge’ and ‘obtaining knowledge’ and the wording of the items is slightly adjusted to the research setting. Confirmatory factor analysis show a sufficient fit with the data ($X^2 = 73.32$ (16), CFI = .95, TLI = .91, RMSEA .09.). All factor loadings of the indicators are statistically significant, $p < .001$, ranging from .42 to .86 (Mdn = .67). Cronbach’s alphas for the two factor model are for providing knowledge (3 items) $\alpha = .68.$, and for obtaining knowledge (5 items) $\alpha = .72$

¹

All commitment items (four foci, three types, 37 items in total) were included in the CFA, allowing for correlation between the similar worded items. Item-level inter-correlations are available from the authors upon request.

Control variables

We have the following control variables in regression analyses: organisation tenure, job role, location, employment group, and region. Tenure in the organisation, and the industry tenure are measured in years of service, which are presented as ordinal categories in the questionnaire. The categories are less than 6 months, 6 – 12 months, 1-2 years, 2-4 years, 4-6 years, 6-8 years, 8-10 years, and over 10 years. On average, employees have 1-2 years organisational tenure. Job role type refers to the type of job which the employees carry out, in this organisation it represents (1) Administrators/Coordinators (i.e. non-professionals), (2) Specialists (junior, professional staff responsible for delivering service that require expertise in a profession), (3) Principal Specialists (more senior professional staff responsible for delivering expert service), (4) Manager/Consultants (who typically manage a team of ten to twelve employees) and (5) Head of functions / Head of Leadership Team (who make up the senior management team). These categories were provided by the HR manager of the firm. Location represents the place where the employees perform their job. There are four categories: (1) Head / Regional office(s) (i.e. ProClient offices), (2) Client sites, (3) Service Centres (ProClient offices where employees perform back office functions for clients) and (4) Mobile (employees who move between ProClient offices). Employment group represents the focus of the services the employees provides. This control variable consists of four categories: (1) Central Services, (2) Client Services, (3) Professional Services, and (4) Shared Services. Since ProClient is a global organisation, we also have region as a control variables. The region variable consists of four groups: (1) United Kingdom, (2) Continental Europe, (3) Asia-Pacific, and (4) Americas. The inclusion of region and location did not reveal any effect on the regression analyses; therefore, we dropped this variable from the final

analyses. All control variables are entered into regression analyses as dummy variables. The category of each variable representing the largest number of respondents is appointed as the reference group which comprised: 'manager/consultant' for job role, 'client site' for the location, and 'client services' for the employment group. The details of all variables and the reference group specification are provided in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Descriptives

The correlations between the twelve dependent and the two independent variables are provided in Table 4. The correlations between the three types of commitment for the four foci of commitment and the two types of knowledge sharing are relatively strong and significant. The strongest relations are between normative commitment to the organisation and knowledge providing ($r = .50, p < .01$) and between affective commitment to the organisation, normative commitment to the team and obtaining knowledge (both $r = .35, p < .01$).

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Results

Regression analysis

In order to test our hypotheses we performed multiple regression analyses (See Table 5). The two regression models are predicted by a two stage model, model one predicts control variables and model two includes the independent variables; the three types and four foci of commitment. In the first model knowledge providing is predicted by three types of commitment to all foci (organisation, team, profession and client).

We find that all foci of commitment have a significant effect on organisational knowledge providing. Each foci of commitment affects knowledge providing via a

distinct type of commitment: affective commitment to the team and profession, and normative commitment to the organisation have a significant positive effect on knowledge providing. Continuance commitment to the client has a significant negative effect on knowledge providing. The model is able to predict 33% of the variance of knowledge providing (Standardized $R^2 = .33$).

In the second regression model, the same independent variables are found to predict knowledge obtaining. Team affective commitment has the strongest effect ($\beta = .21, p < .001$). The model is able to predict 21% of the variance of knowledge obtaining (Standardized $R^2 = .21$).

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Analysis and discussion

We have presented the analysis of our data on the influence of employee commitment to four foci on their knowledge sharing behaviour within the organisation (Hislop, 2003; Lin, 2007; Chan and Mauborgne, 1998). PSFs seek to maximize their bi-directional knowledge sharing as professionals need to share their know-how with colleagues but they also need to integrate the knowledge that they obtain into their own domain expertise thereby increasing what they know. This in turn builds the collective knowledge resources which we know are vital to PSF competitive advantage. The overall pattern of results is the same for both providing and obtaining knowledge. We therefore discuss these results together.

Organisation normative commitment predicts knowledge sharing behaviour thereby partially supporting Hypothesis 1 and existing research (Hislop, 2003). If employees are committed to the organisation they are more likely to share what they know with other colleagues. However, it is important to note that it is only the

normative aspect of the commitment, i.e. 'I feel I should' or 'it is the done thing' that drives the knowledge sharing behaviour. Employees feel obligated to share their knowledge, rather than because they have an emotional commitment to the organisation. This may be because they are required to share their knowledge in two ways. First, when joining the organisation new employees may be requested to share their knowledge of previous clients and competitors. Indeed, ProClient, felt they were very good at extracting information from new staff about their previous jobs as part of the on-boarding process. Second, the requirement to share knowledge may be an integral part of the performance management system, i.e., performance appraisals may have objectives for knowledge sharing behaviour which will be rewarded.

Affective team commitment predicts knowledge sharing behaviour thereby partially supporting Hypothesis 2. Field theory (Lewin, 1943) suggests that the team is the focal point for knowledge intensive work (Alvesson, 2004), it is where client solutions are generated and is the vehicle wherein which professionals conduct their daily activities. The emotional (affective) attachment to the team would therefore encourage the professional to share their knowledge with team members within their organisation. Furthermore, if employees respect their fellow team members, then they are more likely to want to learn from them and are willing to integrate new knowledge into what they already know. The emotional dimension of team commitment is therefore an effective managerial enabler of both obtaining and providing knowledge. Indeed, employees are likely to benefit in an immediate and practical way from both providing and obtaining knowledge from their peers with whom they interact with on a day-to-day basis.

Professional commitment and in particular the affective dimension predicts the sharing of professional knowledge, thereby partially supporting Hypothesis 3. This is

as to be expected given that if an employee is emotionally attached to their profession they are likely to want to share what they know with other professionals in their organisation. They will be eager to learn, obtain and develop professional skills and become more competent. It is ultimately in their career interest to engage in knowledge sharing. This also points to the nature of professional working, which has been likened to an optimal experience (Czikszentmihalyi & Czikszentmihalyi, 1988), wherein which the individual becomes immersed in enacting their profession. This quality of professional experience has a deep seated emotive (affective) aspect. It is therefore in the interest of the PSF to understand how, via their HRM practices, they could generate affective professional commitment in order to encourage organisational knowledge sharing.

Our findings indicate that Field Theory (Lewin, 1943) can be used to explain the relationship between the type of commitment and knowledge sharing behaviour within the professional's employing organisation. That is, if a particular foci of commitment is proximal, such as the team and the profession, then emotive aspects drive knowledge sharing behaviour. Here the professional is deeply engaged with her team and profession and they become the focal point of her knowledge sharing. However, when a foci is more distal, e.g. the organisation, then feelings of 'obligation' (i.e. normative commitment) are more likely to direct knowledge sharing behaviour. It also indicates that processes and practices, such as a formal performance management system with knowledge sharing objectives, will give rise to more normative aspects of commitment which in turn impact on the ability of the firm to generate and manage bi-directional knowledge sharing.

The abovementioned results show a positive relationship between the various types and foci of commitment and knowledge sharing. We find, however, that client

continuance commitment is negatively related to sharing knowledge. An employee who has acquired client specific knowledge, or indeed has become the client or industry expert, is less likely to share their know-how with others in the organisation. There are a variety of possible explanations for this relationship. First, professionals can 'go native' and become highly committed to their clients perhaps because they realise they can learn a great deal from them. When employees feel that their future with the organisation and client is secure and it is in their own interests to become the 'client expert' with no incentive to share their knowledge with their peers. Indeed, there may be a strong motive to develop and hoard unique knowledge, especially if this enhances rather their career prospects either with the PSF or the client.

The process of developing client specific knowledge, perhaps to enhance job security, also has an impact on the type/qualities of the knowledge that is developed. In many situations the client related knowledge becomes so specific (and tailored) that the knowledge cannot be shared, that is either provided or obtained, with other professionals in the employing organisation. That is, the knowledge is context specific and path-dependant and cannot easily be translated into other client context for the benefit of the firm. This clearly presents the firm with a strategic knowledge management challenge as it is in the PSF's interest to develop client specific knowledge in order to keep the client, however, if this knowledge becomes to context/client specific then the PSF cannot benefit from the synergistic effects of the knowledge.

Second, the employee stays with the client because they feel that the costs of switching jobs are too high and in some senses they feel as if they are forced to stay in their current job. Perhaps the job market does not provide enough suitable jobs or because changing jobs may mean a reduction in pay. However, their response is to

reduce the amount of work they do to the absolute minimum, so additional, discretionary activities, such as knowledge sharing, do not take place. This is possible in ProClient because knowledge sharing is not part of employees' normal duties and engaging in this behaviour would require them to make an extra effort, such as seeking out other colleagues, to share their knowledge.

Third, professionals in client service PSFs value their employability which is often characterised by head-hunting from the client organisation or its competitors. The 'talent war' is therefore not just between PSFs in a particular industry but also between the PSF and its client industries. It is therefore in the interest of employees in these client service organisations to develop client and industry specific knowledge. There is a great incentive to obtain knowledge from the client in, for example, the investment banking industry, to learn precisely how the client operates, what its strategic challenges are and which solutions are generated in response to these. Once the professional has obtained this detailed knowledge and they want to be valued by their clients, they are likely to want to share their knowledge with their client rather than their employing organisation. It is therefore the commitment to continue to be an expert within a client industry (continuance commitment) that encourages the professional knowledge worker to obtain and provide knowledge to the client.

This has serious implications for the PSF as it threatens the ability of the firm to retain valuable talent. That is, if the client, or the client's competitors, makes an attractive employment offer then the professional is likely to leave the firm which presents both a professional and industry knowledge loss. Each of these explanatory factors indicates that employees should be moved reasonably frequently between client accounts for optimal knowledge sharing within the organisation.

Conclusions and Implications

Our findings clearly show that the various types and foci of employee commitment are related to organisational knowledge sharing behaviour. Firstly, affective commitment to the team and the profession is positively related to knowledge sharing. Here the emotive engagement with team-and-professional working (Becker, 2009) explains the willingness to share knowledge. Secondly, a feeling of obligation (i.e. normative commitment) to the organisation, is a more important influence on knowledge sharing. Thirdly, continuance commitment to the client is negatively related to knowledge sharing. Employees are less likely to share their knowledge with organisational colleagues when they seek to become client and industry experts and want to continue to work with a particular client. In addition they will have developed highly specific client knowledge which may be difficult to share with other professionals in the organisation.

The paper therefore makes several distinctive contributions to theory. Firstly, it points to the need to understand not only organisational commitment but, given the prominence of cross-boundary work, we need to understand the impact of multiple foci of commitment. Second, we highlight the need to delayer the commitment construct to include affective, normative and continuance commitment if we are to understand which types of HRM practice can influence knowledge sharing. Finally, the inclusion of bi-directional knowledge sharing illustrates that each process responds in similar ways to commitment.

These findings have important implications for theory and for practice. Our analysis has contributed to the limited but growing research into the links between employee commitment and knowledge sharing (Hislop, 2003; Lin, 2007; Chan and Mauborgne, 1998). In particular we have demonstrated that we need to focus on the

various types (Meyer and Allen, 1991), and foci of employee commitment if we are to understand its influences on both knowledge obtaining and providing in cross-boundary environments. In fact it is the distinctive pattern of influence between both the type and foci of commitment on knowledge sharing which has been the most distinctive finding of this research. We have shown that client commitment, especially client continuance commitment has a negative relationship with knowledge sharing, whereas the influence of commitment to the other foci is positive. Indeed, it seems that continuance commitment to the client is quite unlike commitment to the other foci. This also indicates that the personal control which professionals have over their knowledge sharing is magnified in situations where there are multiple foci of commitment. This opens up a rich seam of future research into the drivers and consequences of client commitment on employee attitudes and behaviours.

Employees face distinctive knowledge sharing dilemmas in this environment; they may feel pulled in different directions by the various parties with whom they interact and consequently respond by sharing or hoarding their knowledge accordingly. The current measure of knowledge sharing is limited in representing these dynamics as it is focused only on knowledge obtained from and provided to the organisation. It would be useful to understand knowledge sharing in relation to each of the foci, i.e. profession, team and client which may provide insight into the multifocality of knowledge sharing, as employees may obtain from one party and provide to another.

In summary, we have been able to illustrate not just how commitment to various foci influences knowledge sharing but we have also been able to illustrate how each type of commitment (affective, normative and continuance) to each foci impacts on the knowledge workers' behaviour thereby providing a fine-grained insight into the

links between HRM practices, which support each type of commitment, and optimal knowledge sharing within the organisation. We have shown that for foci which are proximal (i.e. team and profession) HRM practices that stimulate emotive commitment would enable knowledge sharing whereas more distal foci, such as the organisation, will rely on normative HRM practices, for example performance management systems to support knowledge sharing behaviour. Finally, we have indicated that organisations will be faced with strategic knowledge management challenges when developing client specific knowledge which needs to be balanced with the ability to leverage this knowledge within the firm.

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TABLES

TABLE 1 *Chronbach's alpha's for commitment variables*

<i>Type of commitment</i>	Organisation	Profession	Team	Client
Affective	0.93	0.92	0.9	0.91
Normative	0.87	0.88	0.87	0.85
Continuance	0.86	0.91	0.85	0.88

TABLE 2: *Exploratory factor analysis*

Item	Factor	
	1	2
1. I am happy to share my specific professional skills with others so that they can learn them.	0.803	0.216
2. I support others' efforts to gain work experience.	0.867	0.144
3. Others learn a lot by watching me on the job	0.618	0.056
4. I learn a lot by observing others doing their job.	0.115	0.782
5. I turn to others for advice regarding specific professional skills so that I learn them.	0.485	0.516
6. Others support my efforts to gain work experience.	0.472	0.435
7. I learn a lot by asking others in my own team.	0.048	0.848
8. I learn a lot by asking others in the whole of the organisation	0.212	0.568

* Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

TABLE 3 *Control variables, frequencies and reference groups*

Control variables		Frequency	Reference
Employment Group	Central Services (e.g. People Capital, Finance, Legal, Commercial, etc.)	58	
	Global Client Service Centres	195	
	Business Unit	199	X
	Professional Services (e.g. Resourcing Communications, Assessment & Selection, Talent)	107	
Role Type	Administrator-coordinator	109	
	Specialist	166	X
	Principal specialist	119	
	Manager-consultant	118	
	Head of client services or director	38	
	Leadership Team	9	
Location	Client site	233	X
	Global client services	228	
	Head-Regional Office	64	
	Mobile	34	
Region	United Kingdom	319	X
	Europe Excluding UK	162	
	Asia-Pacific	71	
	America's	7	

TABLE 4 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	N	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Organisation</i>															
1. Affective commitment	531	4.52	1.43	1											
2. Normative commitment	537	4.51	1.4	0.79**	1										
3. Continuance commitment	531	3.80	1.42	0.56**	0.65**	1									
<i>Team</i>															
4. Affective commitment	548	5.26	1.29	0.50**	0.44**	0.31**	1								
5. Normative commitment	544	5.03	1.34	0.54**	0.65**	0.45**	0.75**	1							
6. Continuance commitment	545	4.64	1.16	0.14**	0.18**	0.19**	0.18**	0.20**	1						
<i>Profession</i>															
7. Affective commitment	509	4.88	1.37	0.40**	0.39**	0.26**	0.31**	0.33**	-0.02	1					
8. Normative commitment	514	4.38	1.46	0.41**	0.52**	0.34**	0.25**	0.41**	0.1	0.75**	1				
9. Continuance commitment	517	3.91	1.54	0.26**	0.31**	0.30**	0.12**	0.18**	0.08	0.56**	0.63**	1			
<i>Client</i>															
10. Affective commitment	462	4.60	1.44	0.26**	0.29**	0.20**	0.33**	0.38**	0.04	0.33**	0.36**	0.26**	1		
11. Normative commitment	460	4.37	1.38	0.30**	0.46**	0.36**	0.32**	0.50**	0.11*	0.30**	0.48**	0.32**	0.79**	1	
12. Continuance commitment	461	2.73	1.27	0.14**	0.24**	0.31**	0.14**	0.24**	0.19**	0.20**	0.39**	0.41**	0.39**	0.50**	1
<i>Knowledge sharing</i>															
13. Providing	488	5.58	0.95	0.47**	0.50**	0.32**	0.43**	0.40**	0.15**	0.24**	0.27**	0.18**	0.15**	0.22**	0.0
14. Obtaining	481	5.74	0.62	0.35**	0.36**	0.22**	0.35**	0.35**	0.12**	0.31**	0.25**	0.18**	0.17**	0.19**	0.0

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 5 Regression analysis with Knowledge sharing obtaining and providing

	Knowledge sharing providing			Knowledge sharing providing		
	β	F	R ²	β	F	R ²
<i>Controls</i>						
Professional service	-0.86	6.4**	0.05		5.28**	0.0322
Global Client Service Centre	0.37			*.109		
Tenure organisation	*-.096			-0.034		
Principal Specialist	-0.04					
<i>Independent variables</i>						
Team affective commitment	** .250	22.74***	0.31	** .212	18.32***	0.221
Organisation normative commitment	** .306			** .203		
Client continuance commitment	** -.143			** -.123		
Profession affective commitment	** .117			** .190		
N	395			390		
a. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01, ***p<0.001						

Organisation

Affective commitment

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation .84
2. I feel like part of the family at my organisation .92
3. This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me .86

Normative Commitment

4. I would not leave my organisation right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it .87
5. This organisation deserves my loyalty .82
6. I owe a great deal to my organisation .80

'High sacrifice' Continuance Commitment

7. I would not leave this organisation because of what I would stand to lose .88
8. For me personally, the costs of leaving this organisation would be far greater than the benefits .83
9. I continue to work for this organisation because I don't believe another organisation could offer me the benefits I have here .75

Profession

Affective commitment:

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my profession .92
2. I feel like part of the family at my profession .94
3. This profession has a great deal of personal meaning for me .83

Normative Commitment

4. I would not leave my profession right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it .88
5. This profession deserves my loyalty .87
6. I owe a great deal to my profession .79

Continuance Commitment

7. I cannot imagine leaving my current occupation given that my training was a substantial investment for me .93
8. I would not leave my current occupation because I devoted too much energy to master it .80
9. Training for my occupation demanded so much personal investment that I couldn't imagine making a change .90

Team (work group)

Affective commitment:

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my work group .84
2. I feel like part of the family at my work group .92
3. This work group has a great deal of personal meaning for me .86

Normative Commitment

4. I would not leave my work group right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it .82

5. This work group deserves my loyalty .82
6. I owe a great deal to my work group .86

Continuance Commitment

7. Changing work groups would require me to adjust to new work habits .84
8. Changing work groups would require me to get used to a new organisation of work .88
9. If I changed work groups, I would have to re-adapt to new group norms .74
10. Changing work groups would require a great deal of effort on my part to adapt to a new way of working .66

Client

Affective commitment:

1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my client .88
2. I feel like part of the family at my client .93
3. This client has a great deal of personal meaning for me .82

Normative Commitment

4. I would not leave my client right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in the client organisation .85
5. This client deserves my loyalty .76
6. I owe a great deal to my client .83

Continuance Commitment

7. I have acquired so much knowledge concerning the expectations of my client that it would not be possible for me to change employment .80
8. I am so specialized in the services I provide to my client that I could not imagine doing anything else .94
9. It would be difficult for me, given the skills that I have acquired, to re-invest in working with another client .83