

Trust and betrayal in Knowledge Management

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Abstract: Positivist accounts of the KM literature neglect the diverse and socially created nature of knowledge and organizational relations. However, more critical accounts stress a less epidermal approach to the interpretation of KM phenomena and emphasize the contextual and situated nature of KM phenomena. The paper builds on this critique and proposes an alternative approach to trust that allows for the occurrence of betrayal. Here, trust is defined as the faith and belief that one has in their co-workers, the company and its system of ideas. The paper draws on two multinational telecommunications companies that employ similar KM initiatives and reflect polar opposites, i.e. a case of trust and a case of betrayal. Focusing on the individual, as the primary agent of knowledge transactions, the research findings propose that in the presence of organizational and interpersonal mismatches, employees will experience varying levels of trust that will have a significant impact on knowledge-sharing behavior. The egalitarian and unrestricted view associated with 'sharing' was contested in both cases.

Introduction

Positivist accounts of the KM literature neglect the diverse and socially created nature of knowledge and organizational relations. In other words, concepts that can only exist in relation to a context (relational/ processual perspective) are reduced to discrete objects/ assets that can be managed (structural perspective). Such conceptual crudity is manifested in the number of 'recipes' and typologies that promise to align existing organizational elements with the 'new philosophy' of knowledge sharing. However, more critical accounts stress a less epidermal approach to the interpretation of KM phenomena. Critical accounts of the KM literature build on a more relational approach and emphasize the situatedness and socially constructed nature of knowledge. The review of the literature to follow aims at briefly discussing the unitarist and relational approaches to knowledge, KM and trust

and arguing that a more relational approach allows for the possible occurrence of 'betrayal' in organizational contexts. Focusing on the individual, as the primary agent of knowledge transactions, the paper proposes that in the presence of 'betrayals', organizational members will experience varying levels of trust that will have a significant impact on knowledge-sharing behavior.

Knowledge, Knowledge Management and trust

Probably the most contested term in the KM literature is the definition and the nature of knowledge. A number of typologies aim at fundamentally taking forth the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge initiated by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and argue that the former is of increased importance in modern business. Building on this distinction Blackler (1995) proposes five images of knowledge, one explicit (encoded knowledge) and four tacit (embodied, embedded, embrained, encultured knowledge). Similarly, Spender (1996) introduces another variable - individual/social knowledge - which recombines tacit and explicit knowledge to give another aspect to knowledge. However, building on Polanyi's view on tacit knowledge, Brown and Duguid (2001) argue that there can be hardly any distinction between the tacitness and explicitness of knowledge since they reflect two dimensions, rather than two distinguishable types of knowledge. In other words, all knowledge has a tacit and explicit dimension and attempting to distinguish is similar to destroying what is knowledge. Moreover, it is argued that inherent in any typology is a 'formistic' type of thinking that assumes that knowledge is discrete, separate and stable (Tsoukas, 1996). However, Newell et al. (2002) avoid the use of typologies and emphasize that knowledge is better described as dynamic and rooted in practice, action and social relations. This account adopts a processual/ relational approach to knowledge, and emphasizes that practices of knowing are equally important as knowledge and suggests that 'knowledge exists through the interplay between the individual and the collective level' (ibid: 8), that is it is socially constructed. The emphasis on the social construction and a embedded nature of knowledge is commonly found in notions of knowledge that emphasize its distributed and jointly owned nature (Tsoukas, 1996; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) where, even though parts of knowledge are independently held by individuals, it is the 'wider' knowledge that is of interest in organizations. The combined emphasis on process and relations as facilitators of knowledge emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge in organizational contexts and, subsequently, allows for the possible occurrence of malpractice and

relations that may involve uncertainties and politics that may evolve through the interaction of the individual and collective level.

In an attempt to define the concept, many positivist accounts have indeed approached KM as a process by referring to such terms as creating, sustaining, sharing, renewing, enhancing, understanding, managing, building, and sharing (Davenport and Volpel: 2001; Sveiby, 2001; Wiig, 1997; Allea). However, such accounts are also preoccupied with strategies of implementing KM in organizations and claim 'optimum' techniques for the management of the KM process. In much of this literature, technological means that aim to facilitate the knowledge transactions have been 'glorified' and company employees (frequently knowledge workers) are considered as a variable that can be almost effortlessly managed and organized. The underlying assumption is a rational and unitarist perspective of the organization and workplace relationships that suggests that organizations are rational entities and that workplace relationships adhere to common goals. Here, knowledge, organizational members, structure, networks, culture, strategies, and technology are viewed as pieces of a puzzle that if correctly assembled will reveal an image of a 'successful' organizational reality that, as any puzzle image, is static and unique in nature (see Collison & Parcell, 2001; Sveiby, 2001; Davenport et al., 1998; Davenport & Volpel, 2001; Klaila, 2000; Abou-Zeid, 2002; Meso & Smith, 2000; April, 2002; Gao et al., 2002; Soliman & Spooner, 2000; Rubenstein-Montano et al., 2001; Junnarkar & Brown, 1997).

Critical empirical work, however, has contested the emphasis on technological advancements and their deterministic role in the success of KM initiatives. Findings indicate that technological means are frequently marginalized when sharing knowledge which, in turn, is facilitated by the use of face-to-face communication, i.e. primarily verbal interaction (Robertson, 1999; Moss, 1999). Subsequently, it has been argued that the human factor, i.e. employees are equally, if not more, important in the KM process (Swan et al., 2000). The authors suggest that the reluctance to share knowledge and the lack of an appropriate reward system that will recognize such efforts may prove to be significant obstacles. Moreover, it has been shown that issues of power and departmental strength may evolve in communities and networks and may, in turn, disable knowledge sharing processes (Patriotta, 1999; McKinlay, 2002). The above empirical work on the role of employees suggests that there is no one best way of implementing KM initiatives in organizations and that KM phenomena should be better explored in context, indicating that each context will be pervaded by

context-specific parameters that will, in turn, shape both the implementation and the final outcome of KM. In other words, it is argued that KM phenomena are situated/embedded in organizational contexts and will be thus influenced by them (Swan, 1999). Again, the possible occurrence of malpractice and relations that may involve uncertainties and politics that may evolve through the interaction of the individual and collective level enter the KM debate.

In an attempt to deal with the above considerations of the role of employees, much of the positivist literature on KM uncritically employs the concept of trust. Issues of power and people are frequently 'swept under the carpet' of cultures of trust and openness (see also Sveiby & Simons, 2002; Hauschild et al., 2001; Richert, 1999; Banks, 1999; Cook, 1999; Bently & Yoong, 2000). Here, trust is considered to be the 'conjunctive tissue' between technological developments and the knowledge sharers and upon its demonstration it is assumed that employees will full-heartedly share their knowledge. The concept is often reduced to a discrete object/ asset that can be effortlessly managed, like people. Newell et al. (2002) argue that the term is rationally employed without any philosophical scrutiny, that is independent of context and as an inherent human trait that all individuals will demonstrate once indicated by management. Under this light, what trust entails has not been defined and, therefore, the need to borrow from other literature, namely literature on organizational studies, arises.

Literature on trust suggests that, even though trust can be considered as a fundamentally 'good thing', within organizational contexts individuals may often be reluctant to trust one another. Kipnis (1996) argues that feelings of uncertainty will be reduced with others with whom one has reliably interacted in the past, but that having to trust another still implies that one is in an uncertain situation, i.e. one that involves risk, and is, hence, vulnerable (see also Newell et al, 2002). He argues that trust implies one's dependency on others and involves risk, i.e. one's outcomes are contingent on the 'good or bad' behavior of another and there is the possibility of negative experiences. Therefore, trust between two individuals entails a range of potentially adverse circumstances that all together undermine the potential to trust that is commonly assumed in uncritical KM literature.

However, both positivist and critical literature also fail to acknowledge that if we are to talk about trust then the concept should not be limited only to the dyadic relationship among two individuals or communities of individuals, since that implies that the sole reason why individuals may chose not to share their knowledge is

because they do not trust their colleagues. The possibility that, as members of the wider organizational context, individuals and their levels of trust will be influenced by more than their interpersonal relationships has been acknowledged (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003, Brockner and Seigel, 1996; Herriot et al., 1998). Therefore we adopt a broad definition of trust and define it as the faith and belief that one has in their co-workers and the company and its system of ideas (Oxford Thesaurus). Based on this, an organizational context or interpersonal relationship that reduces the possibility of uncertainties and risk can be considered as a trustworthy context or relationship. In contrast, an organizational context or interpersonal relationship that fosters possible uncertainties and risk is more likely to 'betray' its members. Taking into consideration the multiplicity of organizational contexts, relationships and individuals it can be assumed that trust will hardly be exhibited by all organizational members in every organizational context that employs KM initiatives, as frequently implied in most of the KM literature. The level of trust or betrayal that an individual will experience can be better thought of as contingent on the degree of trustworthiness and uncertainty that one will perceive in an interpersonal relationship and organizational context.

Methodology

The paper builds on the above critique on knowledge, KM initiatives and trust and develops a theoretical framework that acknowledges the possible existence of multiple realities, interests, goals and choices from organizational members, i.e. the political role of knowledge sharers, as well as the situated nature of their actions and feelings. Political/ pluralist and relational perspectives on the organization and workplace relations are thus considered appropriate for any KM investigation. The underlying assumption of the adopted framework is that reality is subjective and multiple as seen by knowledge sharers that reflects the possibility of diverse responses to KM in organizational contexts. The approach allows for the examination of KM on a theoretical basis that questions rational management thought and introduces elements of the everyday working experience of knowledge sharers.

In accordance with the above theoretical framework, the research model focused on the relationship between KM initiatives and end users, i.e. individual employees, in the organizational context. Among others, questions were asked

1. on how useful the respondents thought the KM initiatives were in the conduct of their everyday responsibilities, what means the employees preferred, the extent to

which knowledge sharing activities take place in the company, the importance of knowledge sharing and the problems,

2. on the extent to which their employment relationship satisfied their personal expectations. The aim here was to investigate the political role of the respondents within the company, i.e. what were the possible incompatibilities between them and the company, and,
3. on how they felt about sharing their knowledge and expertise. The aim here was to reveal the reasons why respondents shared their knowledge and expertise or not.

The aim was to reveal respondents' perceptions about both KM initiatives and their working reality, so as to reveal the context in which initiatives were embedded. The primary concern of the research model was to maintain a degree of flexibility, in terms of the definitions of the concepts in hand, so that it allowed for an open and evolving stance throughout the research, as well as the in-depth investigation of political and situated phenomena.

The participating companies were selected where there was sufficient indication that specific KM initiatives were being undertaken, even if this was not how the company chose to refer to it. The selection was based on comprehensive discussion with a 'liaison' person (commonly the HR manager or a senior manager) on the appropriateness of the company under consideration. The discussion was based on commonly established KM initiatives (identified through the literature) and allowed for the emergence of 'own-brand' initiatives. Suitable individual participants were then selected in discussion with the liaison (i.e. purposive sampling). All participants were knowledge workers, i.e. 'both consumers and producers of organizational knowledge and understanding' (McKinlay, 2002). Their selection was based on the satisfaction of the following three criteria as set out by the research protocol that defined their appropriateness for inclusion in the study.

- Criterion 1: the sample consists of employees whose job responsibilities involve decision-making, problem identification and solution creation, and planning to a considerable extent since these are activities that involve the creation, synthesis and use of knowledge. In other words, such activities indicate the consumption and production of organizational knowledge and understanding and are in agreement with the above definition of knowledge workers. Moreover, such activities indicate that the employee has a certain degree of discretion over their work that is in agreement with the concept of 'operational autonomy' that

knowledge workers are considered to enjoy (Scarborough et al., 1999).

- Criterion 2: the sample consists of employees who are ‘connected’ with the KM initiative, i.e. they contribute in some way in the flow of knowledge within and/or beyond the company. There was hardly any reason to interview employees who were not involved in the KM initiatives undertaken by the company whilst researching the relationship between the KM initiatives and the individuals involved.
- Criterion 3: the sample consists of employees who have work experience in the company (but not necessarily in the same position) for three years or more. The aim of this criterion was to interview employees who have a relatively long-established relationship with the organization, so that they would be able to adequately comment on the usefulness of initiatives.

According to this line of thinking, respondents held middle and top management positions.

On average the interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and half. Verbatim transcription was carried out to familiarize the researcher with the data (Klimoski, 1991). The need for systematic analysis of the data determined the use of qualitative research software and, therefore, NVIVO was adopted. In this case, it was apparent that extensive attention was needed in order to guarantee that the thematic categories in which the data would fall would reflect and help answer the research questions. Therefore, a number of trials on node structures were performed until the final one was established. NVIVO products are thus totally consistent with the thematic categories (research model) that the study investigates.

This paper discusses a total of 22 interviews with employees from two multinational telecommunications companies that employed an almost identical range of KM initiatives. The initiatives involved both synchronous and asynchronous information and communication technologies (ICTs) and aimed at facilitating communication both in and beyond the boundaries of each company (Table 1).

<i>CellTec KM initiatives</i>	<i>MobiTec KM initiatives</i>
Intranet (Intranet pages)	Intranet
Corporate databases	Corporate databases
Voice over IP applications (Net meeting)	Voice over IP applications (Net meeting & Video conferencing)
Email/ Group mailing lists	Email

Table 1: CellTec and MobTec KM initiatives

Both companies were vendors for telecommunications infrastructure, that is they offered network implementation and maintenance services to operators. All respondents were involved in at some part of the process of implementing, maintaining and/ or selling telecommunication network services and, hence, the two companies were comparable in terms of their KM initiatives, their operations and the responsibilities of the employees interviewed.

Discussion of findings

The implementation, maintenance and/ or sale of telecommunication network solutions entailed the undertaking of projects and the delivery of hi-tech solutions that satisfied specific customer requirements. All employees had both managerial and technical responsibilities, even though, the levels of managerial work (e.g. forecasting, planning, controlling and supervising resources, e.g. financial, time, people, costs) and technical work (i.e. engineering) varied.

'I am a Project Manager. My job is to make sure that the products that we sell are implemented in the best possible way for both our clients and us. That is, to maintain the set of standards of quality for the customer and keep costs within a frame for us. And to do all this is a reasonable time frame'

The need for knowledge, i.e. an 'amalgam' of technical information and technical and managerial expertise, was explicitly expressed, in order to satisfy idiosyncratic customer needs and company goals in one of the fastest developing and most competitive of industries. Participation in projects entailed the contribution of the technical information and technical and managerial expertise that each project member brought with them. Indeed, these were the reasons why individuals were selected to organize and participate in projects. However, effective participation also entailed the continuous 'update' of information and knowledge. Existing and newly acquired information and knowledge were continuously intertwined to produce innovative solutions.

Facilitating vs. non-facilitating contexts: work organization

In CellTec, respondents revealed that project work was facilitated and uncertainties were reduced by the organizational context in a number of ways. The KM initiatives tended to reduce the likelihood of not being able to access the technical information needed in project work and expanded the reach of each

employee on a global scale. More specifically, the corporate databases provided respondents with a large base of technical information while via the email respondents were able to promptly ask for information that could not be found in the databases and transfer information both within and between projects. Both asynchronous (group mailing lists) and synchronous (Net meeting and discussion forums) communication facilitated the company network which linked groups of employees with similar interests with one another and the headquarters. The network allowed each individual in every project for 'global reach' in terms of technical information and technical and managerial expertise.

'The company gives you the tools, the forums, the user groups, the net meetings...everything. [...] And if you can't find something, you can access the right contact person via the intranet pages of the specific group and talk to them. We have global reach [...].'

Moreover, on a local level, a multilayered company structure tended to reduce the likelihood of a shortage of technical and strategic expertise. The horizontal line of hierarchy of the matrix structure of the company provided a pool of engineers, with technical expertise at multiple levels and areas of interest, who provided their expertise on a 'come and go' basis according to the unique needs of each project. The vertical line of hierarchy brought in the projects, colleagues who were responsible for accounts, i.e. major clients, and had knowledge and understanding of the business reality (i.e. strategic expertise).

Furthermore, the company culture tended to reduce the likelihood of counter-productive behavior, while simultaneously allowing for autonomy. A culture of respect to the individual employee allocated almost limitless autonomy to all which, in turn, allowed respondents a) to form project groups by attracting the colleagues with the expertise they considered vital for each project and b) to use KM and other initiatives at their own discretion. The culture also indicated respect to each others' work and, in this context, professionalism surpassed antagonism, and knowledge transfers extensively occurred.

'It is simply up to you, on a personal level, to search, download, look and study so that you are updated. - 'The company respects you. It respects you, the conditions that you work in, it will try to improve your working conditions and will give you whatever you need so that you feel that you are a member of the team.'

Therefore, by providing the means and the channels to obtain information and expertise in an environment that emphasized respect and condemned antagonism, the company managed to reduce uncertainties that may possibly rise from the

embeddedness of the project team in the organizational context. In this case the organizational context contributed towards the efficiency of the project team that could focus on dealing with the inherently risky nature of project work itself (PMI Standards Committee, 1996). The favourable outcomes that consistently flew through the interaction of the individual project member and the organizational context (e.g. project members knew that one way or another they would find the information or expertise they needed) fostered the building of a trusting relationship (Brockner and Siegel, 1996; Brockner et al., 1997, Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) between project members and their organizational context, enhanced this interaction and, subsequently, the information and knowledge transfers within and beyond the project team.

In MobTec, however, project work was not supported as in CellTec. Even though the respondents identified a need for the KM initiatives and their potential usefulness to facilitate project work, the initiatives were marginally used. It was mentioned that the initiatives lacked consistency and continuity and, in turn, traditional forms of communication, i.e. face-to-face communication and meetings, were preferred.

'The company has a huge knowledge repository that can be very powerful but unfortunately these initiatives are not practiced. The company can't apply them.'

'Honestly speaking some of these initiatives I have never heard of before. [...]. There should be consistency and continuity. I don't know to what extent there is consistency among these initiatives and I will say it again, this is not the case only in MobTec. [...] And there is also no continuity.'

Respondents revealed the presence of bureaucratic processes, the rigid demarcation between the multiple company departments (divisional structure), and the lack of horizontal communication. There was hardly any mention of networking. Respondents revealed that exhausting efforts were required in order to obtain technical and managerial expertise and expressed their discontent with having to solve problems repeatedly.

'Sometimes I feel as if I am in the 60s and that is because of the bureaucracy and the procedures that drive you crazy because you can't do your job. It is not possible that we fill in reports that were made in the 70s when we are in 2005.'

'It is tragic that for three months you try to convince them that you have a problem and after you have escalated the problem they then tell you that we know

that we have this problem and we are trying to solve it or, what is more, that since last month we have a solution. And you are in the dark.'

'There is no horizontal communication among departments. That's a huge mistake. We all work in similar areas and we have the similar responsibilities but unfortunately there is no communication between us.'

'From the headquarters in [names country] we never get answers. They agree that there is a problem but nobody gets an answer.'

'Problems are solved over and over again even on practical matters.'

In combination the lack of communication channels that could facilitate the provision of solutions and a strong culture of security and autonomy that was granted to all induced and allowed for lethargic behaviour (i.e. a lack of motivation, willingness to work hard and incentive). In turn, everyday practices were inhibited and the work of more conscientious employees became a frustrating task.

It has to do with the mentality of each employee. How they view their job, what they want to do, if they are interested to work...because I think that in this company the majority is not working. Or at least they are not working, as they should. [...] Others work and others are just waiting for their pensions'

In contrast to CellTec, then, MobTec provided the means but not the channels, an organizational structure that limited communication to the restrained boundaries of each department, a culture that inhibited active behaviour and failed to reduce the uncertainties that may have possibly risen from the embeddedness of the project team in the organizational context. In this case, the organizational context run counter to the efficiency of the project team. In other words, through their interaction with the organizational context, project members were betrayed. The unfavorable outcomes that consistently flew through the interaction of the individual project member and the organizational context, limited this interaction and, subsequently, the information and knowledge transfers within and beyond the project team.

Facilitating vs. non-facilitating contexts: personal aspirations

The way that each company facilitated the personal aspirations of its members confirms the above distinction of the nature of the employment relationship in the two companies. In CellTec the majority of respondents revealed that job opportunities within the company were good and that the company employed consistent and transparent channels of communication in terms of allowing its employees to express their career aspirations and opinions in terms of the company, the ways of working etc.

'There are processes through which you can express your aspirations for your career and they are taken seriously under consideration [...] there are 'ears' that listen. It is not an inhumane company in the sense that there is the inclination to listen. Maybe not every aspiration is satisfy. But the company tries to satisfy aspirations.'

In MobTec, the majority of the respondents revealed that job opportunities within the company were poor and that the company played an inconspicuous part when it came to employee evaluations and promotions.

'There is no application of the knowledge available. Maybe this is because there are no job opportunities and people stop being productive.'

'No...there isn't a systematic way and it clearly depends on the discretion of some people whether what you will say will be taken seriously or not. It depends on luck. I don't think that in general there is some systematic way through which one can express their goals and ambitions.'

Anticipating that an outcome will be favorable has been closely related to levels of trust (Brockner and Siegel, 1996). Under this light, the fact that CellTecians anticipated favorable outcomes in terms of their career development within the company, in essence, highlights their belief that the company has both the intention and the means to fulfill such requests. In other words they trusted the company to fulfill their aspirations. On the contrary, however, the fact that MobTecians anticipated unfavorable job opportunities highlights their disbelief that the company had both the intention and the means to fulfill such aspirations. In other words they expected that in the future the company would betray them.

Facilitating vs. non-facilitating contexts: interests and conditions

In the two cases reviewed here knowledge workers exchanged their knowledge in varying degrees and in different contexts as shown. However, in CellTec, the expectation that something would be gained by transferring one's knowledge proved to be the primary reason why respondents extensively transmitted their knowledge. In other words, knowledge transfers were hardly egalitarian or unrestricted in nature. In contrast, in MobTec, 'frail' knowledge exchanges induced apathy and self-centeredness since frequently little was gained from engaging in such knowledge dealings.

Findings suggest that knowledge transferring is an inherently political activity, in the sense that knowledge workers transferred information and expertise for a reason. There was an inherent interest in achieving 'something' from transferring

information and expertise, a possible trade-off, whether that involved one-on-one discussions (common in MobTec), group discussions (common in CellTec) or searching through databases (common in both companies but to a lesser degree in MobTec). Common reasons were to obtain a piece of information, to network, to get the job done, to learn, to maintain or develop positive work relationships and/or because of formal responsibility to transfer knowledge (e.g. reporting, manager-subordinate relationships). Therefore, findings suggest that knowledge is 'traded' rather than 'shared', i.e. there are specific reasons for which one will engage in any type of knowledge transaction. In turn, the egalitarian nature associated with 'sharing' is removed and in its place findings suggest that knowledge transactions involve a purpose defined by an actor.

'No, no, no...I demand to take as well because we are working here. I don't love my colleagues in the way that I love my partner. This is work. And I make it clear...when I give, I expect you to give in return. There's no other way.'

'I share because the knowledge I share, bounces back and I also benefit from this knowledge loop.'

Moreover, the respondents set personal conditions based on which they either chose to engage in knowledge transactions with colleagues or not, as the case frequently was. These personally-initiated conditions involved the character/personality of the receiver (e.g. being honest) and what the latter would do with the knowledge or information obtained (e.g. properly interpret and use it). Thus, knowledge 'filtering' can best be described as a process where the transmitter evaluates the knowledge to be transferred in relation to the receiver and decides whether to transfer the knowledge or not. Each respondent gave a multivariate account of the type of the individual that they chose to collaborate and why, that reflects the multiplicity and variety of individual preference. The majority of respondents stated that in cases where their personal conditions had not been met, interaction was limited, if not ceased completely. Therefore, the unrestricted nature associated with 'sharing' is removed and in its place findings suggest that knowledge transactions involve conditions defined by actors.

'But there is also information that you don't say. Don't forget that this is a business environment and things may be heard where they shouldn't. So you can't say everything...you have to have filters...especially for issues such as prices, policies on a business level...we can't say everything...we can't share everything. We can't. Some things are secret and that's it.'

'Up to certain extent knowledge sharing from me to them is affected. I stop

sharing when the other person doesn't understand anything and doesn't respect what I am telling them. If I see that the other person has no respect and even though I am making an effort to help them they do not pay attention or they do not respect my help, and also thinks that it is my obligation to help them I stop sharing and I don't move on.'

Conclusion

The paper builds on critical KM accounts that emphasize that KM is fundamentally situated in the organizational contexts that it will be employed. In CellTec, where the organizational context facilitated the work and the personal aspirations of its employees, they trusted organizational practices and the proposed KM initiatives and incorporated the latter in the execution of their everyday responsibilities. In contrast, in MobTec, where the organizational context betrayed its employees by 'threatening' the efficient execution of their work and satisfaction of their personal aspirations, the respondents exhibited apathy and self-centeredness and marginalized organizational practices and the proposed KM initiatives. In other words, the perceptions of respondents concerning the separate KM initiatives were influenced in both cases by existing attitudes and beliefs towards the organizational context.

The findings further suggest that the KM initiatives adopted the qualities of the organizational context and were perceived as any other element of each context. The adoption of existing organizational qualities suggests that KM as a management approach has no moral character independent of context, i.e. the nature of KM initiatives alone do not possess a positive or negative value for organizational practices, and they will only do so once merged with equivalent organizational contexts. Subsequently, the existence of an 'optimum' way or strategy of implementing KM initiatives, which is challenged by critical accounts, is similarly challenged and it is proposed that an emphasis on KM alone or ways or strategies that claim to bring KM benefits neglect the neutrality of KM, i.e. that once implemented it will adopt existing organizational qualities and will be viewed as part of the context, as perceived by employees. In this context, the paper argues that trust is not contingent upon the existence of KM initiatives or the requests of management. The findings suggest that trust is contingent upon the perceptions of organizational members of organizational elements which may equally induce feelings of betrayal, as they did in MobTec. The research findings suggest that the occurrence of betrayal

is as possible as the occurrence of trust in organizational contexts that employ KM initiatives.

Moreover, the findings challenge the unrestrained manner of 'sharing' that is commonly found in unitarist approaches. The findings suggest that, as a management approach, KM lacks a transparent moral character, in the sense that, in principle, KM does not define who gains from knowledge transactions and what. In both cases, findings suggest that once the execution of project work required respondents to act upon knowledge, their actions were pervaded by their individual purposes and intentions, i.e. respondents needed a reason to exchange their knowledge and set conditions that if not met frequently disrupted knowledge dealings. It is suggested that, in cases of both trust and betrayal, the activity of exchanging knowledge carries an inherent political nature, i.e. agents attribute value to the knowledge they will potentially exchange and, in turn, have the power to enhance, moderate and seize such activities. Under this light, KM and such initiatives seem to be vulnerable to the personal preferences of their executors, rather than determining their actions.

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