



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

Master Degree Project in International Business and Trade

Challenges of Knowledge Sharing when Facing a Generation Shift

The case of Axalta

Hanna Enocson and Lilian Wretenfeldt

Supervisor: Harald Dolles
Master Degree Project No. 2016:8
Graduate School

ABSTRACT

Today firms' competitive advantage is determined by how efficient they can share knowledge internally. The knowledge management is indeed a well-researched field, however not many studies has been conducted linked to a generation shift and the challenges that may arise due to this. The companies that are facing a generation shift risks losing many years of experience that has been build up within the individual and has led to industry expertise. Therefore, firms need to secure this knowledge by providing a good framework for the process of knowledge sharing, leading to the purpose of this study, which is to understand what challenges of knowledge sharing organizations might face internally when managing a generation shift. The analysis and findings are based upon a framework that takes into account the entire knowledge process from creation, storage, distribution and application, as well as factors influencing the process such as motivations, barriers and generation shift. It was discovered that the impact on an organization's knowledge sharing when facing a generation shift is large for companies that have great generational differences. Firms face large challenges with securing knowledge sharing due to the time and cost that overlapping processes request. As the older generation does not use IT tools to the same extent as the younger there is a problem of transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge electronically. In addition, there is a need for firms facing a generation shift to create a good organizational structure in order to improve the prerequisites to knowledge sharing. To fulfill the purpose and get insights from a real life case, Axalta Coatings System was chosen as a case company due to its generational differences and future challenges related to the generation shift.

Keywords: Knowledge management, knowledge sharing, generation shift

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, we would like to give thanks to our supervisor Harald Dolles, who has given us direction and provided us with feedback. We also want to thank The International Business institution for supporting us along the way.

We appreciate and would like to give thanks to the employees at Axalta Scandinavia, with whom we conducted plenty of interviews that has served as a foundation in our research. A special thanks goes out to Hannes Vedin who has been our contact person during the thesis and gave us valuable guidelines.

Lastly, we would like to thank our families and friends for the encouragement and support they have showed us.

Gothenburg May 2016

Hanna Enocson & Lilian Wretenfeldt

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Background.....	5
1.2 Problem Discussion.....	6
1.3 Purpose and Research Question.....	7
1.4 Delimitations.....	8
1.5 Disposition	9
2. Theoretical Framework	10
2.1 The Knowledge Concept	10
2.2 Knowledge Creation.....	12
2.2.1 <i>The SECI-model</i>	12
2.3 Knowledge Storage and Distribution	14
2.4 Knowledge Application	15
2.5 Barriers of Knowledge Sharing.....	17
2.6 Motivational Factors influencing Knowledge sharing	19
2.7 Generation Shift Impact on Knowledge Sharing	21
2.8 The Conceptual Model	22
3. Methodology	24
3.1 Research Approach	25
3.2 Research Design	26
3.2.1 <i>Research Unit</i>	26
3.2.2 <i>Data Collection</i>	26
3.2.3 <i>Interview Process</i>	28
3.2.4 <i>Analysis of data</i>	30
3.3 Criteria for Evaluating the Case Study	30
4. Empirical Findings: The Case of Axalta	32
4.1 Company Structure of Axalta.....	32
4.1.1 <i>Knowledge Sharing at Axalta</i>	33
4.2 The Concept of Knowledge	34
4.2 Knowledge Creation.....	37
4.3 Knowledge Storage and Distribution	42
4.4 Knowledge Application	48
4.5 Motivation and Barriers of Knowledge Sharing	49
5. Analysis	52
5.1 The Knowledge Concept	53
5.2 Knowledge Creation.....	54
5.3 Knowledge Storage and Distribution	57
5.4 Knowledge Application	59
5.5 Motivational Factors.....	60
5.6 Barriers.....	64
5.7 Revised Conceptual Model of the Knowledge Sharing Process	65
6. Conclusions	67

6.1 Findings and Theoretical Contributions	67
6.2 Recommendations	69
6.3 Suggestions for Future Research	71
References	73
Appendix 1	77
Appendix 2	79

1. Introduction

This chapter will introduce the background to the chosen topic knowledge sharing and the importance in connection to a generation shift. A problem discussion is derived based on the background and then the purpose and research question will be stated in order to guide the thesis. Finally, the delimitations will be brought up and a disposition of the thesis will be shown in the last part.

1.1 Background

Globalization has indeed changed the conditions and settings for firms operating around the globe. There are now plenty of advantages to benefit from, but competition has also increased in line with globalization. Continuous organizational learning and performance are important in today's society in order to remain competitive. Therefore, companies need to have internal transfer capabilities in knowledge. It was in the other half of the 1990s that knowledge transfer arose as one important management issue and since then researchers have stressed the importance of knowledge as an essential tool to gain competitive advantage (Grant, 1996; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Szulanski, 1996).

Kogut & Zander (1993) were among the first authors who put emphasize towards the role of knowledge as a basis in the creation of successful organization. Continuing on a knowledge based approach, Grant (1996) stresses the meaning of knowledge as one of the most important resources for firms to obtain sustainable competitive advantage. He introduced the knowledge based theory as an outgrowth of the resource based theory, with the aim of underlining the importance of knowledge transferability, as knowledge transferability within organizations could minimize the time span for learning. Gupta & Govindarajan (2000) on the other hand, claim that it is firms' ability to transfer and exploit knowledge more effectively and efficiently in the specific context that is crucial. By including the communication theory, Gupta & Govindarajan (2000) argue that knowledge flows within organizations occur in multiple directions across multiple dimensions. This takes us further to Foss & Pedersen (2004), who mention the importance for organizations to share knowledge through networks. Before knowledge was seen as a product that could be packaged

and transferred (Kogut & Zander, 1993), but in the late 1990s Foss & Pedersen (2004) describe that there was a transition from market failure approach of internalization theory and transaction cost theory towards a knowledge based theory. As a result, large international organizations are now viewed more as knowledge sharing networks, and it is crucial for organizations to have continuous knowledge flows within the company as well as between firms to maintain competitive in the global market. According to Szulanski (1996) transfer of knowledge or transfer of best practice can be seen as replication of internal practices that are performed and a practice refers to the organization's routine use of knowledge. Thus, transfer of information and best practices and can be seen as an exchange of knowledge between a source and a receiver. The large benefits of efficient knowledge transfer cannot be underestimated, however the effectiveness varies considerably throughout organizations and is sometimes not easy as shown in for example IBM that some years ago had great difficulty in transferring hardware design processes between business units (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Szulanski, 1996).

1.2 Problem Discussion

The concept of knowledge is broad and has been a widely covered topic ever since it arose as a management issue in the 1990s. Before, knowledge sharing was more important to firms in the service industry as well as firms that were applying high amounts of research and development. However, due to the increasing globalization followed by increasing competition, knowledge sharing is now important in all industries in order for firms to stay competitive (Grant, 1996; Szulanski, 1996). As it is agreed that the transferring of knowledge is important within organizations, this has been brought into light in connection to external challenges, which firms are facing today. According to the Swedish Public Employment Service (2010), organizations in Europe as well as in Sweden are now facing large challenges as people with years of accumulated knowledge will reach a retirement age. The generation shift in the coming years will strike differently against different industries and regions in Sweden. It is estimated that between 2010 and 2025, 37 per cent will retire in Sweden, a number which is 255 000 more than the last 15 years (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2010). This argument put forward is confirmed by another research conducted by

Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, claiming that companies in Sweden are facing the largest retirement ever in Swedish history due to large baby booms in the 1940s and 1950s. The people that will retire have during their professional life developed knowledge that many organizations are dependent on (Karlsson, 2010). Therefore, it is of great importance that this knowledge is transferred to newly recruits in the organization in order for the firm to maintain its competitiveness in the market (Grant, 1996; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Szulanski, 1996).

The existing literature in knowledge management has mainly focused on pointing out the importance that knowledge has for the competitive advantage and how to create knowledge within the organization, but less attention has been paid to how firms practically should work with knowledge sharing between the generations (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Grant, 1996; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Szulanski, 1996). When a company is facing a generation shift, it means that employees with a lot of experience and knowledge are about to leave, whereas a younger generation will take over. It is therefore a risk that the competitiveness decreases, which raises the importance of knowledge sharing in connection to a generation shift (Karlsson, 2010). However, it can also be good that the knowledge base gets broader and mixed with a younger generation's knowledge, as different backgrounds and increased competition can trigger the motivation to learn more and be more open to change. Also, the older generation is not as used to technological systems used in connection to knowledge sharing as the young generation (Gursoy et al., 2008). As the requirements of knowledge in business have increased in line with the development of goods and services, it is important to continuously increase the knowledge level, whereupon knowledge sharing is an essential tool for obtaining competitive advantage (Grant, 1996).

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

Following the problem discussion, the purpose of this study is to contribute theoretically to the knowledge management domain by gaining a deeper insight and understanding of what challenges of knowledge sharing organizations might face internally when managing a generation shift. The importance of successful knowledge

sharing becomes even more prevalent within a company facing an evident generation shift as firms risk losing many years of accumulated experience. Therefore, the goal is also to propose how firms practically can improve processes and practices. This leads to the following research question:

What is the impact on an organization's knowledge sharing when facing a generation shift?

In order to accomplish the purpose, the American company Axalta will be examined, as the company will face a large generation shift in the near future. As the coatings industry is very niched, many people stay within the industry for a long time, which makes the generation shift prevalent for a company like Axalta. It is reported that the industry that Axalta is active in is an industry that will face among the largest retirements until 2025 (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2010). The generations that will retire within the coming five years at Axalta represent 20 per cent of the employees in Scandinavia, which makes this an important and interesting case (Vedin, 2016).

1.4 Delimitations

The focus in this study will be on the Refinish part (injury painting), which is Axalta's main market. We will therefore exclude powder coating, supply chain, industrial operations in Axalta Västervik, and original painting for large companies and trains from the report when studying knowledge sharing. The focus will therefore be on investigating internal knowledge sharing within marketing and sales at Axalta in Scandinavia. As the three brands within Axalta Scandinavia stand-alone and communicate different value propositions to the customer, but have similar profiles, it is interesting to investigate knowledge sharing within and between these brands. Further, as we will limit the investigation to sales/marketing, including the Market and Business Support (MBS) unit, we will exclude functions including production, HR, finance and IT. As regards knowledge, the focus will mainly be on sharing knowledge about customers, as Axalta operates in an industry that is very much based on the establishment of long term relationships.

1.5 Disposition

This thesis will be divided into six different chapters, including the first chapter where the study is introduced as well as an introduction to the case company, delimitations and the research questions. The second chapter provides a basis of theories that are connected to the knowledge and generation shift topic. The purpose is to create a framework for understanding the basis of the knowledge concept, the process of knowledge sharing and the differences between generations. In the end a conceptual model is presented, which will be used as a guiding model for the analysis as well as the interview questions. The third chapter presents and discusses different methods and approaches applied when conducting the research of the case study. There will be explanations of how the interviews were conducted and also a discussion about the reliability and validity of the research. The fourth chapter presents the collected data from the interviews in order to create a comprehensive foundation for the analysis. Thus, Axalta's challenges with the knowledge sharing and generation shift will be investigated more in detail and presented here. In the fifth chapter, an analysis will be conducted comparing the conceptual model with the empirical findings and linking them, by presenting a revised model. In the last and sixth chapter, the research questions will be answered and the findings will be presented. Theoretical contributions, managerial application as well as future research will also be put forward.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter theories will be presented in order to fully understand the broad concept of knowledge and generational differences. After that, the process of knowledge sharing will be presented through useful models, ending with a conceptual framework that summarizes the theories.

2.1 The Knowledge Concept

Knowledge is a multifaceted concept with plenty of different definitions and meanings (Grant, 1996). In the management literature there are many terms, different discussions and distinctions of types of knowledge such as knowing how and knowing about. The concept of knowledge is very broad as it can either have a philosophical meaning or refer to a subject of science (Jonsson, 2012). Some authors distinguish knowledge and information, while others do not (Grant, 1996). A common saying is that knowledge is rooted into an organization where it is shaped by its members, tools and tasks (Argote & Ingram 2000; Levitt & March, 1988). In this thesis the focus will be put on one of the dimensions of how knowledge is created, which is the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, where knowing how is equal to tacit knowledge and knowing about is equal to explicit knowledge (Grant, 1996). Polanyi (1958) was the first one to write about tacit knowledge, followed by plenty of authors developing and differentiating between tacit and explicit knowledge, within knowledge management literature (Cook & Brown, 1999; Grant, 1996; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Shin et al., 2001; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001).

Explicit or codified knowledge can be revealed by its ease of communication and is explained as something concrete or digital, captured in for example libraries or databases (Grant, 1996; Nonaka, 1994). This kind of knowledge is formal and systematic and can therefore always be explained in words or numbers, thus easily transferred and shared (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is hard to formalize since it indwells in the human mind and therefore hard to express or transmit. It is of a cognitive character with an individual's image of reality and beliefs, rooted in experience (Nonaka, 1994). Since tacit knowledge is more

difficult to put into words, thus it is more challenging to transfer and share it. Tacit knowledge also requires good relationship between people since it based on trust (Jonsson, 2012).

When touching upon the concept of knowledge, the discussion about what is individual and organizational knowledge is often made. Some authors' mean that organizational knowledge is the norms and values within the firm, but other authors mean that it is the sum of all individual's knowledge (Newell et al., 2009; Nonaka, 1994). However, others argue that the knowledge resides within an individual but is developed in the social context of the organization (Jonsson, 2012). Thus, the knowledge is rooted into an organization and shaped by its member's tools and tasks. By taking the standpoint that the knowledge exist within an individual, social interaction becomes important. It is further argued that especially tacit knowledge is embedded in individuals and therefore employees need to be coordinated to share this knowledge, something that will be discussed in the next sections (Argote & Ingram, 2000).

There has also been a debate whether knowledge is a cognitive state, a process or an object, but it is the knowledge as a process that dominates the literature of knowledge management (Shin et al., 2001). The knowledge sharing as a process can be described with a 4 step value chain starting with creation, storage, distribution and lastly application as seen in figure 1. Within each step there are plenty of frameworks from authors that use different terminology of this process. This model will be used as a basis for the conceptual model, as it is a good model summing up the process of knowledge sharing. Even though the model is divided into a four step process, the different stages can coincide and be present at the same time. Thus, the distinction of the stages is rather obscure, but is still a good foundation to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge.

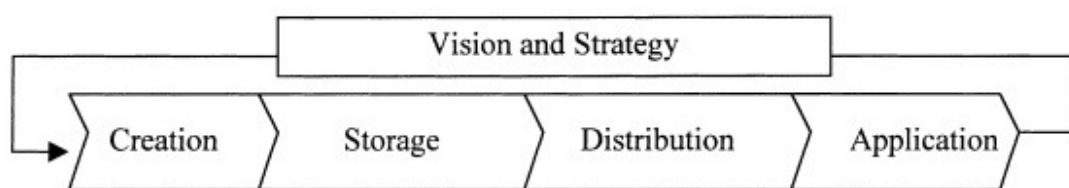


Figure 1. Knowledge Management Value Chain. Source: Shin et al., (2001)

2.2 Knowledge Creation

2.2.1 The SECI-model

In the first stage of the knowledge sharing process, there are different ways of explaining how knowledge is created. In this thesis, the focus will be derived from the contribution that Nonaka (1994) has put forward and thus with the assumption that knowledge is created through conversations between tacit and explicit knowledge. Nonaka (1994) developed a model containing four different patterns of interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, which is socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. Through this model it is possible to convert existing knowledge to new knowledge, making it a cornerstone in knowledge transfer theory. It describes how individual knowledge forms organizational knowledge as seen in Figure 2.

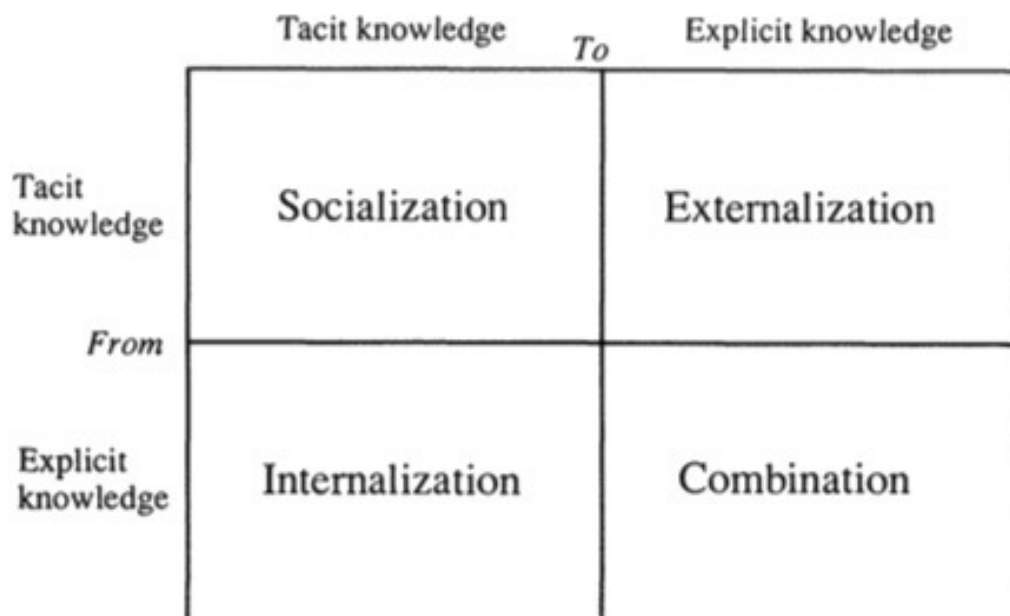


Figure 2. Modes of the Knowledge Creation. Source: Nonaka (1994).

Socialization - Tacit to tacit knowledge. Through social interactions one can acquire knowledge. It is not just by language but also through observation, meetings, imitation and practice. The key to acquire tacit knowledge is experience, which

inhabits an individual and this can be achieved by for example having or being an apprentice or that employees from different units or levels work together.

Externalization - Tacit to explicit knowledge. In this stage the knowledge is codified and spoken because people have managed to make the tacit knowledge to explicit. Since individuals have been able to codify the tacit knowledge, they are able to express it in writing or words and by this way it can be passed on.

Combination - Explicit to explicit knowledge. This involves different combination of explicit knowledge in order to create new explicit knowledge and can be from other co-workers in for example meetings and telephone conversations. At this stage, different databases and IT tools play important roles since co-workers can use this in order to share their explicit knowledge.

Internalization - Explicit to tacit knowledge. At this stage it is important to internalize the knowledge, thus making it part of the culture and way of working. By learning by doing the explicit knowledge can become tacit (Nonaka, 1994).

By having joint activities and experiences, knowledge is created through socialization, combination, externalization and internalization. This process is described as a spiral of knowledge since the knowledge will be extended throughout the organization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Jonsson (2012) argues that this model is good for describing how knowledge is created, but it can also be used for understanding knowledge transfer. Further, the management of the firm needs to see knowledge as a process that includes all employees, and it has more to do with managing employees than managing knowledge. Therefore, firms need to identify what sort of knowledge that needs to be transferred for the knowledge transfer to succeed (Jonsson, 2012). As it is argued by Jonsson (2012), the SECI-model is good to use when describing how knowledge is created it will therefore be included in the first box in the knowledge creation section as can be seen in the conceptual model in figure 3.

Since the tacit knowledge is hard to codify and translate into explicit knowledge the SECI-model is a good foundation in managing knowledge creation and transfer. It describes how to deal with this issues giving examples of different actions a firm can put emphasize on such as using IT tools to share the explicit knowledge. Touching upon the concept of IT tools, the stored knowledge becomes important. The next phase in the model deals with the storage and distribution of knowledge.

2.3 Knowledge Storage and Distribution

A significant component related to knowledge management is what to do with the knowledge after it has been created (Argote & Ingram, 2000). Therefore, the storage of knowledge is important to highlight and firms can secure the knowledge within a firm by using different IT tools, program or systems in order to store it (Jonsson, 2012; Jonsson & Tell, 2013). However, due to the difficulties in storing tacit knowledge in databases, the focus has shifted. Since knowledge resides within an individual and a great amount of this knowledge is tacit knowledge, the focus is more on how to share it through social interactions (as the SECI-model), to create trust and to motivate employees to share knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Styrhe, 2003). Thus, an increasing attention is therefore put on the process of knowledge transfer rather than the static approach of storing it.

In latter years, knowledge has become one of the most important resources for firms to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage. However, the advantage lies in if a firm can transfer the knowledge more efficient than its competitor due to minimized time span for learning (Grant, 1996; Gupta & Govidarajan, 2000; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Minbeava, 2007; Szulanski, 1996). One attempt to define knowledge transfer is done by Argote & Ingram (2000) who say that knowledge transfer in organizations is the process through which one unit (group, department or division) is affected by the experience of another. In regards of knowledge, transferability is important between firms, but most important within the firm, as is the focus in this study. Knowledge transfer requires a two-part process, both the actual transmission of knowledge, which is the sending of it and the receipt of knowledge, which is the extent to which the receiving unit acquires and utilizes knowledge. There need to be a potential for

aggregation in order for the knowledge transferred to be efficient. However, it takes time to spread knowledge and if the transferability is not made efficiently firms will not gain competitive advantage from knowledge transfers. The efficiency of knowledge aggregation can be enhanced when knowledge is expressed in a common language where individuals share understandings and knowledge that, at the time is unfamiliar for them. Examples of such common languages can be statistics or different best practices (Grant, 1996). This is essential for firms from a knowledge perspective, as increased common knowledge leads to an increase of knowledge sharing (Grant, 1996). Since the focus from knowledge storage has shifted and the focus is more on the transfer of knowledge, the authors of this thesis agreed that the two concepts will be in the same box, thus functioning as the same stage in the process of knowledge see figure 1 and 3.

As focus has shifted more to the sharing of knowledge rather than the storage of it, this thesis will also focus more on the knowledge sharing as well. It was learnt that if creating a common language in terms of the same beliefs and understanding, knowledge can be transferred more efficiently. This leads to the next step in the model and process of knowledge sharing where application becomes important. Even though knowledge is passed on to a person in the firm, the sharing becomes only efficient if this person will be able to applicate the knowledge and actually use it.

2.4 Knowledge Application

Knowledge application is when knowledge is available and is being used in order to function as essential guideline in decision-making (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2014). It makes it possible for firms to decrease time and costs when responding to technological changes by utilizing current knowledge and technology, and generates it into new products and processes (Song et al., 2005). When introducing the knowledge-based approach, Grant (1996) put emphasize on organizations' roles in knowledge application rather than knowledge creation, arguing that firms should function as institutions for integrating specialized knowledge. This process has been facilitated due to advances in IT. As it has become easier to share knowledge, in

particular explicit knowledge, IT has shown to have a positive impact on knowledge application (Grant, 1996; Song et al., 2005). It is, however, harder to codify tacit knowledge than explicit knowledge, and if tacit knowledge cannot be codified and can only be studied during the application process the knowledge transfer will be inefficient and costly (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992). Therefore, Grant (1996) presents four coordination mechanisms that organizations should put focus on in order to facilitate knowledge application and integrate specialized knowledge:

- Rules and directives; provide tools for integrating knowledge into practices efficiently. Tacit knowledge can thereby be converted into readily explicit knowledge. This includes coordination processes such as schedules, policies, and information and communication systems.
- Sequencing; effective in production processes in order to prevent overlapping. Sequencing is, therefore, more efficient for products that consists of several components rather than continuous processes.
- Routines; support interaction activities between individuals, such as verbal communication, rules and directives.
- Group problem solving and decision-making; the most efficient type of practices when it comes to complex problem solving, compared to the previous coordination mechanisms. This is costlier but the previous mechanisms need to be supplemented by personal interactions through group activities, such as meetings.

The effectiveness of coordination mechanisms depends on the existence of common knowledge, including common language, shared meaning, commonality of specialized knowledge; other forms of symbolic communication, and recognition of individual knowledge domains. It is also essential for firms to implement the right coordination mechanisms suggested by Martinez & Jarillo (1989), in order to overcome the barriers associated with knowledge flows. Managers must also learn how to codify and transfer tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, while promoting the absorption ability within the organization (Kogut & Zander, 1993). The absorption ability is very much a relevant aspect when studying knowledge application as the integration of new and external knowledge is essential for firms' innovative

capabilities (Grant, 1996; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Knowledge application represents the last box in the knowledge transfer process and under this box goes the different tools in order for knowledge application to take place such as rules and directives, sequencing, routines and group problem solving and decision making as seen in figure 3.

It is learnt that there are different coordination mechanisms in order to increase the knowledge application among employees in a company. By establishing rules and directives, sequencing, routines and group problem solving and decision making firms can better applicate knowledge as well as overcoming different barriers to knowledge sharing. This leads to the discussion of different barriers of knowledge sharing that will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.5 Barriers of Knowledge Sharing

There are some barriers to knowledge transfer and replication and the internal knowledge transfer between subsidiaries is determined by the knowledge stocks, their motivational disposition to share and gain the knowledge, richness of transmission channels and the capacity to absorb incoming knowledge (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Szulanski, 1996). The greater the value of a subsidiary's knowledge stock is, the more attractive the questioned subsidiary tends to be. Another determinant is the motivational disposition of the source and receiver unit, meaning that subsidiaries that possess valuable knowledge might not voluntarily share it as this is seen as a mean to gain power. It is therefore essential for headquarters to establish coordination mechanisms to link subsidiaries to the rest of the global network to facilitate communication and knowledge transfers. Even though knowledge might be transferred within the network, the subsidiary receiving the knowledge might have barriers to absorb it due to unwillingness or lack of understanding deriving from "not invented here" (NIH) syndrome (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Szulanski, 1996). However, Szulanski (1996) identify the three most important barriers of knowledge sharing such as arduous relationships between source and recipient, lack of absorptive capacity and causal ambiguity:

Arduous relationships

Since knowledge transfer occurs between people it requires good relationships between the source unit and recipient unit, especially if it has tacit components. However, if there is no intimacy and instead a distant relationship, this may appear as a barrier of knowledge transfer.

Absorptive Capacity

There may also be a lack of absorptive capacity at the recipient of knowledge, which means that a person's ability to take in new knowledge has to do with their preexisting stock of knowledge. The absorptive capacity needs to be present, both for the ability and motivation of employees and to convert this information into useful internal resources.

Causal Ambiguity

When it is hard to replicate a capability in a new setting, causal ambiguity is present. This can be due to the tacitness of the knowledge but also due to human complex skills (Szulanski, 1996).

Another factor that can be a barrier towards knowledge sharing is related to a fear based perspective, meaning that employees see knowledge as power and fear the risk of replacement if they share valuable knowledge. In addition, this can be more prevalent when considering organizations as whole compared to the own team, as employees may feel a stronger willingness to share knowledge within the own team (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). When studying electronic knowledge repository (EKR) usage in a social exchange context, Kankanhalli et al. (2005) also show that the loss of knowledge power can be a barrier towards knowledge sharing. The study also shows that the effort of codifying knowledge is a possible barrier, which is a factor that increases in line with the technological development of sharing knowledge electronically.

In order to overcome the barriers of knowledge transfer, companies need to invest in resources to create closer relationships between organizational units, develop learning capabilities of organizational units and try to understand practices and communicate

them. These barriers are factors that can hinder the effect of motivational factors that also affects the knowledge sharing process. Therefore, the box of barriers is placed in the conceptual model as seen in figure 3 and an arrow is pointing into the motivational factors that will be explained in the next chapter.

2.6 Motivational Factors influencing Knowledge sharing

To overcome challenges associated with knowledge sharing, it is important for managers to find a common knowledge in order to motivate employees to share knowledge (Grant, 1996). Gupta & Govindarajan (2000) claim that the level of knowledge sharing within organizations mainly depends on the value of the knowledge stocks and the willingness of employees to share and absorb it. Managers should therefore strive to motivate the employees to share knowledge and thus increase the incentives for sharing knowledge compared to maintaining the power of knowledge for themselves.

Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) introduced the theory of reasoned action (TRA), which acknowledge that personal attitudes have the main impacts on human behaviors. The theory has got a lot of attention throughout knowledge management research and has been widely used to explain behavioral intentions and actual behaviors. However, Bock et al. (2005) argue that little attention has been put on motivational impacts on employees' knowledge sharing intentions. The authors, therefore, incorporate motivational impacts into the TRA theory, where underlying factors influencing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are considered.

Motivation is not a unitary phenomenon, as people are motivated by different amounts of motivation (level), and different types of motivation (orientation). Distinctions between extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors have been discussed by several authors regarding motivational impacts on knowledge sharing. Deci & Ryan (2000) takes into account to several different distinctions and present combined definitions and describe the conditions that foster each. Intrinsically motivated behavior can be characterized by individuals' natural motivations to learn and explore without any extraneous incentives due to personal satisfaction and tasks being

interesting. Such motivations can either exist within individuals or in the relation between individuals or activities. In contrast to intrinsic motivational factors, which are motivated by the satisfaction of the activity itself, extrinsically motivated behavior can be characterized by the instrumental value of the outcome of the activity. Thus, the challenging part with motivational factors is that not everyone is motivated by the same activities, and everyone is not motivated by any specific task, which increases the importance of determining what motivational factors employees are motivated by and how these can be improved (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, Szulanski (1996) argues that motivational forces depend on two main factors: employee's personal belief structures and institutional structures. Bock et al. (2005) is in line with Szulanski (1996), as their study also shows that behaviors are very much dependent on attitudes and the organizational climate. Bock et al. (2005) and Deci & Ryan (1987) raise the importance of intra-relationships within organizations, whereupon Deci & Ryan mean that authority-relationships have a large impact on behavior. If a person is lower in a power perspective and is being controlled, that person will much likely share knowledge in order to satisfy the needs of the person with more power. They mean that factors like rewards, charisma, force, position, and expertise to a large extent affect knowledge sharing (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

However, Bock et al. (2005) argue that extrinsic motivations through reward systems not necessarily result in positive effects on knowledge sharing. They mean that individuals' attitudes towards knowledge sharing are very much based on reciprocal relationships. The organizational climate, based on collectivism rather than individualism also has a large impact on knowledge sharing. Therefore, they suggest that corporations should aim for implementing a transparent organizational environment in order to facilitate knowledge sharing. Their study shows that aspects such as fairness, innovativeness, and relationships have a great influence on the creation of norms of knowledge sharing, and individuals' intention to participate in knowledge sharing (Bock et al., 2005).

Another important aspect in knowledge sharing processes is trust. Ardichvili et al. (2003) show in their study that different types of trust can decrease knowledge sharing barriers, such as fear of criticism, or of misleading others. They distinguish

between two types of trust: knowledge based trust and institution-based trust. Knowledge based trust is based on social interactions, which means that closer relationships will result in increased easiness of predicting actions and what to expect from the other person, which thereby increase the level of trust and knowledge sharing activities. This type of trust can be promoted by face-to-face interactions and informal groups; such as study groups or courses. The other type of trust, institution-based trust, is based on the organization having clear norms that knowledge sharing is a moral obligation and that the organization trusts its employees. The authors mean that a mix between the two types of trust is the best way to improve knowledge sharing processes. The organization needs to communicate clear standards and norms to its employees, while at the same time provide several opportunities for employees to participate in face-to-face practices through group work (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Lee & Choi (2003) further present a model including some enablers of knowledge creation processes, whereupon trust is one of the prominent factors. Other enablers are collaboration, learning, centralization, formalization, and information technology support. It is therefore important for managers to apply a mix of coordination mechanisms in an organization comprised of different strategies and different cultures and administrative heritage (Martinez & Jarillo, 1989).

The motivational factors can affect the knowledge sharing process and are therefore implemented in the conceptual model and can be seen in figure 3. However, since this thesis has a focus on knowledge sharing in connection to a generation shift, it is of interest to learn more about the different generations and what characterizes them. This will be investigated in the next chapter.

2.7 Generation Shift Impact on Knowledge Sharing

A study conducted by Sanaei et al. (2013) shows that generational characteristics have a great impact on knowledge sharing even though employees were unaware of the influence. The Baby Boomers that were born between the early 1940s and mid 1960 can be characterized by being independent, respect hierarchy, resistant to change, loyal and attached to organizations and have a difficulty with learning new things and multitasking. In contrast, Generation X-ers that were born between 1965 and 1979

tend to be somewhat skeptical to authority and lack loyalty, but are open to change values and are good multitaskers (Becton et al., 2014; Gursoy et al., 2008). Generation X-ers are grown up with using technology, while Baby Boomers are not very used to handle technology and find e-mail or voice mail impersonal, and instead prefer face-to-face communication. As the generations have different characteristics it is important to have a strategy for coping with multigenerational differences and issues. By introducing adequate trainings Generation X-ers will gain opportunities to improve their knowledge and learn from older employees with more experience, while the Baby Boomers can feel more appreciated and valued (Gursoy et al., 2008). Thus, strategies that take account to generational differences can be implemented in organizations in order to improve knowledge sharing between the generations and to limit the barriers. These aspects will therefore be considered in the conceptual model presented in the upcoming sector.

2.8 The Conceptual Model

Based on the theories in the theoretical framework above, a conceptual model has been developed and presented in figure 3, based on the model of Shin et al. (2001). This model will be used as a basis for the analysis when comparing the empirical data to the theories, but also as a basis for the interview guide. The conceptual model is divided into three stages, instead of four as in the original model. The different stages are first knowledge creation, storage and distribution and lastly application. Further, there are external factors that affect the process; such as barriers, generation shift and motivation. In this thesis knowledge sharing will be viewed as a process starting with how knowledge is created, then how it is stored, how it is distributed (shared) and lastly how to applicate knowledge. However, sometimes the three different stages can coincide and it is very common that knowledge creation become knowledge storage and distribution rather fast.

The model starts off with the first stage, Knowledge *Creation*, which is explained by the SECI-model on how knowledge is created through socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (Nonaka, 1994). In this stage it is assumed that knowledge resides within the individual that is part of an organization, thus it

becomes organizational knowledge (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Jonsson, 2012). Also, knowledge has two characters such as the explicit knowledge and the tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The next stage is *Storage and Distribution*, which in the original model where two different stages that has now been merged into one. The reason to this is that storage and distribution can coincide at the same time so they might as well be in the same stage. This can be exemplified by the storage of knowledge in common IT systems, as the knowledge is directly distributed to the participants in the system (Jonsson, 2012; Jonsson & Tell, 2013). In latter years greater emphasis has been put on knowledge distribution rather than storage due to the constant process and importance of sharing the knowledge faster and more efficient than competitors.

This final stage is *Application*, which is a stage where knowledge is available and is being used in order to function as an essential tool in decision-making. This stage is mainly determined by four coordination mechanisms (Rules and Directives, Routines, Sequencing, Group problem solving and decision-making), that Grant (1996) presents in order for organizations to facilitate knowledge application and integrate specialized knowledge.

The three stages are the base for the knowledge sharing process, but this can in turn be affected by Barriers, Generation Shift and Motivation. The motivational factors can improve and facilitate the knowledge process, whereas the barriers can hamper the effect of motivational factors. These external factors depend to a large extent on the values and competences of the employees and their willingness and motivation to share and absorb knowledge.

The Process of Knowledge Sharing

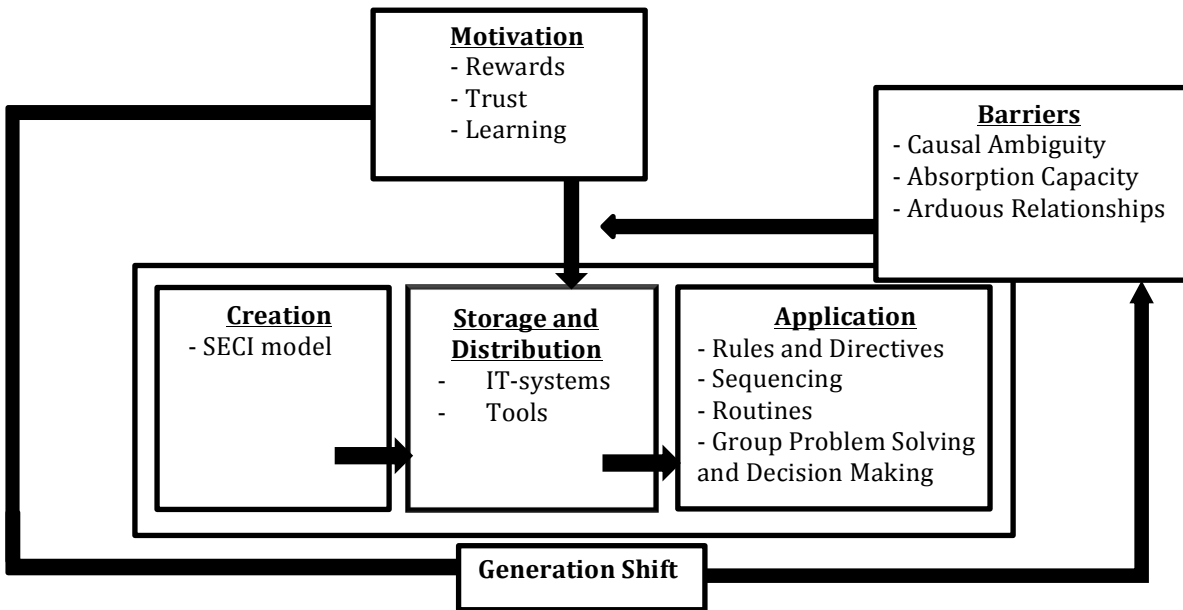


Figure 3. The Conceptual Model. Source: Created by authors.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used for the thesis more in detail. The research approach will be presented and argued for such as the data collection method. Then the interview process will be outlined and lastly how quality through the research process was ensured.

3.1 Research Approach

This paper aims at studying the challenges an organization face in knowledge sharing due to an upcoming generation shift. As shown in the theoretical framework knowledge management is a widely covered topic by many researchers, however, not many researches have been put forward on knowledge sharing in connection to a generation shift. Out of different methods a qualitative approach was chosen since we wanted to get a deeper understanding of people's interpretations of experiences in a situation. The primary source for collecting and analyzing data in qualitative studies is, in contrast to quantitative studies, done through analyzing documents and executes interviews and observations (Merriam, 2009). By applying a qualitative research a possibility to interpret reality in different ways and to question other people's way of looking at this reality was provided (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Furthermore, as it is argued that no research is purely deductive and inductive, but rather a mix of both, this paper performs an abductive approach in order to increase the understanding of knowledge sharing in a firm with an upcoming generation shift. Hence, the study is derived from a conceptual framework, which is based on the literature review and used when going out the company and collect empirical data. Therefore we had a pre-understanding of the questions, which was used when we collected the empirical data. The empirical findings were then filtered through the chosen theories in the conceptual framework with the purpose of supporting or rejecting current research within the field. However, since the findings did not match the framework exactly, the conceptual framework was revised and small changes added (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.2 Research Design

As this study will explain the behavior of a company, which is shaped by the decisions made by its employees, this thesis takes the design of a case study. A case study design is good to apply when making a deep investigation on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context, as being made by the study of a generation shift in a knowledge sharing context at Axalta (Yin, 2014).

3.2.1 Research Unit

The reason why Axalta was chosen as a case company was that it could be acknowledge that the firm is facing challenges with knowledge sharing due to the upcoming generation shift, thus making it a relevant and a well-suited company for a case study. As the Scandinavian part of Axalta is facing an extremely large generation shift with 20 per cent of the employees retiring within five years, it becomes relevant to study this phenomenon (Vedin, 2016). Axalta was also chosen due to our previous connections and collaborations with the company.

The benefits of choosing a single case study instead of multiple case study designs are for example that the case represents an extreme or unusual case (Yin, 2014). In this study, the case company chosen is considered to be an unusual case since it was pointed out that a large number at Axalta will retire. However, even though Axalta is a large multinational company, the research is conducted in the Scandinavian part of the organization due to what we could acknowledge a large generation shift is taking place only on these sites. It would have been interesting to study knowledge sharing from countries that differ more in a cultural setting or from a MNC perspective. Due to convenience sampling these sites were well suited to conduct the research study on as well as time and cost restrictions.

3.2.2 Data Collection

Since a qualitative study was chosen, the study is based on a gathering of both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data consist of in depth interviews that were conducted with the employees at Axalta. Also, some interviews were complemented with follow-up questions that were made through email. The

advantage of doing interviews compared to questionnaires is that it is easier to prepare and adapt to the situation and make follow-up questions. However, it is more time consuming than doing a questionnaire, but with a questionnaire more people can be reached (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The gathered secondary data were articles and internal company presentations and documents.

In order to prepare for the interviews, an interview guide was developed (see Appendix 1) from the theoretical framework. In this way, the questions could be structured in a systematic way following the conceptual framework and process of knowledge sharing. The interview guide served as a great help when conducting the interviews in order to keep a good and relaxed conversation. The contact details for the interviews were provided by the HR department in Sweden, our primary contact person for the study of Axalta. He made a list of who to contact and in that way the respondents already knew about the project when we proposed the dates for interviews. The HR manager made sure we received the contacts to all the employees that was targeted for the purpose of this research, thus covering all positions within the sales and marketing department at Axalta Scandinavia. Therefore, the sample is not biased and there was not a risk letting the HR manager provide us with the contact details.

The interviews were conducted with key managers and salespersons at Axalta Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The interviews took place with the chosen employees at the office in Sweden, but due to time and cost on telephone with the employees in Denmark and Norway. The main goal was to interview the respondent from the Danish and Norwegian sites through Skype, however due to technological issues it was not possible. All interviews were recorded and the respondent were notified by this as well and agreed with it. This allowed for us to keep a good conversation and not have to worry that any information would be missed out.

There were in total 15 interviews conducted, of which 10 of these were held face-to-face and five via telephone. A full list of the interviews can be seen in appendix 2, including date and duration of the interviews. Since Axalta had a wish for the interviews to be conducted anonymously the wish has been taken into consideration.

Therefore, the area of responsibility of each respondent and the location they work at will not be mentioned in appendix 2. By having anonymous interviews it allowed for the respondents to speak more openly about certain questions. This also allowed the interviews to be trustworthy and to try to come near the truth as far as possible.

3.2.3 Interview Process

In order to guide the answers and questions into the right directions, but still allow for a relaxed and open dialogue, a semi-structured interview was conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A semi-structured interview allowed us to cover our specific topic following the literature review, but also to ask follow-up questions and leave room for spontaneous thoughts.

When preparing for the interviews, we read more about the company and the activities Axalta conduct in accordance with Bryman & Bell (2011) in order to better understand and interpret what the respondent would say and mean. Beforehand, no interview questions were sent to the interviewees, so that the employees would not reply with a rehearsed response to the questions. The more interviews we held, the more we familiar we got with the interview technique and the company's situation as regards to knowledge sharing, which resulted in us asking more follow-up questions during the interview. After each interview session, the questions in the interview guide were followed up and if necessary revised. All interviews started with a background question about how long the employee had worked at Axalta and what responsibilities they possessed. Due to the semi-structured approach all interviews were unique and some areas were covered more with certain respondents while some topics were not covered.

As mentioned before, the interviews with the Swedish employees were held face-to-face whereas the interviews with Norway and Denmark were held through telephone. In the face-to-face interviews we were able to look at the body language, take notice of the voice and make the respondent feel as relaxed as possible. Therefore we always told them about the purpose of the thesis and that we would have a conversation more than an interrogation. However, since a few interviews were held

through telephone this may have had a negative impact since we could not notice body language or other emotions. This may have resulted in shorter and not so developed answers. Another aspect that is worth considering when comparing the interviews held with the site in Sweden with those with Denmark and Norway is that the contact person is headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden, where also most people in the Scandinavian organization are located, which makes them more familiar and on board with our thesis writing, purpose and topic. The employees at the Swedish site might have felt more trust towards us in the interviews and thus opened up more as it was face-to-face. It is harder to develop trust through telephone. Therefore, the empirical findings could perhaps have come more near the truth if the interviews with Denmark and Norway were held face-to-face as well.

In addition, another aspect that may have had a negative impact was that the interviews were conducted in several languages. Our thoughts when conducting the interviews with Denmark and Norway was to facilitate the communication using the language the respondent felt most comfortable with. The respondent in Norway and Denmark used their mother tongue. However, there was somehow of a language barrier as it was hard for us to understand the Danish accent, which resulted in us using a mix of Danish, Swedish and English. We also got a feeling that they did not clearly understand our purpose with the questions, as their answers were not as developed as the other respondents. Therefore, follow-up questions were posed through email to clear some questions out. Also, the aspect of language barrier did not have as large impact on the interviews held with the employees at the Norwegian site, as it was easier for both parts to speak their mother tongue and understand each other correctly.

A last contributor to the results is the structure of the Scandinavian organization. The Danish and the Norwegian organizations are much smaller than the Swedish, which makes the prerequisites for faster communication easier. As the Swedish organization is more complex and the location at the Swedish office hampers fast and easy communication, this may have contributed to the Swedes delivering more developed answers.

3.2.4 Analysis of data

After the empirical data was gathered from all 15 respondents, the findings were transcribed with the help of a transcription tool named oTranscribe. The tool facilitated the speed of the recordings to go slower in order to transcribe correctly and accurately. The tool was used in order to increase the respondent validation. Second, the analysis of all data was carried out, but no analysis tool was used. Compared to the analysis of quantitative data with clear rules of how to analyze, there are few established rules when analyzing qualitative data. Furthermore, qualitative data is attractive due to its richness but when it comes to analyzing the data, it is hard to find analytic paths although there are a few strategies available (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this thesis, the empirical findings were categorized in accordance with the interview guide, which was developed from the literature review. All the topics were then carefully analyzed by a comparison between the conceptual framework and the empirical result. The structure of the analysis follows the five themes found in the interview guide, which as said before is also found in the conceptual model.

3.3 Criteria for Evaluating the Case Study

When it comes to judging the quality of a study, validity and reliability are key aspects and important factors to consider since these two can determine if there is good or poor research (Brink, 1993). However, validity and reliability is something that mostly has been an issue in connection with quantitative studies. This is because qualitative studies lack the certainty of hard numbers and p values (Morse et al., 2002). Some writers have tried to apply the concepts of reliability and validity to the practice of qualitative research, however some argues that it is unsuitable for qualitative studies and suggests alternatives ways (Bryman & Bell 2011). A much-cited definition has been done by Lincoln & Cuba (1985) who argues that qualitative studies should be evaluated to a different criterion from those done by quantitative researchers. The authors substitute reliability and validity with the parallel concept of trustworthiness and authenticity.

Trustworthiness refers to the way a study has been conducted in a correct and ethical manner that can correspond to reality and be a truth to other people. There can be

many truths about the social world and therefore it is important to look at it from several accounts. Therefore, research should be carried out with good practices and in order to judge how believable the findings are in our study, triangulation has been used (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As the design of this study has been based on a large literature review of several much cited authors and more than one source of data has been used, this adds to the credibility. We interviewed many respondents as well as used different collection methods and theoretical perspectives. Raw data from the interviews has been used in order to also increase credibility. Furthermore, the methodology has been described thoroughly and reviewed critically in order to add credibility to the research. Language barriers, trust and the way the interviews were conducted could have added to more credibility (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Second, findings that apply to other contexts are empirical issues in qualitative research and therefore researchers should contribute with as much detail and description about their study in order for others to decide the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). In this thesis, we have carefully described the different choices made along the way of the writing and also described the advantages of our chosen methodology. In addition, another criterion is fairness, which judges how fair the members of the organization have been represented in the study. Since one of the delimitations was to study knowledge sharing within the marketing and sales section of Axalta, we have tried to represent as many as possible in our data collection with the recommendations from the HR manager at Axalta.

4. Empirical Findings: The Case of Axalta

The empirical findings will be presented according to five themes, just as the conceptual was divided into: the concept of knowledge, knowledge creation, knowledge storage and distribution, knowledge application as well as motivation and barriers of knowledge. The generational differences will be mentioned throughout the findings as well. Firstly, there will be an introduction to the case company to get a deeper understanding.

4.1 Company Structure of Axalta

Axalta was formerly known by the name DuPont Performance Coatings, which is an American firm that was founded in 1802. In 2013, DuPont was acquired by an investment company named The Carlyle Group, whereupon the company was rebranded as Axalta (The Carlyle Group, 2013). Axalta is a leading global coatings company with global headquarters in Philadelphia, the US. The company develops, manufactures and sells liquid powder coatings to customers in 130 countries and has more than 12 000 employees worldwide. Axalta offers its customers products within Light Vehicle OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) Coatings, Commercial Vehicle Coatings, Industrial Market Coatings, and Aftermarket and Refinish Repair Coatings, whereupon the last product group is the main focus in this thesis (Axalta, 2016).

Due to various acquisitions through the years, Axalta now consists of three brands: Spies Hecker, Cromax, and Standox, which market themselves as different brands but have similar characteristics and are direct competitors as they all focus on the high end segment (Vedin, 2016). The business is divided into six regions: North America, Latin America (excl. Brazil), Asia Pacific (excl. China), Europe/Middle East/Africa, Brazil, and China. The European headquarters are located in Cologne, Germany, which coordinates Scandinavia, including Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Sweden is a larger market than Norway and Denmark, and the three brands therefore have different managers. There is one business manager for two brands (Spies Hecker and Cromax) and another business manager for the third brand (Standox) in Sweden, whereas there is one manager responsible for all three brands in Norway and another one in Denmark. The structure in Scandinavia is very country specific as the business

in Sweden is built upon both wholesale and sales through retailers, whereas Norway focuses only on sales through retailers and Denmark focuses only on the Standox brand (Vedin, 2016).

Corporate functions like Human Resources (HR), Logistics, Information Technology (IT), Market and Business Support (MBS) and Finance are, however, located in the Scandinavian headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden, and are shared among the brands. The business managers together with the HR manager, the MBS manager, and the Logistics manager represent the management group, which currently consists of five people. Ever since the company got acquired by The Carlyle Group, the communication among the brands has increased, but it can still be improved. Even though it is important that the brands have their own niche so customers can notice a difference, the employees of the different brands need to share more knowledge in order for Axalta to improve the performance (Vedin, 2016).

4.1.1 Knowledge Sharing at Axalta

Axalta is an interesting company to study knowledge sharing in due to the generation shift, but also because of the uncommon organizational structure of incorporating three directly competitive brands, as this aspect may constitute a major barrier to knowledge sharing between the brands. Furthermore, the IT systems that are provided to the employees today should function as tools to enhance knowledge sharing at the company. One of the systems is called Salesforce, which aims to store all information regarding the customers in order to facilitate customer interactions and meetings. The other system is Sharepoint, which was introduced in 2014 as the headquarters in the US, with Germany as a driving force, decided to implement a new system instead of having everything located on servers. This new system aims to build a knowledge platform and facilitate knowledge sharing between the different departments throughout the company. Sharing internal knowledge in the form of for example templates and best practices in sale processes, policies, prices, old dialogues and networks can save time and prevent overlapping, and therefore increase efficiency and productivity within the company. It is also important to effectively share valuable information to technicians and salespersons process regarding customers and markets.

The systems have, however, not been used to a large extent yet but Axalta plans to introduce individual targets through bonus systems which may enhance the use of the IT tools. As Axalta's profile is based on tradition, partners and individual salespersons and techniques; such information is very valuable to pass on in a long-term perspective (Vedin, 2016). However, what may be important to consider when studying internal knowledge flows is that there can be barriers towards knowledge sharing as departments may have interests that do not go hand in hand, or feel motivated to share knowledge.

4.2 The Concept of Knowledge

To summarize, all fifteen respondent interprets the concept of knowledge as something that is gained by a person through experience. The knowledge that is acquired is based on the individual's previous experience and knowledge from other sources. It can either be gained through reading manuals in theory or in practice, and most of the respondent agreed that in practice the most knowledge is gained. However, worth mentioning is that a large part of the respondents agreed that it is hard to really explain what knowledge is since it is such a broad concept. Thus, the overall view of knowledge within the older generation is that it is something that comes with experience. One of the respondents expressed:

“It is hard to define because you can either acquire knowledge by reading or working experience. In the end I think a combination of these two is the best in order to use the learnings in practice”.

- Employee 9

Further, a few respondents from the younger generation explained that there is knowledge that is hard to put down in words or manuals such as the social skills a person has. This is a kind of knowledge that a person just inhabits and rarely writes down as a best practice or in a manual.

“Knowledge is not only the facts and knowing about products, but knowledge is of course also how to respond to our customers and social skills. There is so much in that word”.

- Employee 3

When it comes to knowledge within Axalta most of the respondents have high expectation on knowledge creation with the upcoming generation shift and agrees that there need to be an effective knowledge sharing in the company. Both the younger and the older employees see the generation shift as something that will contribute extensively to the firm and one of them puts it like this:

“My goal is that when I retire and quit, no one will miss me in the way that they need to come and ask me things. The department and business shall work and that we jointly have created a knowledge level and base so that the organization can continue to work if I am not there... and it can never work if we not share knowledge or information”.

- Employee 12

There is a consensus that the company is in need of new co-workers to bring in new ideas and perspectives for the development and success of the company in the future. As of now, the younger employees that just have worked some years at Axalta mean that they notice that the company is in need of people from other industries and experience in order for the company to continue developing.

“I think we could raise the level of knowledge a step further in the company, but I think it will happen with new co-workers and when we get mixed competences in the company”.

- Employee 3

Even though all the respondents agree that knowledge is important in the coming generation shift, some respondents think it is taking place too slow and would rather see it happen faster. Also, there seem to be no current framework or strategic plan on how to deal with the overlapping time in the coming generation shift. It can clearly be

seen that both the older and the younger generation think it is important with overlapping time. As of now the company does not allow for a new person to walk beside for a longer time due to cost restraints.

“What I see as the biggest problem is that the overlapping time is too short. The ideal time for an apprentice is 6 months for a salesperson, but we have not planned this. Also, the company often talks about the generation change, but there is not much more. There is no outspoken plan or someone who says that we need to have double staffing for a while”.

- Employee 12

There are also some concerns about the future that need to be taken into consideration in regards of the generation shift. Even though it will bring with it new possibilities and knowledge from other industries, some of the respondents belonging to the older generation means that not everything is positive about the generation shift. They mean that years of experience could get lost and that new people in the organization might not understand the industry that well as they do. One respondent mentions the uncertainty that exist in connection to this:

“I worry that some knowledge will be missed and that people run their race... maybe there will be new people who have worked in other industries before, but our industry is so special and I worry that many, not all, lack knowledge of this”.

- Employee 8

Another positive effect of the generation shift is that younger people with broader skills in IT will come in to the company and use the tools that are available in the company in order to perform a better job and share knowledge. However, some respondents does not put value on the age, but mean that it is good to have people from other industries, which can bring new perspectives into the operations, which in turn can allow for change and development. It does not necessarily have to be younger people, it can be people with many years of experience contributing with knowledge in processes and practices from other industries, and however the IT-skills need to be there.

4.2 Knowledge Creation

When it comes to creating new knowledge at Axalta, the individuals themselves are often responsible for learning new things. Axalta provides the tools in order to facilitate knowledge creation and transfer, but afterwards the employees are themselves responsible for continuously create knowledge by running different projects and learning new tasks in their daily work. Knowledge creation when new employees start to work in the company is interesting due to the fact that most of the respondent mention they had to learn by themselves. All the respondent mention the importance and need for a salesperson's to walk side by side for at least six months when they start but out of all the respondent there is no one who has done that. Taking a closer look it seems like the older generation has been learning their work tasks by applying learning by doing and that the younger generation mostly have learned their tasks by asking their colleagues or manager.

“I did not have an introduction when I started at Axalta so most of my development I created on my own. It is hard to create an education in order to take on the role I have as there are so many different fields that the leader role is composed of”.

- Employee 14

There is no specific introduction related to the different roles which raise the importance of managers' leadership during new recruitments at Axalta, as they bring guidance and help. One younger respondent say:

“I had no one to go next to, but I had a good manager who helped me a lot and a colleague who had been here for two years”.

- Employee 8

Even though the managers play an important role in guiding the new employees, one respondent says that much of the knowledge has been learnt on their own.

“I have both learned from my manager who told me a lot about how we work, but much I have learned on my own. So it is both that I got to know this by my colleagues and managers, but also by myself”.

- Employee 3

In addition, sales or technical educations on products are held every now and then for the employees. However, the views on education and internal training at the company differ. It is notable that the older generation of the respondents is satisfied as it is today:

“I think that Axalta is good when it comes to providing trainings as they offer a lot of technical and sales trainings”.

- Employee 4

Other respondents from the older generation criticize the training system as it is structured today and are not either aware of the different trainings that exist whereupon some respondents both from the older and young generation request more educations at Axalta:

“I have a lot of experience from the industry but it is always good to be updated on new things and not only when starting in the company. We do not have many educations internally at Axalta. That is an area that we can improve”.

- Employee 14

There also seem to be a need for a better strategy for the trainings in order to enhance knowledge creation at the company. One newly recruited employee belonging to the younger generation says:

“The training system at Axalta is not good. I just jumped in and got to cultivate the knowledge I had before. It would have been a clear advantage if the company had a strategy used for training”.

- Employee 15

Furthermore, almost all fifteen respondents say they have a personal engagement for knowledge creation at Axalta. They mention that in order to perform a good job there is a need to share knowledge among the co-workers and try to always create

knowledge within Axalta. There is a desire among the younger generation to create a culture that is open and where you think about the group's performance rather than being individualistic.

"I am very engaged in that part. I talk a lot about the importance of creating and sharing knowledge. I have seen that it can have great impact on the business. I also think that it is fun to learn new things and to know what I am talking about".

- Employee 11

However, it seems like there is a tendency that the older generation sees knowledge as a means of power, and do not want to give away knowledge since it is a competitive advantage to have. One of the respondents from the younger generation says:

"I have no problem with giving away my information or share my knowledge, but think it is a little worse for those who worked here for a long time since some are more afraid to let go of what they know".

- Employee 3

Even though all the respondents claim that they feel a personal engagement for knowledge sharing, not many of them walk the talk and actually shares knowledge on a regular basis. Instead there is a perception that you share knowledge all the time, but from the interviews it is possible to see that the knowledge sharing level need to be increased further. Here is one respondent's view on it:

"I'm probably the one that is most active in the group to share knowledge and write down things".

- Employee 7

One of the respondent from the younger generation only feel a personal engagement for creating knowledge within their role as is mentioned:

“Yes in my role within what I am responsible for ... I have no personal commitment to working to increase the level of knowledge with the people I do not work with every day”.

- Employee 15

Another respondent say he feels an engagement for creating knowledge in order for the company to develop, but adds to the fact that there is no need to attend all the trainings anymore. Thus,

“Personally I am about to reach an age where I do not have to attend all the trainings. I have attended many trainings throughout the years to acquire knowledge”.

- Employee 9

Even though all fifteen respondents say that they have a personal engagement for knowledge creation and sharing, there are still a few respondents within Axalta mentioning that the company lacks employees that have a strong desire to actually learn new things and to explore new learnings by themselves. One respondent sums it up saying:

“Everyone wants change, but nobody wants to be changed”

- Employee 10

As many employees have worked within the industry for a long time they have high expertise in the field. However, due to market developments and changed customer behaviors during the years, one respondent claim that:

“30 years of expertise corresponds to five years of learning six times”

- Employee 13

Therefore, it is important that all employees work with the implementation of knowledge sharing even though they have worked in the industry for a long time and have high expertise. Axalta provides different IT tools in the daily work to simplify

knowledge creation, storage and sharing such as Salesforce. Salesforce is used by the salespersons to store data about the customers and note for example when the next meeting will be held. What has been noticed is that even though Salesforce was introduced over a year ago and initial training sessions have been held, the usage of Salesforce is still low. The older generation in particular does not use Salesforce, but the younger generation does it to some extent.

“In order for knowledge to be created around this tool, there need to be a desire within the employees to learn, in order for the process to take place”.

- Employee 1

Lastly, as much as knowledge need to be created and transferred within the organization, it also need to be created and transferred internationally between the sites of Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Many of the respondents express that the best way to share knowledge between the sites is through face-to-face meetings, but most of the meetings are held through telephone to save both time and costs. However, the view of how close the cooperation between the sites is varies. Overall, it seems like Norway and Sweden have closer collaboration than Denmark since they only handle one of the brands. One respondent say:

“Much of the knowledge sharing is through conferences but physically we see each other about two times a year. There is not enough time for meetings”.

- Employee 9

In addition, due to time concerns, collaboration is restricted between the Scandinavian sites and does not allow for regularly meetings face-to-face. However, most of the respondents feel that it is enough as they have established closed relationship anyways.

“We have some common Nordic conferences where we exchange experiences, and I feel there is enough meetings. Otherwise we call each other”.

- Employee 11

4.3 Knowledge Storage and Distribution

In regards of storing the knowledge that is acquired by an individual within the organization, most of the respondents say that the knowledge is first of all naturally stored in their head. One of the respondents of the older generation says:

“I am not good when it comes to writing down things on my computer. I keep most of the things in my head. Or I am old-fashioned and use my notebook”.

- Employee 5

Second, to store information on the laptop seem to be the most common practice between the younger respondents when storing and sharing knowledge. One respondent say this on the question of where knowledge is stored:

“On my laptop. I store it in documents and files. That is the only way of storing it. You should not believe that the head could store everything”.

- Employee 9

Moreover, Axalta offers some tools for their employees to use for sharing knowledge. However, the usefulness of these tools can be debated since many of the respondent say they do not use it as much as they should. It is the top management of Axalta in Germany and the UK that are providing Scandinavia with tools such as the Sharepoint system and Salesforce. However, there is only a one-way communication where the top management has decided to use the tools, and then it is up to every site to implement it accordingly to their ways. Even though training has been provided by Axalta Scandinavia it has not yet been fully implemented. The younger generation however has a desire to use it, but since not everyone uses it there is no meaning of using it, as the prerequisites of a sharing system is that everyone gives and takes. Here is what one of the respondent says about Sharepoint:

“We do not use it enough and we have a lack of technological knowledge on how to use the systems. The prerequisites if the system should work are that everyone needs to use it. The systems will not become better otherwise”.

- Employee 9

Even though the Sharepoint system has been around for a while, the degree to which the employees use it is very low. When the system was introduced to the Scandinavian countries, a full day of education regarding the system was held. This was approximately one year ago and when asking the respondent to what extent they have used Sharepoint, the answers varied extensively. There are still some technical issues remaining of how to structure the content of Sharepoint in order to be able to find the files that is needed in the right context. One of the respondents says:

“Yes, we use it to a certain degree, to the extent we have knowledge to share”.

- Employee 15

Another respondent confirms what seems to be the overall agreement at Axalta, that Sharepoint is a good tool, but the implementation needs to be better:

“If everyone used it, it would be a good tool. The IT knowledge is low and low interest exists on learning the systems, people do not dare to try, instead they wonder when they get education”.

- Employee 6

One respondent do not use the Sharepoint system at all:

“I absolutely do not use Sharepoint. No one knows how to use it... a big disadvantage of Axalta is that we get new programs, but no one can use the programs”.

- Employee 7

However, one respondent means that the usage of the different technological tools to improve knowledge sharing will be used more frequently when people start to understand and see the positive effect that comes out of it.

“It is not until you see what comes out of the systems you actually start to see the benefits of them. When you realize that the CRM systems contain a lot of good information, it is not until then you also begin to add information”.

- Employee 10

The problem is the lacking ability to motivate or push employees enough to use the systems, and there is a tendency to have a mindset similar to the following:

“We have tried to nag, but it does not happen so much and then one gets back to think about that we have positive sales figures anyway and the people are good anyway ”.

- Employee 3

However, when it comes to the system Salesforce, the usage seem to be a bit better than Sharepoint and most of the salespersons have managers that push for the usage of it. Salesforce aims to make it easier for the salespersons to share knowledge about the customers within the specific brands. The usage of this system also varies in the company and it seems like some knowledge is harder to document:

“Some things are documented in Salesforce but we talk more about things than writing them down”.

- Employee 11

It seems like knowledge sharing needs to be documented and stored in order for Axalta to create a common knowledge system. Also, the employees need to see the benefits of sharing knowledge in order for them to start sharing knowledge continuously through the different IT tools available.

“I do not think that we use Salesforce enough and think it is because many salespersons see it as a burden, and that they do not feel they are getting something out of it”.

- Employee 12

Another point of view brought forward in the connection to sharing knowledge disregarding the usage of Salesforce and Sharepoint is through formal and informal meetings, telephone, Skype and emails. A few of the respondent mean that when they see there is need for more knowledge, they try to form an educational meeting about it either by themselves or taking in a person from outside. Other respondents say they hold regularly meetings in order to spread the knowledge they have on their site. The meetings are through telephone and in some cases also face-to-face meetings. To share knowledge through email is another common form used by the employees at Axalta. However, as is illustrated before, knowledge between the brands are not shared, only the knowledge within a specific brand such as Cromax, Standox and Spies Hecker. Here it is also possible to distinguish that younger employees rather see that knowledge is shared among the brands whereas the older think the current structure is good as it is:

“Personally I do not think that it is good to have too many meetings internally with all the brands. The brands need to be divided and separated from each other somewhat to become efficient”.

- Employee 4

However, there are different opinions about how the three brands should be organized, as the younger generation thinks like this:

“I think that our meetings should be more integrated between the brands. As we have three different brands we have three different meetings as well. But if we would have the structure that I prefer, one CEO and one sales manager, meetings should also be customized after that structure”.

- Employee 13

A common opinion among the respondents despite the different generations was that the best way to share knowledge is through face-to-face meetings. However, the extent to what degree the company adopts face-to-face meeting varies. In Sweden, Norway and Denmark some of the salespersons are located in other parts of the country and therefore it is more convenient to have telephone meetings or

videoconferences. The same solution is applied when the managers from Norway and Sweden have meetings. Due to the digital solutions that exist today, the urge to have face-to-face meetings have been diminished since it is both time consuming and there are cost restraints. Instead, the company employs the concept “train the trainer”. This means that if there is a meeting or conference in Germany one person from for example Sweden will be sent down to participate and then tell the other employees back home about it. By using this concept Axalta can overcome inefficiency as well as saving money for the travel expenses.

“Actually, I would prefer if we had the time and opportunity to have personal meetings, but because we are so spread out and it is not always financially feasible that all will go on to meet and sleep over and everything you need to do”.

- Employee 3

Lastly, in regards of knowledge sharing, the feelings and thoughts were mixed when the respondent were asked if they feel that Axalta encourages knowledge sharing throughout the organization. Many of the respondent mentioned that there is no outspoken goal in the company that knowledge needs to be shared.

“I think the reason to the current restructuring is to enhance the openness and collaboration over the borders. But I do not think that an official bank of knowledge sharing exists. Not in my opinion. I neither think that Axalta thinks that it is very important to promote exchange of knowledge sharing if I am going to be honest”.

- Employee 4

However, one of the respondent recognize that it is not only the responsibility of the top management of Axalta to encourage knowledge sharing, but also that all the sites in the Scandinavian market also cooperate and try to create it themselves.

“Centrally, Axalta probably do not encourage knowledge sharing but I think it is up to us to create it ourselves here in the Scandinavian market”.

- Employee 9

To a great extent this has to do with the old company culture that still to some extent prevails in the organization, but also the organizational structure of the three brands. The three brands are each other's competition and therefore almost no knowledge is shared across the brands. However, knowledge is shared to a larger extent within the respective brands between salespersons, technicians and the sales manager. As mentioned above already, some of the respondents belonging to the younger generation believe there is a need for a reconstruction of the organizational chart in order for the knowledge and communication to spread easier and faster. Instead of having competing brands there should be someone responsible for all the brands, someone to report directly to. One of the respondents says:

“I think the knowledge sharing between the three brands and departments could be better... it is a great problem. There is no CEO that has comprehensive overall responsibility. It should perhaps be someone who is responsible for everything”.

- Employee 3

Another respondent agrees by commenting on the importance of direct communication with one manager instead of three as it is today. By having one decision-maker, faster business decisions can be made and direct guidelines can be provided that Axalta will benefit from.

“A person that you could talk directly to, and that could make a direct decision. It would have been a clear advantage”.

- Employee 15

Some of the respondents from Sweden also mean that the office space in Gothenburg itself is not well planned, resulting in that not much knowledge creation nor sharing takes place, even though it has improved somewhat during the years. The possibilities to take a spontaneous coffee break or meet in the corridor are decreased and thereby limit the chances for informal knowledge sharing. However, many of the respondents believe the knowledge sharing will increase when they move to a new office building after the summer. One respondent say:

“We are very spread out at the office today. We miss a lot of informal meetings but it will get better in the new buildings when no one will sit longer than 75 meters from each other. Today we never see the ones who sit in the other part of the building”.

- Employee 9

4.4 Knowledge Application

Despite the competing brands that exist to some extent, the culture and business climate at Axalta seem to allow for openness among the colleagues after all. All the respondents claim that they are dependent on other people in the organization in order to gain new knowledge and to share knowledge. There is always someone who perhaps has worked longer or has the knowledge of the industry. Many of the respondents talk about the importance of being a team and helping each other out when in need.

“If I do not know anything I just call a colleague. For example, I take advantage of the knowledge of one colleague next to me as he knows a lot”.

- Employee 11

However, a few of the respondents mention that knowledge sharing over the borders is not always easy, especially knowledge coming from the headquarters in Europe.

“Yes we share knowledge all the time, but not from England or Germany. It is mostly just from Norway and Denmark, alternatively from Sweden”.

- Employee 15

Furthermore, the usage of best practice examples is yet not well established at Axalta. If a deal have gone through successfully, it is not written down anywhere. Instead, people talk about it and have it in their mind. Also, one of the respondents claims it is easier if best practices are told face-to-face. One respondent say:

“We do not talk a lot about the reasons behind good and bad businesses but that would be relevant to talk about when we meet once a year”.

- Employee 2

The same goes if Axalta loses a deal. A few of the respondent argue that it is hard to create best practice examples in the company but agree that it would be good to keep a record of the customers of what went well and what works or not. If this kind of knowledge were to be written down, it would be an advantage for the company says a respondent.

“It is difficult to establish best practice, but one can just use simple comments. A contract that has not succeeded, will perhaps work in three years. It can be good to have knowledge exchange and for example write a note in Salesforce so little knowledge is added into Salesforce and to have that history”.

- Employee 6

Moreover, in a relationship-bounded industry that Axalta operates, it is important to share information with the colleagues if something is not good when it comes to acquiring new customers to keeping old customers. Some of the older generation respondent reveals that newly hired employees from other industries have been a great advantage for Axalta as they can look at things from a new angle.

4.5 Motivation and Barriers of Knowledge Sharing

When it comes to the motivation of knowledge, all the respondents say they feel motivated to share knowledge at work. The factors that motivate them vary, but gaining better relationships motivates most of the respondents. They mean that if they share, they will also receive new knowledge, which makes it a win-win situation and fosters good relationships between the colleagues. There is a wish to do things as good as possible in the organization. One respondent says:

“It is in the blood. I think that if I give, I get. I do not know if different incentives would affect knowledge sharing. I think it would be hard”.

- Employee 13

Another respondent believes that getting knowledge that helps them in the daily work is a motivation because then they will develop their skills. If they do things as good as possible the company will be able to sell more which is a goal. One respondent talks about the importance of profitability and means that is a factor of motivation saying:

“Profitability that it will go well for Axalta. Obviously it is good if Spies Hecker is performing well, but it is most important that Axalta performs well”.

- Employee 10

Two respondents from the younger generation say that incentives through bonuses would encourage them to sit down and share more knowledge, however, they underline the risk of having this system to as it means they would only chase money. They mean it is better to feel encouraged by other things than bonuses.

Furthermore, there are different opinions on what Axalta can do in order to improve knowledge sharing within the organization. One respondent propose that if the top management of Axalta would not keep information to themselves, and instead share more knowledge and show transparency, the behavior would rub off to the employees. As of now, the decision-making and the organizational structure is very unclear.

“The management team has internal meetings in the house, but no one knows what is decided there and when it is communicated to the rest of the employees it is communicated through four different people. We need to know who is the main decision-maker as no one knows at present.”

- Employee 6

Another part worth considering in order to encourage more knowledge exchange would be if all the employees were more present at the office and not to have home offices. It becomes evident that the employees at Axalta are allowed to work from home more than is necessary. In connection to this it also becomes evident that it is not a requirement that the employees at Axalta have to have open calendars for each

other. It is up to each employee to decide whether or not they are willing to share their calendars with their colleagues. One of the respondents says:

“We encourage the employees to be able to work at home if it is needed due to private grounds.”

- Employee 10

Moreover, a new organizational structure together with outspoken goals regarding the aim of knowledge sharing should be communicated in order to improve the knowledge sharing in the company. With a better structure, the communication would be enhanced and thus knowledge sharing would become more natural. One respondent who agrees with the structure of the organization says:

“Create simpler process in order to share knowledge. It also has to be an outspoken goal in the company or a core value”.

- Employee 1

A few respondents say that perhaps Axalta can add more detailed and concrete tasks in the work description in order to improve the knowledge sharing. Also, there need to be a stricter development plan for employees in order to motivate them and fulfill their self-esteem of learning.

“Axalta can probably do a lot of things when it comes to that. Motivate the employees to have a willingness to share with each other. And also have a stricter development plan for each employee to make them aware of the development opportunities. As of today, this is a lacking part”.

- Employee 9

One of the main factors that would hinder employees to share knowledge is the competitive situation between the three different brands. It becomes clear that some information can simply not be shared, and that sensitive information about one brand has to stay within that brand. Another major barrier to knowledge sharing is the lack of IT knowledge and the willingness to learn and use the IT systems.

“We have tried to nag, but we cannot notice a great change. Then one gets back to think about the fact that we have positive sales figures anyway and that the people perform well anyway. I think we need to use both ‘carrot and stick’ in order to make employees use the systems“.

- Employee 10

Another important factor that may hinder knowledge sharing at Axalta is what most of the respondent says is lack of time. It can be the lack of time of absorbing knowledge from another person that is sent out through email or other digital communication. It can also be lack of time of participating in a meeting where knowledge is shared. Many respondents mentioned the factor lack of time when it comes to barriers:

“It would probably be if I am stressed and if I choose to not prioritize some things due to time-pressure”.

- Employee 10

Also, the own knowledge of how something should be shared can be a barrier, especially for the older generation. This is related to the lack of a deeper IT-knowledge. One respondent also say that a barrier is if sharing knowledge will cause extra work because then the interest is reduced. Further, the ability to absorb knowledge says most of the respondent depends on the lack of time. One respondent argues that the knowledge has to be relevant and trustworthy, if not then it is not absorbed.

5. Analysis

In this section, the empirical results will be compared to the conceptual model that was presented in previous sections. Firstly, the concept of knowledge is analyzed, followed by the different steps of knowledge creation, storage, distribution and application.

5.1 The Knowledge Concept

The concept of knowledge is broad and is in literature explained as tacit and explicit knowledge. At Axalta, all the employees agreed that knowledge is something that is gained through experience either by reading or by working physically. They also revealed that some knowledge is hard to write down and articulate in words. This can be equaled to the tacit knowledge that is described by Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995). Since this knowledge is harder to codify, it is more challenging to transfer it and share it. Tacit knowledge also requires good relationships between employees since it is based on trust, something that seems to be prevalent at Axalta (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). However, the explicit knowledge sharing through documentation of routines, manuals, and best practice is not great at Axalta as the technological systems, Sharepoint and Salesforce, are not used to a large extent. It is also hard to share tacit knowledge, as it is not time- and cost efficient to watch and learn from each other. It is, therefore, very important for companies like Axalta with an upcoming generation shift to transfer tacit knowledge to explicit, in line with the externalization process in the SECI-model. Thereafter it should be shared in internal templates in order to take advantage of existing expertise before a great portion of the employees reach their age of retirement. Employee 13 do not think that business expertise is as long as the working life by referring to “30 years of expertise corresponds to five years of learning six times”, due to market developments and changed customer behavior. Employee 13 also claims that it would be good to hire younger employees that have different types of knowledge, who can contribute to new business perspectives, in order to get a mix of expertise. On the other hand, employee 10 claim that he constantly learns new things by the older generation who have knowledge that extends far back in time and therefore have the ability to see trends more easily. With this in mind, it would be good if the employees that soon will reach their age of retirement can learn how to share knowledge through documentation of routines,

manuals, and best practice in order to facilitate for future practices. This would hinder the generation shift's appearance and save time and costs due to otherwise overlapping procedures. Another strategy for taking advantage of existing knowledge is to introduce alumni networks where the generation that will retire can share their knowledge and continue their business engagement even after the retirement.

The knowledge that the employees who have worked at Axalta for a long time seem to have, is based upon the tacit knowledge with cognitive character rooted in experience (Nonaka, 1994). It is this kind of knowledge, the tacit or invisible knowledge that some of the respondents are afraid of losing when the generation shift will take place. However, with the generation shift, there will also be new ideas and perspectives that come into the organization, which plenty of the respondents see as positive and have high expectations on. As the older generation will be replaced by a younger generation, the employee setup will be more mixed. Axalta therefore needs to work on structuring the upcoming generation shift and allow for people to walk side by side in order for the tacit knowledge to be passed on.

5.2 Knowledge Creation

The SECI-model can be used for describing how individual knowledge forms organizational knowledge and then how it is transferred. The model is based upon the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge through four processes: socialization, externalization, combination, internalization (Nonaka, 1994). The empirical findings show that most of the knowledge at Axalta is created through social interactions such as trainings, telephone meetings and some face-to-face meetings. There are a few respondents saying that they share knowledge during informal meetings such as coffee breaks, however, the building in Sweden does not allow for so many spontaneous meetings. In Norway and Denmark for example, the sites are smaller and the communication goes faster, but in Sweden the communication will probably increase when they move to a new site after the summer. Now a few respondents mentioned that they do not meet colleagues in the corridor or at the coffee break since everyone has their own office space. The new site with an open office space will allow for more informal meetings and thus create more

knowledge. This will be a big step into a more efficient knowledge creation and sharing and all these meetings can be equalized with Nonaka's (1994) socialization process. He means that the key to acquire tacit knowledge lies in the individual's experience, which can be taught through meetings, collaboration, observation and dialog. However, most of the meetings at Axalta are held through video or telephone and not face-to-face. With increased meetings held face-to-face and a framework that allows for overlapping of employment during new recruitments, the tacit knowledge would be enhanced and shared more efficiently.

Furthermore, almost all of the respondent say they had to learn their work tasks on their own when they started at Axalta and that no one had the opportunity to walk beside someone. However, a few respondents also mention that knowledge creation is at its best when an employee walks beside another employee for a few days or weeks, but this form of knowledge creation was rather rare. Instead, most of the employees had to seek knowledge themselves by asking a manager or a colleague. In order for the tacit knowledge to really be passed on, there is a need for Axalta to create a framework or policy in the organization regarding the training when someone is new at the company (Nonaka, 1994). There are also a variety of thoughts when it comes to training at the company. Some respondents mean that they have enough meetings and trainings, while some employees think this area can be improved. What can be an idea, judging from the empirical results, is to enhance the follow-up after training sessions have been held and set up developmental goals in order for the employees to motivate each other. As Salesforce was introduced over a year ago but still has low usage despite training sessions it would be good to set up common goals and have follow-up sessions in order to cultivate the knowledge creation and enhance the transfer of it. By learning the tasks in group the motivational factors will most likely increase from employees pushing each other and making it an important developmental path for the company, while hindering employees from avoiding the learning process, as that would have negative effects on the rest of the group. That would also improve the “we-feeling”, which is needed as the rivalry between the brands somewhat limits knowledge sharing between the brands. The “we-feeling” would be even more improved if the bonuses that will be introduced would be partly based on individual goals and partly on common goals for Axalta.

The next step in the SECI-model is externalization where employees have codified the tacit knowledge and therefore are able to express it and passed it on. In Axalta's case this is happening to some extent since many of the respondents have started to use Sharepoint. There is however a challenge in motivating all employees to use the tools for knowledge sharing frequently. Also, when a new person starts, there is a wish among the respondents that this person will walk beside the person who will retire for at least three months, but it is not an outspoken rule. If walking beside someone is needed also depends on what position it regards. One of the respondents has a goal of teaching the others as much as possible so that the day the respondent retires, no one will miss this person's knowledge. Furthermore, there is also a concept called "train the trainer", where one person will go on a training session and then come back and show the learnings to the other employees. However, Nonaka (1994) means that if the tacit knowledge should become implicit knowledge, it needs to be codified and verbalized. At Axalta this is something that needs improvement since many of the employees do not see the point of using the tools available for codifying knowledge or do not know how they should use it. The employees, however, also request clearer outspoken company goals and increased transparency, as this would enhance communication and motivation to share knowledge within the organization.

The combination process in the SECI-model involves a combination of explicit knowledge to create more explicit knowledge such as telephone conversations of meetings. IT tools and databases play significant roles at this stage due to the possibility to pass on explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). What is learned from the case of Axalta is that there are different IT tools, which can be used for writing down manuals and best practices. If the systems are used efficiently, knowledge can be shared among the employees, but it is also shown in the empirical result that not many employees use the IT tools available. There is therefore a need to increase the usage of it in order for the knowledge to be created and shared more efficiently.

In the internalization stage of the SECI-model it is important to make the knowledge a part of the culture and the way of working, thus internalizing it. An important step to acquire this is by making the explicit knowledge be transformed into tacit knowledge through learning by doing (Nonaka, 1994). As is shown in the empirical results the

respondents prefer to learn by doing rather than reading too much about it. Perhaps it is the reason to why there seem to be a slow start for employees to write down and document what they do. However, if the tacit knowledge is not documented it is hard for other employees to practice and make use of that knowledge. The empirical findings also show that no best examples are used, however, there is a need to create a culture where best practice examples are lifted forward and encouraged in order to better take advantage of existing knowledge (Nonaka, 1994).

5.3 Knowledge Storage and Distribution

Since knowledge has become one of the most important resources for firms in latter years, it is important to be able to transfer knowledge more efficient than competitors (Grant, 1996; Szulanski, 1996). Therefore, great emphasis is put on the storage and distribution of knowledge. As many of the employees at Axalta belong to the older generation, there is a lack of technological knowledge, which affects the storage and distribution of knowledge negatively as it is not as effectively as it could be. After knowledge has been created, a firm needs to be able to storage the knowledge and to facilitate for the employees to distribute it (Argote & Ingram, 2000). Even though Axalta has a system called Salesforce, which is the main portal for storage of customer information, and a system called Sharepoint, which aims to function as a portal for shared information and templates between the business units, these systems are not being effectively used. The main challenge has been to get the employees to make use of these tools in their daily work. Together with a dominant lack of technological knowledge within the company, there is neither a push towards change. The employees have been given education on the systems but there are no follow-ups or enough push factors provided in order for the employees to get motivated enough to use them. If the systems should be able to function as relevant helping tools, it is important that everyone uses them. There is otherwise no need for sharing, as it is unnecessary to spend time on creating knowledge sharing if the sharing does not generate any results (Jonsson, 2012). Thus, even though some employees are positive towards the systems and try to use them frequently, they will gradually quit using them too if no one else does. As the employees do not use the technological tools in an effective manner when storing knowledge, most knowledge is stored individually

in employees' own heads, and in some cases it is stored on files on the own computer. This is one of the main problems with the upcoming generation shift, as employees that have worked in the industry for a long time soon will retire and currently there is no effective way on how to take advantage of their knowledge. However, it is worth taking into account that the knowledge level does not correspond with the time of employment as the industry is continuously developing and the employees that have worked at the company for a longer time feel less need for training as they think that they know the industry and are fully learned. Thus, there is a problem that the employees mostly work independently, which results in a tendency of laissez-faire behavior, meaning that the employees easily get stuck into old habits if they find a way of working that they consider works well for them. In order to prevent such behavior and for the employees to effectively being able take advantage of the older generations' existing knowledge, it is important to motivate the employees to use the systems and make sure that everyone understands the contents.

In addition, from a knowledge sharing perspective, the generation shift might be a step in the right direction. As Axalta will have to replace the older employees with a younger generation, the IT knowledge will increase in turn, as this generation is more familiar with using IT tools and writing down information to share to others. Also, as there is competition between the brands, many of the respondents have might not seen the benefits of using Sharepoint and Salesforce. However, if the competition will decrease in line with the organizational restructuring, the knowledge sharing will most likely become more accessible, easier and efficient. There is although a difficulty in storing tacit knowledge and therefore greater emphasis should be put on the process of transferring knowledge. This can be done through continuing using the concept "train the trainer". This training method would both save time and costs for Axalta as well as allowing for the tacit knowledge to be transferred.

Common language and understandings are examples of how knowledge can be transferred more efficiently and, therefore, Axalta should create a culture with this emphasis (Styrhe 2003; Nonaka, 1994). A shared common language and culture is also something that will benefit the Scandinavian sites, as knowledge transfer across borders would be facilitated (Grant, 1996; Jonsson, 2007). The empirical findings

reveal that there is a close collaboration between the sites in Sweden and Norway, but not so much between Sweden and Denmark. However, the main reason to this is that Denmark only sells the Standox brand, whereas Norway sells all three brands. Even though there are not so many face-to-face meetings in a year between the Scandinavian units, most of the employees think that the amount of meetings is enough as they feel that it is easy to contact their colleagues both to share important and less important knowledge. This indicates that there is a high trust between the Scandinavian sites, which is a good prerequisite for knowledge transfer (Nonaka, 1994; Styrhe, 2003). However, there are some improvements to be made in order for more knowledge sharing to flow. More face-to-face meetings during new recruitments can be provided as increased levels of trust increases knowledge sharing. Furthermore, if tacit knowledge will be passed on it requires face-to-face meetings in accordance with Nonaka's (1994) socialization process (Nonaka, 1994; Styrhe, 2003)

5.4 Knowledge Application

The preconditions for knowledge application at Axalta are good as the offices in Scandinavia are relatively small, which allows for better connection and closer collaboration. As Song et al. (2005) and Grant (1996) claim, IT has made it easier for firms to share knowledge. However, there is a problem if the employees at Axalta do not know how to use the technological systems effectively, as this can be a weakness when comparing to firms in the same range. Grant (1996) and Kogut and Zander (1992) mean that the knowledge sharing process will be inefficient and costly if tacit knowledge cannot be codified and saved on templates in information and communication systems, but can only be studied during the application process. That is why it is important for Axalta to develop an ambition and motivation for the employees to learn and use the systems. Grant (1996) suggests that firms should work with sequencing, rules and directives, routines and group problem solving and decision-making in order to increase knowledge sharing. Regarding sequencing, the MBS group at Axalta is a starting point of integrating activities between the brands in order to prevent overlapping. Axalta can, however, put more effort on implementing stricter rules and directives. For example, some respondents request more openness by the management group, as they want to know more about what is going on within the

company and get clearer guidelines and goals. In addition, the majority of the respondents also request shorter decision-making processes, which could be realized by restructuring the current organization chart and have one manager or one CEO with an overall responsibility. This would enhance the motivational factors of creating a “we-feeling”, which in turn would enhance knowledge sharing in the company. Axalta can also introduce more routines at the office by for example hold more regularly meetings. In order to improve the IT knowledge, Axalta can also have group problem solving activities, preferably related to the regularly meetings, as this would make the employees be more engaged to the tasks and feel committed to Axalta as a whole.

5.5 Motivational Factors

It is worth taking into account that in an organization, like Axalta, comprised of employees from different generations and brands with different strategies, cultures and administrative heritage, Martinez & Jarillo (1989) suggest that managers should apply a mix of coordination mechanisms. All of the employees claim that they feel motivated to create and share knowledge and most of the employees also think that they take advantage of other employees’ knowledge in their daily work. However, they do not think that knowledge sharing is something that the management group pushes towards. It would therefore be good if knowledge sharing were one of the stated goals at Axalta in order for the employees to be more motivated to share knowledge. It would also be good if there would be less people in the management group, and if Axalta has one business manager instead of two. This person could preferably also can take on the role as a CEO, and be the main responsible for the Scandinavian organization in order to facilitate the communication. Currently, the structure of the organization is complex, which makes it hard for the employees to know who to communicate with in different situations. The structure also prolongs the decision-making as no one in the management group has the main responsibility for the decision-making. Thus, if a clearer structure of the management group would be provided, goals and guidelines could be more easily communicated. This would make it easier for Axalta to reach common goals and for the employees to grow together with the company through shared knowledge, as the knowledge level would be

increased if the employees learn from each other and create a common culture and motivate each other in a group.

Another important aspect when considering organizational changes is that regularly meetings every second week should be held as this would allow for follow-up meetings on different tasks and information updates. The tasks that should get prioritized are IT learnings, and updates on what is going on within the company and on the market. It is requested by employees to know what is going on within the company, and improve the communication about goals and objectives, which would also make them feel more committed to working for Axalta instead of working for their particular brand. It is, therefore, important to promote transparency at the office as openness has proved to have a positive effect on motivation at the office and will improve the commitment of working towards common goals.

A recommendation is also to implement stricter rules at the office in order to get a better balance between using “carrot and stick”. Today, it is not a requirement that employees have to have open calendars, but open calendars would allow for more control and increase the easiness of contacting and interacting with each other internally, while at the same time preventing work from home. It is prevalent that work from home is rather common and it would therefore be relevant to imply a rule saying that home office is only allowed for those who do not have a viable distance to the office. By introducing stricter rules regarding home office, the amount of informal meetings at the office would increase and there would be a better mix between the employees having personal responsibility and following rules. This can be related to what Bock et al. (2005) say about reciprocal relationship. If employees would spend more time at the office the prerequisites for establishing reciprocal relationship would increase. Better connections would also enhance the respect for other employees, which can be linked to what Deci & Ryan (1987) mention about authority-relationships, as a person who is lower in a power perspective will much more likely share knowledge.

Employees are not sure whether incentives will improve knowledge sharing, and instead think that the exchange they get from sharing knowledge is the greatest

motivational factor to fulfil the self-esteem of learning new things. This motivational factor, however, does not seem to be enough in order to make the employees learn the technological systems, Salesforce and Sharepoint, and share knowledge through these. By referring to a citation: *“We have tried to nag, but we cannot notice a great change. Then one gets back to think about the fact that we have positive sales figures anyway and that the people perform well anyway”*, this shows a typical mindset of the managers at Axalta. It is a proof of the employees working with individual responsibilities and that not many requirements are set. Even though employees generate positive figures, and the results are good, there can still be room for improvements and there should always be a willingness to continuously strive for business developments in order to be in line with customer preferences, and market and technology developments. Otherwise, there is a risk that competitors will catch up if they are more updated regarding markets and customer preferences and have more updated systems to apply internally and when communicating with customers. To mitigate these risks, it is important to maximize knowledge sharing, which can be done through introducing regularly meetings, and requirements on attending trainings, having open calendars, working at the office at least once a week and scheduling customer meetings and writing related notes. The bonus systems that are planned to be introduced is claimed to be based on the amount of customer meetings, which is an organizational change that is a step in the right way in order to increase the preconditions for knowledge sharing. It is said that bonus systems have been rejected before but are now on the way to be implemented. This is good as it will probably change the attitude towards learning the systems, and some respondents are positive to extrinsic motivations through bonus systems and claim that they would be more encouraged by bonuses. They do, however, acknowledge a risk for increased competitiveness among the salespersons, which is in line with Bock et al. (2005) who claim that bonus systems can have negative effects on relationships. On the other hand, small amounts of competitiveness are good from a business perspective. Today, Axalta applies intrinsic motivations only, which can be extended by extrinsic motivations in order to increase the motivational level as the research by Deci & Ryan (1987) shows that extrinsic motivations have a great impact on knowledge sharing. Regarding trainings, it is claimed that Axalta offers a lot of trainings to their employees. There is, however, a problem that there is not enough motivation to

renewal or push towards attendance on the trainings. The older generation has a tendency to feel that they are fully learned, whereas there are not enough pull factors from managers to get the younger generation to prioritize to attend trainings. It is, therefore, important for managers to find a balance between using what employee 10 referred to as “carrot and stick”. The situation regards to knowledge creation and sharing at Axalta today is very much based on individual responsibility, resulting in that the business is built upon trust, which is one of the major enablers of knowledge creation processes according to Lee & Choi (2003). It is good that the management group trusts its employees, but at the same time there is also a risk for laziness and employees taking advantage of the possibility of working from home.

Lastly, the main factor that motivates knowledge sharing is relationship and increased relationship boundaries will also prevent employees from storing knowledge individually on the own computer or in the head. The relationships at Axalta are somewhat complex as the company consists of three brands that are direct competitors to each other. The relationships over the borders and in Norway and Denmark separately are good, whereas the relationships between the employees in Sweden can be improved. The ongoing restructuring at the Swedish office is claimed to have had a positive effect on the relationship and communication at the office as the employees’ offices now are located closer to each other. Before, Standox’ offices were in another part of the building with own entrances, whereupon the employees that worked for the other brands rarely never interacted with them. It is, therefore, proved that the competition between the brands has decreased in line with the restructuring at the office. Another reason to the decreased competition, and the increased communication as an effect, is that one manager is now responsible for two of the three brands, which has improved the “we-feeling” whereas before each brand had one manager. There is, however, still some competition between the brands, which will be improved even more when moving to new buildings, as the brands will sit even closer to each other. This will improve the relationship building as informal meetings can occur more often. The barriers deriving from competition between the brands can, however, be even more decreased if there would be one responsible for all three brands.

5.6 Barriers

Szulanski (1996) identified three of the most important barriers regarding knowledge sharing, which is arduous relationships, lack of absorptive capacity and causal ambiguity. The findings show that the factor that constitutes a major barrier for the employees to absorb knowledge was lack of time. However, the older generation at Axalta may have lack of absorptive capacity meaning that the ability to take in new knowledge has to do with their preexisting stock of knowledge (Szulanski, 1996). Since many employees lack preexisting knowledge of how to write down manuals or other information on Salesforce and Sharepoint, this result in lack of absorptive capacity of taking in new knowledge, thus how to share the knowledge.

There is a risk that employees feel that trainings are meant for those who lack some competences and that it is sensitive for the older generation in particular if newly hired employees say what to do as they might take it personal. It is therefore a question about how to present change and renewal, and it is important to create a vision for continuous improvements and a norm that everyone has to attend at least one training a year in order to overcome the barriers of laissez-faire behavior. If everyone agrees on informing rules saying that everyone has to attend trainings and learn the technical systems, no one has to take it personally and instead view trainings as possibilities to develop and a progress that everyone proceeds in order to perform the best possible for Axalta.

Furthermore, one respondent claimed he would not absorb knowledge if the information were not trustworthy. Thus, good relationships between the source unit and recipient unit are very important. The empirical findings showed that employees help one another and have good relationships at Axalta, but between the country specific units the relationship could improve. If the relationships are more intimate, trust will be developed and knowledge sharing will be more effective as well. Furthermore, the empirical findings also showed there are some causal ambiguities present at Axalta. This is when it is hard to replicate a capability in a new setting. Plenty of the respondents mention that best practices are not written down and that it is hard to imitate a sales situation since it has to do with relationships and human complex skills as mentioned by Szulanski (1996). In order to overcome the challenges

or barriers that are prevalent at the firm, Axalta needs to invest in creating closer relationships between the organizational units both between Scandinavia but also between the employees at the sites.

5.7 Revised Conceptual Model of the Knowledge Sharing Process

From the empirical findings it can be noticed that organizational structure is a prerequisite for efficient knowledge sharing when dealing with a generation shift. Therefore, a box named “organizational changes” was added into the conceptual model in order to improve the prerequisites for knowledge sharing. In addition, it is important that the management informs strict rules regarding how much transparency that should be given to the employees in order to maximize knowledge sharing. It can be concluded that organizational changes in regards of location have improved motivational factors, which in turn, has facilitated the knowledge sharing process. As the organizational changes through restructuring regarding locations and positions at the office in Sweden have increased the collaboration over the brands and created a common culture and a “we-feeling” at Axalta, knowledge sharing has increased in line. This aspect is expected to increase even more, in line with the change of buildings and the ongoing merge of positions between the brands, starting off with the MBS team. Therefore, it is relevant to include “a desire to create a we-feeling” as a possible factor that motivate the employees to share knowledge. This leads to a modifying of the conceptual model as seen in figure 5 below. Lastly, the motivational factors that are prevalent can be divided into pull and push factors, as the pull factors are based on the external forces that create motivation while push factors refers to the internal forces.

Revised Conceptual Model of the Knowledge Sharing Process

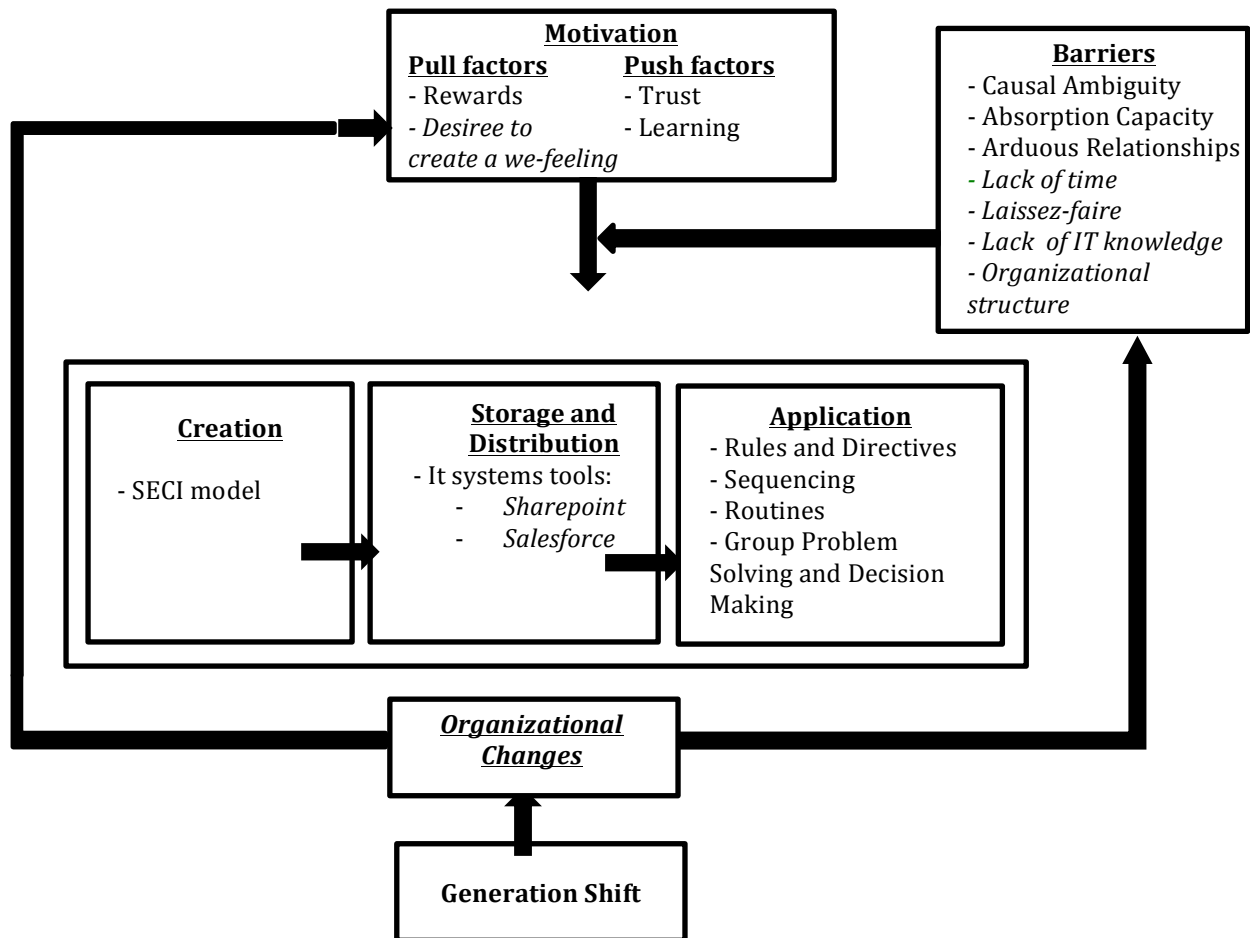


Figure 5. Revised Conceptual Model. Source: Created by authors.

6. Conclusions

In this part we will answer our research question and summarize the main findings. The relevance to the theoretical field will also be pointed out as well as recommendations to Axalta. Lastly, a section of future research will be provided.

6.1 Findings and Theoretical Contributions

The purpose of this thesis was to understand the impact on an organization's knowledge sharing when facing a generation shift. As mentioned before, many studies have been carried out in the knowledge management literature but not many have focused on knowledge sharing from a generation shift perspective and how firms practically can work with knowledge sharing. Since the literature review and the empirical data of this thesis have provided a deeper understanding of the knowledge sharing process linked to a generation shift, the results aims to fill the knowledge gap in literature as well as provide organizational recommendations to Axalta. The research question will now be answered:

What is the impact on an organization's knowledge sharing when facing a generation shift?

When studying intra-organizational knowledge sharing it was discovered that the impact of a generation shift is large and that firms need to secure that knowledge expertise remains within the company. Since the older generation does not use IT tools to the same extent as the younger generation there is a challenge of transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. In addition, there is a need for firms facing a generation shift to create a good organizational structure in order to improve the prerequisites to knowledge sharing.

The explicit knowledge sharing through documentation of routines, manuals, and best practice is not great when the IT systems are not used to a large extent. It is also hard to share tacit knowledge, as it is not time- and cost efficient to watch and learn from each other. It is therefore, very important for companies with an upcoming generation shift, to transfer tacit knowledge to explicit and thereafter share it in internal

templates in order to take advantage of existing expertise before a great portion of the employees reach their age of retirement. Even though it would be good to get a mixed working force by hiring more younger employees that have different types of knowledge and can contribute to new business perspectives, it would still be good if the employees that soon will retire can learn how to share their knowledge through documentation of routines, manuals, and best practice in order to facilitate for future practices. This would limit the generation shift's appearance and save time and costs due to otherwise overlapping procedures.

After the empirical result and the analysis have been put forward there is a need to revise the conceptual model that was conducted based on the theoretical framework in figure 3. The empirical findings were in line with the model in regards of the process of knowledge transfer within creation, storage, distribution and application. However, under storage and distribution Sharepoint and Salesforce are added under IT tools. The factors that hinder knowledge sharing were also found in the empirical data and were aligned with literature such as arduous relationships, causal ambiguity and absorptive capacity. However, the empirical findings showed four other factors that can hinder knowledge sharing, which was lack of time to absorb knowledge, lack of IT knowledge and a tendency to laissez-faire behavior as some employees work in their own manners and easily get stuck in old habits. From the empirical findings it can be concluded that organizational structure can hamper knowledge sharing and can thus be seen as a barrier towards the knowledge sharing process. These barriers hinder the knowledge sharing process, thus decreasing the willingness of learning new things and create knowledge as well as sharing knowledge.

On a theoretical viewpoint, with the changed conceptual framework this is a contribution to the theoretical field of knowledge management and the process of knowledge sharing in a firm facing a generation shift. It is proved that knowledge sharing is a process, which is affected by the motivation, barriers and generation shift. However, it is the organizational changes, which is the prerequisite for good knowledge sharing when facing a generation shift.

6.2 Recommendations

The results help managers in organizations who operate in a business context with challenges of knowledge sharing due to generation shift as this thesis comes up with suggestions on how they practically can improve knowledge sharing. The conceptual model provided in this thesis is a managerial contribution considering different aspects of motivation and barriers of the knowledge sharing process. It also shows that the prerequisites for an efficient knowledge sharing are to have a good organizational structure in the company and those organizational changes can enhance the process. The recommendations that will be provided for Axalta can also be applicable for firms with similar organizational structure facing an upcoming generation shift.

First of all, it is important for Axalta to develop a structure and a framework that deals with the generation shift such as allowing for overlapping of employment in order to transfer tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. This could in the long term be more cost efficient as knowledge sharing could save time in future practices. Another idea for sharing knowledge between the generations is to introduce alumni networks where the older generation can share their knowledge and continue their business engagement even after the retirement.

Regarding the organizational structure, one suggestion is that the Scandinavian management group could consist of one objective CEO in Sweden, one in Norway and one in Denmark. Under those there could be one sales manager who is responsible for all three of the brands. Another suggestion could be to only have one sales manager and no CEO. The management group today consists of two brand managers, MBS manager, and supply chain manager, HR manager, CFO. For the group to have a more effective decision-making too many positions should not be included. A recommendation is therefore, to scale it down to one sales manager (and the CEO if there is one), the CFO, and the supply chain manager. This group could together make decisions that will have an impact on the entire organization in Scandinavia. The majority of the respondents say that there is a lack of direct guidelines and direct communication, and still some rivalry between the brands. For the communication to become clearer and for the barriers to be mitigated it would be

effective to have one sales manager. If the brands work more closely together it is easier to have synergies between the brands and also to transfer from one brand to another if the generation shift result in development opportunities within one of the two other brands. The interviewees' answers show that working closer together results in a shorter time of overlapping, which also conclude that there is a cost-effectiveness of having an integrated team.

Another recommendation linked to the management group, is that the business managers and sales managers should have regularly meetings. It could be effective to hold meetings once every second week, preferably every second Monday. Afterwards, it could be useful for the sales managers to have a meeting with their particular salespersons. It is better to have shorter meetings more often in order for the employees to remember to perform the tasks they agree on before the next meeting is coming up and thereby prevent the occurrence of *laissez-faire*. Today, it is noticeable that many employees fall into old habits and do the way they have always done because many employees have worked in the industry for a long time and are not open to new knowledge or do not think that they have a need for it. Therefore, the employees need personalized developmental plans and more encouragement and follow-up meetings, as this would make it easier to understand the content of using helping tools, and work towards common goals.

As many employees lack structural features regarding the use of technological systems, it is important to make sure that there are enough trainings on how to use them, and that everyone understands the systems, so they are not too complicated to use. If some trainings would be held on how to use the technological tools and follow-up meetings on the learning's would be provided, it would be easier to make the employees take advantage of the systems, as they have to show their learning's to each other in a group. In that way it is also easier to get a structure and the managers can set up weekly plans and have follow-ups after two weeks. A suggestion is also to have more individual meetings, preferably every month, and work more on creating individual development plans. The bonus systems that are planned to be introduced will be based on the amount of customer meetings and individual targets. However, it would be better from a Axalta perspective if the bonuses will be based on 50 per cent

individual targets and 50 per cent on the company targets in order to increase the employee's' motivation to share and absorb knowledge between the business units.

Established relationships with colleagues also motivate employees to spend more time at the office, which is good for informal meetings to take place. It is also good in order to establish meetings in a regularly manner because when relationship bounds increase, trust increases in turn. This is important to enhance knowledge sharing between the three brands, as the rivalry will be mitigated if the relationship and trust between the employees at the different brands increase.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Even though this thesis provides some interesting findings and contributions to the knowledge management literature, there are some recommendations to be made for further research. In this study, the process of knowledge sharing in connection to a generation shift has been reviewed covering the Scandinavian part of the organization. Thus, one recommendation for future research is to further investigate the phenomena of knowledge sharing in connection with an upcoming generation shift covering the whole MNC, thus from an international business context. In addition, it would also be interesting to study knowledge sharing in countries that do not face challenges of generation shift and see if there are any connections or differences. Furthermore, as this study was built upon a single case study it would also be interesting to include more companies in the sample in order to cover more generalizability. Moreover, the coatings industry is facing an evident generation shift in Scandinavia due to low employee turnover because of the niche. It would, therefore, be interesting to see whether our results would be constant when analyzing the entire organization in countries with just small generation shifts. It would also be interesting to make a similar research for companies that do not consist of three directly competitive brands, as this might have limit this research's ability to be compared to companies in the same industry. It can also be interesting to see whether the results would be similar in other industries using the same framework. Lastly, as this study was a qualitative research, a study of a more quantitative character is also recommended in order to cover more companies and include a larger data sample to

draw conclusions from. Using this research design, the common denominators are perhaps easier to find and as there are multiple tools for analyzing quantitative data is could perhaps provide more accurate conclusions.

References

Arbetsförmedlingen (2010) Generationsväxlingen på arbetsmarknaden. Available at: http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.6880a4dd130790d556980003977/generationsvaxlingen_rapport.pdf

Ardichvili, A., Page, V., & Wentling, T. (2003). Motivation and Barriers to Participation in Virtual Knowledge-Sharing Communities of Practice. *Journal of knowledge management*, 7(1), 64-77.

Argote, L., & Ingram, P. (2000). Knowledge transfer: A basis for competitive advantage in firms. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 82(1), 150-169.

Axalta (2016). Overview. Retrieved 2016-02-15, Available at: http://www.axaltacs.com/corporate/en_US/about-axalta.html

Becerra-Fernandez, I., & Sabherwal, R. (2014). *Knowledge management: systems and processes*. Routledge.

Becton, J. B., Walker, H. J., & Jones-Farmer, A. (2014). Generational differences in workplace behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 44(3), 175-189.

Bock, G. W., Zmud, R. W., Kim, Y. G., & Lee, J. N. (2005). Behavioral intention formation in knowledge sharing: Examining the roles of extrinsic motivators, social-psychological forces, and organizational climate. *MIS quarterly*, 87-111.

Brink, H.I.L (1993). Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research. Curationis. *International Journal of qualitative studies* 16(2).

Bryman, A. & Bell E. (2011). *Business Research Methods*, 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Cohen, W. M., & Levinthal, D. A. (1990). Absorptive capacity: A new perspective on learning and innovation. *Administrative science quarterly*, 128-152.

Cook, S. D., & Brown, J. S. (1999). Bridging epistemologies: The generative dance between organizational knowledge and organizational knowing. *Organization science*, 10(4), 381-400.

Davenport, T. & Prusak, L (1998) Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1987). The support of autonomy and the control of behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 53(6), 1024.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. United States: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Foss, N. J., & Pedersen, T. (2004). Organizing knowledge processes in the multinational corporation: an introduction. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 35(5), 340-349.
- Grant, R. M. (1996). Toward a knowledge-based theory of the firm. *Strategic management journal*, 17(S2), 109-122.
- Gupta, A. K., & Govindarajan, V. (2000). Knowledge flows within multinational corporations. *Strategic management journal*, 21(4), 473-496.
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T. A., & Chi, C. G. (2008). Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 448-458.
- Jonsson, A. (2007). *Knowledge sharing across borders. A study in the IKEA world*. Lund: Lund Business Press.
- Jonsson, A. (2012). *Kunskapsöverföring & knowledge management*. Malmö: Liber.
- Jonsson, A., & Tell, F. (2013). Knowledge management. In L. A. Strannegård, *Management*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. pp 75-106.
- Kankanhalli, A., Tan, B. C., & Wei, K. K. (2005). Contributing knowledge to electronic knowledge repositories: an empirical investigation. *MIS quarterly*, 113-143.
- Karlsson, P. (2010). Svenskt Näringsliv. Vad betyder 40-talisternas uttåg för företagens kompetensförsörjning?. Published 6th of July.
- Kogut, B., & Zander, U. (1992). Knowledge of the firm, combinative capabilities, and the replication of technology. *Organization science*, 3(3), 383-397.

Kogut, B., & Zander, U. (1993). Knowledge of the firm and the evolutionary theory of the multinational corporation. *Journal of international business studies*, 24(4), 625-645.

Lee, H., & Choi, B. (2003). Knowledge management enablers, processes, and organizational performance: An integrative view and empirical examination. *Journal of management information systems*, 20(1), 179-228.

Levitt, B., & March, J. G. (1988). Organizational learning. *Annual review of sociology*, 14, 319-340.

Lincoln, Y.S & Guba E.G, (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Martinez, J. I., & Jarillo, J. C. (1989). The evolution of research on coordination mechanisms in multinational corporations. *Journal of international business studies*, 10(3), 489-514.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Minabeava, B. D. (2007). Knowledge transfer in multinational corporations. *Management International Review*, 47(4), 567-593.

Morse, J, Barrett, M, Mayan, M, Olson, K & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1 (2).

Newell, S., Robertson, H., Scarbrough, & Swan, J. (2009). *Managing knowledge work and innovation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Nonaka, I. (1994). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. *Organization science*, 5(1), 14-37.

Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company: how Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Shin, M., Holden, T., & Schmidt, R. A. (2001). From knowledge theory to management practice: towards an integrated approach. *Information processing & management*, 37(2), 335-355.

Song, M., Van Der Bij, H., & Weggeman, M. (2005). Determinants of the Level of Knowledge Application: A Knowledge-Based and Information-Processing Perspective. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 22(5), 430-444.

Styrhe, A. (2003). Knowledge management beyond codification: knowing as practice/concept. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 7(5), 32 - 40.

Szulanski, G. (1996). Exploring internal stickiness: Impediments to the transfer of best practice within the firm. *Strategic management journal*, 17(S2), 27-43.

The Carlyle Group (2013). The Carlyle Group Completes Acquisition of DuPont Performance Coatings. Retrieved 2016-02-10, Available at: <https://www.carlyle.com/news-room/news-release-archive/carlyle-group-completes-acquisition-dupont-performance-coatings>

Tsoukas, H., & Vladimirou, E. (2001). What is organizational knowledge?. *Journal of management studies*, 38(7), 973-993.

Vedin, H. (2016). HR Manager Axalta Nordics. 2016. Interview 10 February.

Yin, R. K. (2014) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Background

- What is your age? For how long have you worked at Axalta?
- What is your position and responsibilities at Axalta?

The Concept of Knowledge

- How would you define knowledge in general?
- What is knowledge in your area or within your role?
- What are your thoughts about the coming generation shift?
- What are your expectations of knowledge sharing?

Knowledge creation

- How did you learn the work/tasks you use today?
- Do you feel a personal engagement for knowledge creation?
- Do you have a close corporation with the teams from Norway/Denmark?

Knowledge storage and distribution

- When you acquire new knowledge, how and where do you store it?
- Do you use the current system Sharepoint to access and share knowledge?
- How do you currently work to actively share knowledge?
- In what way would you prefer to share knowledge?
- What is your experience of exchanging knowledge/information with project managers from Norway/Denmark?
- In what way do you feel that Axalta encourages knowledge sharing between the units?

Knowledge application

- Do you feel that you take advantage of other employees' knowledge in your daily work?
- In what situations do you think that shared knowledge is applicable?
- Do you have any best practise examples?

Motivation

- Do you feel motivated to share knowledge at work?
- What factors motivate you to share knowledge?
- What can Axalta do in order to improve knowledge sharing?

Barriers

- Are there any factors that would hinder you to share knowledge?
- Are there any factors that would hinder you to absorb knowledge?
- Do you have any examples of a situation when you failed to share knowledge?

Appendix 2

Overview of the Interviews

Respondent	Date	Duration (aprox)
Employee 1	08-mar	30 min
Employee 2	08-mar	30 min
Employee 3	09-mar	60 min
Employee 4	09-mar	45 min
Employee 5	15-mar	30 min
Employee 6	15-mar	90 min
Employee 7	17-mar	45 min
Employee 8	22-mar	60 min
Employee 9	22-mar	60 min
Employee 10	22-mar	90 min
Employee 11	29-mar	45 min
Employee 12	29-mar	60 min
Employee 13	29-mar	90 min
Employee 14	30-mar	30 min
Employee 15	30-mar	45 min