



# WANT TO KNOW WHAT I KNOW?

## An assessment of Knowledge Sharing in a Knowledge Intensive Firm

**Author: Anna Fransson & Sofia Langenius**

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Thesis:	30 HEC
Program:	Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester/year:	Spring 2020
Supervisor:	Stefan Tengblad
Examiner:	Karin Allard

## Abstract

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Keywords: *Knowledge Intensive Firm, Knowledge Sharing, Structural Capital, Culture, Communication*

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to on an organisational level assess knowledge sharing in a Knowledge Intensive Firm.

**Theory:** The main theories used are; Dreyfus's (2004) model of expert knowledge, Human Capital Theory (Sweetland, 1996), Knowledge Based View of the firm (Levitas, 2013) and the concepts; Tacit and Explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994) and Knowledge Intensive Firm (Alvesson, 2004).

**Method:** The study is carried out through a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews and case-study design. Interviews are conducted with consultants and consultant managers within the case company and a thematic analysis is used for analysing the qualitative data. The respondent group consist of 13 participants.

**Result:** Findings of this study indicate that knowledge sharing is an important activity within a knowledge intensive firm. A model of the identified sharing and development of knowledge is presented. This process can be summarised as transferring of the external inflow of knowledge, through found challenges to knowledge sharing and attributes of knowledge, on the foundation of identified facilitating prerequisites. By the use of this process, we argue that the organisational knowledge will increase. Found challenges to knowledge sharing are presented along with how these can be viewed and worked with.

# **Acknowledgement**

We would like to express our gratitude towards everyone who has supported us throughout the two years of this Master Programme in Strategic Human Resource Management.

Conducting this thesis has given us the opportunity to explore interests within our field of studies, as such we are grateful towards our collaboration company and all of their dedicated time. We would also like to direct this gratitude towards the initially intended collaboration company for taking time to discuss and inspiring us towards where we are today.

We would also like to thank our supervisor, Stefan Tengblad for all of his support, inspiration and guidance. Thank you very much!

Lastly, we direct a big thank you towards our loving friends and family who have supported us throughout this process. We are thankful for the opportunity to write this thesis together.

Anna & Sofia  
Gothenburg, 2020

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# 1. Background

*This chapter will provide the reader with an overview of the chosen field of research and the most central concepts used, as well as an insight to its relevance for Human Resource Management.*

Today, we find that the approach towards HR and HR-work has changed compared to just a few decades ago. Emphasis has been moved from HR being a “clean” support-function towards becoming a strategic partner in many organisations, the competencies found within the HR field are requested and needed to a higher extent on a daily basis throughout organisations (Baill, 1999; Cappelli, 2015; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

The current labour market is not facilitated by the same structures as before, employees tend to have weaker ties to their employers, and stronger ties to their profession, especially in the field of knowledge work. However, the organisations and employers are more dependent than ever on the access and utilization of the human capital and sophisticated knowledge while the workers on the other hand, are more reliant on their knowledge, rather than on their employer (Stewart, 1997). Continuing on this note, Nurmi (1998:1) states that “*knowledge is power*” and as such, the human capital of a firm is of greater importance now than ever. This thesis directs its focus towards knowledge sharing, specifically so in a knowledge intensive firm (KIF). It is therefore important to state that knowledge is active and has an effect on how things are done. KIF’s are characterised by using processes and translating knowledge into services and products for their customers (Alvesson, 2004), offering the use of knowledge based products and their focus tend to be within intellectual skills and development as they often operate within fast changing industries (Alvesson, 2004). This has become an increasingly common way of structuring an organisation, in order to match demands of current trends in a fast changing economy, as Bran (2019) states “*all types of currency need to circulate*” and knowledge sharing is identified as one of the keys to success in today’s economy. A typical example of a KIF is a consultancy firm. These industries tend to be highly learning intensive, meaning holding a high level and amount of knowledge. Knowing this, one can assume the importance of working actively with sharing and ensuring an active flow of knowledge in order to remain relevant and ensuring sustained competitive advantage. This study will investigate the concept of knowledge sharing and how it works within a KIF. The

KIF in this study will be anonymised and referred to as Company X. The centrality of human capital for the survival of the firm is one of the defining factors of a KIF. This found centrality and defining nature also creates interesting challenges to Human Resource Management, specifically for this study in terms of sharing important knowledge inherent in workers as well as the importance of finding ways of utilizing knowledge in terms of competitive advantage in the long run (Jørgensen, Becker, Mathews, 2011).

Knowledge is always a part of all types of organisations, although with a different focus, in KIF's knowledge has a central role (Jørgensen, Becker & Matthews, 2011). This is a field where research so far seems to be limited and therefore we find it interesting to investigate this topic further. Knowledge in itself is a subjective matter, which can be defined from many different perspectives and approaches, as it often lives within the minds of individuals it can be seen as problematic to store within an organisation. Knowledge can be divided into different groups and is of varying levels of importance depending on the organisation and its industry. The groups of knowledge used in this study are classified as tacit, explicit or expert knowledge. In industries where employees spend a large amount of time outside of the office, and where competition is based on the knowledge residing in individuals, the development and sharing of knowledge is crucial. It is stated that an organisations that can live through being agile, continuously learning, and adaptive are the ones that will thrive (Doan, Rosenthal-Sabroux & Grundstein, 2011).

## **2. Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to on an organisational level assess knowledge sharing in a Knowledge Intensive Firm. Therefore the aim is to, through investigating different types of knowledge such as tacit, explicit and expert knowledge, assess how these are perceived and used by consultants and managers as well as identify challenges in sharing.

### **2.1 Research Question**

RQ 1: How does a Knowledge Intensive Firm (KIF) work with knowledge sharing?

RQ 2: What are employees' experiences of sharing knowledge in the organization?

RQ 3: What challenges are identified?



### 3. Previous research

*This chapter will provide the reader with a background on previous conducted studies within knowledge sharing, knowledge management and knowledge intensive firms, providing a framework and overall understanding of the field.*

Knowledge sharing is defined by Chandler and Munday (2020) as the exchange of information, technologies and ideas between people and organisations. With this information at hand, they highlight the importance of knowing that there is no one best method or process for all types of knowledge sharing. It is always dependent on the nature of the problem or the knowledge that is shared, the people involved and the circumstances (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004). In their research, Awad & Ghaziri (2004) identifies lack of trust, lack of time, status of the knower and the quality and speed of transfer as main obstacles to knowledge sharing. The goal of knowledge sharing is for it to be a natural part of everyday work and organisational life in order to maximise knowledge assets (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004). The organisation needs to be aware of where the knowledge originates from, what its intended destination is as well as through which channels and efforts the knowledge flow can be enhanced. Knowledge sharing is a part of knowledge management, which according to Liebowitz and Megbolugbe (2003) is the act of creating value from an organisation's intangible assets, it is also the process of making knowledge accessible. The authors in their article emphasise that when knowledge is captured, learning takes place and therefore knowledge can be argued to be embedded in both individual and organisational processes. They draw the conclusion that knowledge management will increase in necessity in the future.

Previous research has shown that culture and communication are topics closely related to knowledge sharing and knowledge management (Marouf, 2016; Monteiro de Carvalho, 2014). Marouf (2016) investigates the role of a knowledge sharing culture by leveraging knowledge management strategies and human resource strategy to improve business performance. The study explains the organisation as being a facilitator for the integration of already existing knowledge held by the individuals in the organisation. The study revealed that knowledge is created by, and lives within people. Further it also mentions that a knowledge management strategy, encouraging interaction between employees through informal channels, not depending on standard processes and systematization, will promote

sharing and learning of knowledge and expertise through collaboration and interaction. This in turn creates for a knowledge sharing environment (Marouf, 2016). Knowledge sharing and culture are further investigated in an article by Bran (2019:1) who states that “*all types of currency needs to circulate*”, and by this refer to knowledge sharing as key in, what she addresses as today's knowledge-based economy. She argues that organisational culture can be hard to spot on the surface, however everyone feels it and acts according to it and therefore she suggests to build a knowledge sharing business culture.

Further, Monteiro de Carvalho (2014) studied communication management in information technology (IT) conducted as a case study where the author identified barriers to communication. The study brings up the cruciality of communication in IT projects but also identifies how communication processes and practices are not always prioritised. Monteiro de Carvalho's (2014) study is relevant to this study as it brings up how information is shared through communication medias. Her study indicated that the intranet was most frequently used in terms of storing project data. Following, the top three most used medias in information sharing are listed as; informal conversation, meetings and project records. Important to mention is that several of the respondents brought up the importance of face-to-face communication, this because as stated in the study “*they judged personal contact to be decisive with regard to effective communication during projects*” (Monteiro de Carvalho, 2014:51). The author moves on by addressing lessons learned and knowledge gathering during the life cycle of a project. Results indicate that meetings focusing on lessons learned and feedback are not used to a wide extent. The results go on by stating that employees view these meetings as pure bureaucracy, few project managers are concerned with lessons learned and state that “*to upload the information on the intranet takes time, and it is our scarcest resource*” (Monteiro de Carvalho, 2014:51).

When investigating the topic of knowledge sharing and specifically so in Knowledge Intensive Firms, there is a limited amount of empirical studies to be found. This makes the previous research in this study somewhat theoretical. However, articles on topics that are relevant in relation to the investigated field have been identified and used as a complement to the theoretical framework.

## 4. Theory

*This chapter will provide the theoretical framework. Starting with an overarching understanding of the field of knowledge management and related concepts, then narrowing it down to the specific concept of knowledge sharing and lastly addressing the connection to organisational culture.*

This study has its focus on Knowledge Intensive Firms (KIF's) and the theory will therefore present an understanding of how these can be classified and understood. The concept of knowledge intensive firms refers to organisations that offer the use of knowledge based products, also called "sophisticated knowledge". This is normally defined as firms where the Research and Development (R&D) costs are above the expenditure related to manufacturing (Alvesson, 2004). These companies often base their core activities in intellectual skills such as development. Formal education is positively connected to analytical and theoretical abilities of importance to a KIF, which therefore holds high value. Characteristics of a KIF are; low hierarchy of the firm, high degrees of autonomy in the workplace, knowledge-based work done by highly qualified professionals and the use of ad hoc and adaptable organisational forms (Alvesson, 2004). These are established to benefit the capturing of opportunities and increased problem solving, they also tend to be beneficial in order to increase competitive advantage in fast changing industries. Alvesson (2004) further identifies a need for strong communication in such organisations.

A KIF differs from traditional manufacturing companies in many ways, one specific way being the relation to their customers. Products provided from KIF's are usually produced with the clients' specific needs in mind and are thus uniquely tailored. Because of this, the process involves a close interaction between client and the involved professionals. As such, specific needs and requirements can be assessed and thus the professional or professionals involved can be applied and tweaked in appropriate manner for the specific purpose (Ejler, Poulfelt & Czerniawska, 2011). Therefore a high level of experience and specialist knowledge is required in order to adapt the product to the needs of the customer. Examples of knowledge intensive professions are IT consultants, HR specialists, engineers, communications advisors or management specialists (Ejler, Poulfelt & Czerniawska, 2011).

In order to understand the broader context of knowledge in an organisation this study has its foundation in and refers back to the concept of knowledge management. As Stated by Awad & Ghaziri (2004), knowledge management became the emerging business model with a focus on knowledge within the framework of an organisation. Knowledge management is of interdisciplinary character, covering a range of fields such as business, economics, psychology and information management. Knowledge management is the process of capturing and utilizing the collective experiences and knowledge existing in an organisation. The goal of knowledge management is to view all processes in an organisation as knowledge processes. The authors define the ideal knowledge organisations as one where people share knowledge across functional areas by using technology and established processes to do so. A key challenge concerning knowledge management is how to capture, process and act on it (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004).

All organisations view and work with knowledge differently. To get an insight to ways of working with, and making sense of knowledge we direct our attention towards the knowledge based view of the firm by Levitas (2013) as well as Grant's (1996b) beliefs on knowledge work. Scholars of the knowledge based View of the Firm (KBV) unites in the view of firms as developers, exploiters and integrators of knowledge. Firms seen from this perspective, hold assets, tangible and intangible as well as tacit knowledge, which is there to guide the development, exploitation and maintenance of resources to fit that specific firm. Therefore, learning is viewed as capturing and progression of new knowledge. This perspective aims at explaining how such capabilities direct the positioning by using, gathering and building firm resources. As such, learning from past experience develops beneficial changes and progression of these firm capabilities (Levitas, 2013). However, the firm is also viewed as a compound set of social interactions such as informal rules and structures, which collectively form the consciousness carried within the firm (Levitas, 2013). Such capabilities are formed from social interaction between employees and are as resources used and adapted for current and future use, they are also self-reinforced. However, the KBV perspective does not expect consistency or similarity in knowledge across firm units, rather it assumes that the different knowledge bases within the firm are partially built up by "firm-wide capabilities" (Levitas, 2013).

Grant (1996b) believes that shifting employee training from depending on individual specialist skills, towards practices such as job rotation and cross-training is anchored in the belief that an increase in common firm knowledge can lead to enhanced organisational capabilities. Integration of knowledge will come easier with an increased level of common knowledge. With this common knowledge he means shared recognition of knowledge domains, shared meaning or language form or other symbolic communication, as such, it helps employees to share aspects of knowledge between each other, or sometimes even merge them. Grant (1996b) locates a managerial challenge related to the capabilities that require effective integration of specialist skills. Namely that the specialist skills tend to indicate lower levels of common knowledge between individuals of a team and thus increases the complexity in its integration. Connecting this to the transferability of knowledge where Grant (1996b) identifies, what he refers to as a critical distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge. This identified distinction lies in transferability and the mechanisms used when transferring between individuals. Explicit knowledge being connected to its ease of communication in the way it is structured, carrying this communicability as its main capability. Tacit knowledge is acknowledged in its application. Tacit knowledge can be hard to codify, if this is the case it can only be attended through application, meaning through practice. Transferring knowledge between people this way is costly, slow and uncertain (Grant, 1996b).

Grant (1996a) focuses on knowledge as a firm resource, firstly because it adds value to the organisation as well as its strategic importance in terms of its barriers to replication and transfer. He focuses on tacit knowledge as entailing skills and practical knowledge as inherent in organisational members and is thus complex to transfer. The Knowledge Based View of the firm as was previously discussed, is built upon assumptions as these. Grant (1996a) argues that knowledge integration is a firm's primary role if production processes that relies heavily on knowledge input, if efficiency is dependent on specialised knowledge as stored by individuals and if the application of many types of specialised knowledge is crucial for production. The author points to four mechanisms of knowledge integration, these are: (1) rules and directives, (2) sequencing, (3) routines and group problem solving & (4) decision making (Grant, 1996b).

This connects to a firm's absorptive capacity, which relies to a high extent on its prior related knowledge and the amounts of that as dependent on its individual members. Cohen and Levinthal (1990:1) presents "*a new perspective on learning and innovation*" explaining it as the firm's ability to realize the value of new information, and the ability to incorporate and apply it to "commercial ends". That being said, an organisation's absorptive capacity is dependent on current and previous investments of its individuals (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). However, the absorptive capacities of the firms' individuals are not the only building block of an absorptive capacity, the organisation's ability to exploit the information is as important. Based on that, an organisation's absorptive capacity depends on interaction with the external environment and the transfer of knowledge within and between units. Meaning that this builds on the way which communication is structured, both between the organisation and its external environment as well as between and within departments, teams or other subunits of the organisation as well as lastly, on the way which distribution of expertise is done (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990).

Individuals as part of organisations acquire information in terms of decision-making activities and problem solving. However, organisations can exist even without specific individuals. Seeing individuals' cognitive activities as a point of focus in an organisations' active information acquisition is a reflection of active construction of memory (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Since the logic of consistency that puts characterisation to organisational interpretations is possible thanks to individuals' sharing of interpretations with each other. This sharing process thus moves the "organisational interpretation system" above the individual level. Because of this an organisation can keep past knowledge even if and when key members of the organisation leaves (Walsh, Ungson, 1991). Interpretations of the past can be ingrained in individuals but can also be embedded in artifacts and systems. What forms the core of the organisation's memory in the end, are the problems solved and the decisions made over time (Walsh & Ungson, 1991).

#### 4.1 Types of Knowledge

Knowledge, if categorised can roughly be divided into two groups. Explicit knowledge as explained by Nonaka (1994) as knowledge possible to mediate through formal, systematic language, is easily documented and shared between individuals. Tacit knowledge is built on technical and more cognitive components. An example of a cognitive feature is the individual

mental model that is based on unique experiences, comparisons and correlations of the world. Technical elements are built on objective crafts, know-how and specific skills that are applied in certain contexts (Nonaka, 1994:16). Tacit knowledge is described as “*a continuous activity of knowing*”, or as explained by Polanyi (1966:4) “*we can know more than we can tell*”. The knowledge that can be seen and easily explained, put into numbers and words is only a small piece of all existing knowledge.

Another knowledge classification of importance in this study is that of expert knowledge. Dreyfus (2004) presents a five-stage model of adult acquisition, consisting of the stages (1) Novice, (2) Advanced Beginner, (3) Competence, (4) Proficiency and (5) Expertise. These five stages explain how an adult can evolve from being novice in a subject to become an expert, while it highlights the fundamental differences between the stages. In the stage of Novice, the fundamental task environment is decomposed to context free-features that can be understood, and rules and guidelines are explained, determining what action to take. As an advanced beginner, the novice begins to adapt learning’s, putting them into practice and develops an understanding of the relevant context. In stage three, Competence, the performer becomes fully aware of potentially relevant elements and procedures, these tend to become overwhelming. It is still difficult for the performer to determine what features should be taken into consideration in what situation; the performer has to understand how to restrict themselves to relevant features and aspects. In stage four, Proficiency, the now competent performer becomes increasingly emotionally involved in the task, which in turn increases the difficulty in distancing oneself and sticking to a rule following approach. The challenge here is to replace the emotional involvement with pure involvement; the ability of doing so will set the frame for further advancement. In the fifth and last stage, Expertise is reached. The performer has developed the ability to see what has to be done as well as how to achieve the wished outcome without unnecessary constraint. The expert has the ability to calculate using rules and facts with the fine tuned sensitivity that comes from experience. This is explained by Dreyfus (2004;4) as “*... normally, an expert does not calculate. He or she does not solve problems. He or she does not even think. He or she just does what normally works and, of course, it normally works*”.

## 4.2 Human, Intellectual & Structural Capital

Human capital is defined by Sweetland (1996) as suggesting that individuals and society gain

economic benefit from investing in people. An example of a potential investment is education, which is argued to contribute to improved health. It is also further suggested that education is the only measurement that tends to increase individuals economic capabilities. According to Becker (1993:15), Human Capital is relevant because it *“Improves health, raise earnings, or can add to a person’s appreciation of literature over his or her lifetime”*. The Human capital view was presented early in the 1980’s by Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quinn Mills & Walton (1984). These scholars also state that Human Capital should be seen as a great competitive advantage. Intellectual capital essentially hold the same meaning as human capital, however it points more specifically toward the inner value of knowledge possessed by individuals *“In the old economy, people bought and sold ‘congealed resources’ – a lot of material held together by a little bit of knowledge” – Stewart (1997:16)*.

Becker (1993) also indicates that investments in human capital through training, medical care and education are thus investments in capital. The term “human capital” derives from the fact that the asset belongs to an individual and cannot be removed from him or her. The human capital theory is essential to this study as it concerns an individual’s economic value in an organisation. This study will approach different types of knowledge residing in individuals on different professional levels and as such, will assess the potential values for the organisation, however, not in economic terms. When discussing human capital, structural and social capital are terms that have to be taken into consideration. Structural capital is the supporting infrastructure that enables human capital to function in an organisational setting, basically one of the cores for knowledge storing and sharing. The structural capital can be information and processes gathered in databases for the use of the employees (Duignan, 2016). Social capital is by Häuberer (2010) defined as a resource that is embedded in the different relationships among actors. Social capital is also built on two foundations, namely social networks and social resources.

### 4.3 Culture

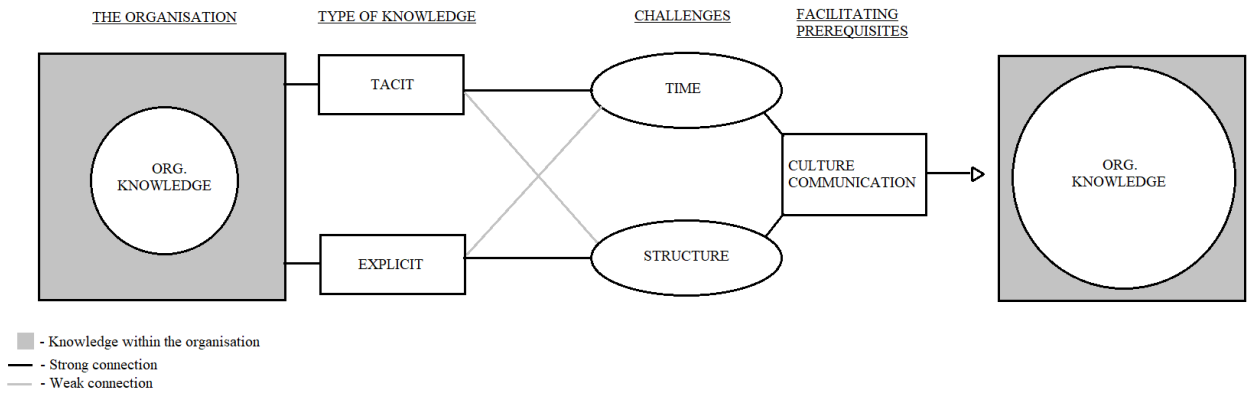
Schein (2010) addresses the importance of adapting to changes. The way of doing this is by becoming endless learners, for this to happen, we need a learning oriented culture. As such, culture is a crucial concept for this study as it revolves around knowledge sharing and as such learning from one another. There are a number of reasons for us to become endless learners. Some of those are predictions about knowledge-based organisations, the information age,



globalism, networks and the loosening of organisational boundaries. It is hard to predict what the world will look like tomorrow, however we do know that it will be different. It will be more fast-paced and more complex, to adapt to these changes, we need to become learners. This, he says, implies a need for learning oriented, flexible and adaptive culture rather than one that is stable and difficult to change. A culture of that nature needs to inherit a “learning gene”, meaning a shared assumption among members that learning is essential, that it is worth investing in and that the act of learning in itself is a skill that needs to be acquired. Schein (2010) continues to argue that feedback is a key to learning that includes analysing and taking time to reflect on the feedback received. For this to work, employees need to be open to learn and by that means, not afraid to ask for help. To have a learning culture thus means inheriting the ability to try new ways and finding new responses. In order to reach this, the organisation needs to value experimentation and reflection, and as such needs to give members the opportunity to do so through time and the right resources. He moves on by arguing that for a learning culture to work, it must build on the underlying assumption by its members that communication is a central piece. That indicates a need for a communication system based on several communication channels allowing everyone to connect to each other in a way that is effective and suits them. It does not indicate that everyone will use every channel or for all matters, it however indicates that communication is wished for and easily done, indicating the increased importance of task-relevant information as well as an openness to share that between one another. Schein (2010) calls this approach “learning leadership”, in that he indicates an importance of specifying the minimum communication system as well as what information is crucial for learning and increased effective problem solving. He also mentions trust as an important variable in order to achieve full task-relevant information. In this manner, trust is created through truth and communication of such between parties (Schein, 2010).

Culture has been defined as *“a learned way of perceiving, thinking and feeling about problems that is transmitted to members in the organisation”*(Walsh and Ungson 1991:63). The culture of an organisation incorporates past experience which can be of importance for future work. Culture is therefore, as explained by Walsh and Ungson (1991), a piece of an organisation's memory retention facilities. This information, as embedded in the culture is stored in symbols, frameworks, language and stories. Since this information goes through the sharing of interpretations and is then collected and kept in the transmission process, the

information is stored above individuals, in the so called supra individual collectively.



### Model 1

The model above is developed by the researchers of this study and shows one way of understanding and summarising the knowledge sharing as drawn from the theoretical framework. The described process is somewhat static as it is based on the chosen theories used in this study.

## 5. Method

*This chapter will provide the reader with the methodological stand points used in investigating the aim of the study. It addresses core structures, limitations and methodological choices made as well as explains how the study is carried out.*

### 5.1 Research Strategy

The qualitative genre of a methodological approach is by Ritchie and Lewis (2014:13) described as; *“In-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about the sense they make of their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories”*.

The study is carried out through a qualitative method through the use of semi-structured interviews. It is conducted using a case study design in order to assess potential knowledge sharing within Company X. Through using case study design and a qualitative method, flexibility is created within the study. A qualitative approach is applied by the use of interviews with managers and employees within the case company. The qualitative genre of methodological approach is by Ritchie & Lewis (2014:3) described as concerned with investigating a phenomena from the inside, often starting with the perceptions of participating interviewees; *“In-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about the sense they make of their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories”*.

This study is unique in it’s kind as it investigates a Knowledge Intensive Firm, more specifically so a consultancy firm.

### 5.2 Research Design

A case study design is used in this study, which as described by Yin (2018) is appropriate when one wishes to investigate the *how* or the *why* for the chosen area of research. Since this study aims at investigating how Company X works with knowledge sharing within the own organisation, this is found to be the appropriate technique. Yin (2018) also states that the case study design is especially applicable when investigating a complex subject, while still giving the possibility to remain in a real-world perspective. Since knowledge sharing can be abstract,

and to some extent hard to grasp, the case study approach is found to be a good fit in serving the purpose of this study. Further, Richie and Lewis (2014) emphasises that the case study design is particularly useful when studying a phenomena in a set context. This is due to the fact that the case study design offers potential to gain a detailed and deeper understanding of the investigated questions. This is also pointed out by Yin (2018) as one of its advantages as it provides the possibility for a deeper understanding of contemporary events and happenings. It is also stressed by Bryman & Bell (2015) that when investigating the “real” world, as often done in the field of social science, events and social settings cannot be “frozen” by the researchers and therefore, the researchers will always encounter elements that are out of their control.

The building blocks when conducting a case study are the research question, the proposition, the case, the linkage between the data and the proposition as well as the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2014 & 2018). Since our questions aim to investigate how a KIF work with knowledge sharing, it is relevant to conduct a case study through semi-structured interviews in order to enable a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the practical reality. This study is identified as a single case embedded study due to the fact that all interviews are conducted within the same organisation with the aim to investigate the organisational view on knowledge sharing.

### **5.2.1 Academic Contribution**

The first contribution made through this thesis is the model presented in theory and analysis, this visualises the knowledge sharing and development process. The second is that this study investigates knowledge sharing in a knowledge intensive firm, more specifically, a consultancy firm. Drawing from previous literature and research, this type of investigation is limited to our understanding, knowledge sharing has prior been investigated, but not in the context apparent in this study.

The study draws a connection to Dreyfus’s (2004) model of knowledge levels, and how these can be connected to levels of seniority/juniority as became apparent through interviews. A relationship between knowledge sharing and economic value is identified by the use of human capital theory (Sweetland, 1996; Stewart, 1997; Becker, 1993; Beer et al. 1984). Schein’s (2010) ideas about culture and learning have been further connected to knowledge intensive work.

### **5.2.2 The Case**

The collaboration company for this study is a consultancy firm established in the 1990's. They employ approximately 2400 throughout the organisation and have offices across Europe and Scandinavia. Their business idea is built upon an entrepreneurial mindset and the organisation is divided into three main business areas, in this study presented as Business area 1, Business area 2 and Business area 3. This study is conducted at the Gothenburg office, with a main focus towards management consultants within Business Area 1 with additional contributions from business area 2.

The respondent group consists of consultants on varying levels, both junior and senior positions as well as consultant managers. Since Business area 1 and 2 offer different services they also have different customer bases as such the organisation holds a broad variation of customer organisations and industries. This indicates a difference in experience from consultant to consultant.

From a number of 13 respondents, five are junior consultants and eight are classified as senior. The group of junior consultants have been active in the industry for less than three years, and seniors have thus been active more than three years. This indicates a variation in experience of working as a consultant in the field, whether that is within the given organisation or not. 38% of the respondents are female and 68% are male. The majority of the junior consultants were employed by Company X immediately after graduating from the university, while the senior consultant have various backgrounds and experiences from different industries and educations.

## **5.3 Data Collection**

Data is collected through 13 semi-structured interviews within the case study organisation. Due to the current Covid-19 situation, all interviews were conducted over the phone with both researchers present. They lasted between 30-50 minutes each. The interviews took place during the beginning of April, 2020.

### **5.3.1 Sampling**

Bryman and Bell (2015) considers sample size to be one of the most difficult questions within qualitative research, however they suggest that the broader the scope of the study, and

depending on how many comparisons between groups one wishes to make, the more interviews should be conducted. The number of 13 interviewees was perceived as enough in order to cover a broad picture of the organisation. This was applied in combination with a purposive sampling, combined with opportunity and snowball sampling. Through the purposive sampling, access was created to participants well suited for the study, providing a good overall understanding of the context. In the opportunity sampling, through which information and suggestions were made from beforehand targeted participants, recommendations were used in order to access further suitable respondents. The purpose of the snowballing sampling was to target similar participants as those identified through the opportunity sampling. Which further added the possibility to access individuals and/or information that could not be anticipated beforehand (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This combination of sampling methods was chosen to ensure that enough substantial information was gathered in order to answer the aim and research questions of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

### **5.3.2 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews provides flexibility to adapt the interview questions to the situation, as well as provides enough structure for relevant topics and questions to be covered within the scope of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interview guide was structured covering three main themes; (1) Background, (2) Organisational culture, and (3) Knowledge sharing. All participants were asked the same questions, regardless of position or professional belonging. The interview guide was developed in both Swedish and English, but as the interviews unfolded, the Swedish version was the only one used in action. All interviewees were fluent in Swedish, which made this the natural choice.

All interviews were conducted over the phone, there are both benefits and limitations connected to this method of data collection. *“Some qualitative researchers suggests that non-face-to-face interviewing lessens the relationship that can be established and maintained between the interviewee and the researcher. Overall, it is our view that the persuasive use of these technologies in everyday life means that they have become entirely normal as a way of interacting for many people. Hence, concerns about non-face-to-face interviewing being entirely less naturalistic are becoming less important.”* - Bryman, Bell & Harley (2019;450-51)

Benefits with telephone interviewing in comparison to doing face-to-face interviews are that it is cost effective, useful when the research group is hard to reach or when the safety of the interviewer and/or the respondent group is at risk. In this particular case, the first and foremost risk is that of infection and spreading of Covid-19. Since most organisations have decided to follow the guidelines from the The Public Health Agency of Sweden, employees have been encouraged to work from home if possible, and therefore the respondents were easier accessible over remote channels such as phone or link.

However, some existing difficulties with non-face-to-face interviews cannot be disregarded. Non-face-to-face interviews will not be appropriate for all groups of respondents. This method is not compatible with long lasting interviews. As discussed by Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) interpretations of atmosphere, body language and facial expressions will disappear when interviewing over the phone. It is also important to bear in mind the possible risk of technical difficulties. There is always a fine line between what is actually said in an interview and what is interpreted by the interviewer in qualitative research. This fact was kept in mind when analysing the collected data, as was the awareness of potential restrictions following that the chance to meet the interviewees was lost as was the opportunity to visit their work environment.

## 5.4 Data Analysis

### 5.4.1 Thematic Analysis

The purpose of a thematic analysis is to create and provide a framework for the analysis of qualitative data, the method of analysis acts as guidelines for how the researchers handle their data in terms of themes, sub-themes and categories (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study uses a thematic analysis with the purpose to find common central themes and subthemes. Themes that are typically built on recurring trends found in the data, were structured into categories which were later applied as a framework for the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Themes can be discovered in various ways, as presented by Bryman and Bell (2015) the most common way of finding themes is to look for phrases or subjects that are recurring throughout the material. Themes can be indicated through expressions and/or words that are used in unfamiliar ways, if there are metaphors or analogies in the collected material, how interviewees shift from one topic to another or how different interviewees approach the

discussed topic. Furthermore, linguistic connections can indicators of how interviewees use linking words to indicate how different questions or topics are related to each other. It also presents the possibility to reflect over what is *not* in the collected data, which can point the researchers in the direction of a certain theme or use specific scientific concepts as a way of discovering themes. However, regardless of approach used, emphasis is put towards repetition in order to establish patterns within the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The most important focus when creating themes is that of relevance for the investigated research question.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed to enable thematic analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015) in order to make it possible for the researchers to focus on the content as well as enable the possibility of transcribing the interviews to ensure valuable information and insights (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The total of 13 interviews were first coded with initial codes which were then merged into central themes. During the initial coding it became fairly obvious that the participants brought up roughly the same things, which made it possible to summarize the material in seven main themes. The main themes created were (1) Background, (2) Types of knowledge that is shared, (3) Methods and channels for knowledge sharing, (4) Challenges, (5) Culture, (6) Structure and (7) Perception of knowledge sharing. These themes laid the foundation for the structure of the results, which aim is to present the main findings in an easy and accessible way. The themes made visible certain patterns and differences between interviewees, they also made clear the type of connections that could be drawn between the empirical data and the chosen theoretical framework.

## 5.5 Ethical Considerations

In regards to ethical considerations, all participants were beforehand informed about the purpose of the study and were guaranteed full anonymity and confidentiality in line with recommendations from the Swedish research council (Swedish Research Council, 2017). All participants received a letter of intent containing information regarding the study and how the collected data was to be used and stored during the process. It was further stated that their participation is voluntary and that they can, at any time withdraw from the study. Permission to record was asked beforehand. All participants had the opportunity to ask questions both during and after the interview. Interviewees were also informed about storage of the interview files as safeguarded by the two researchers.



### 5.5.1 Reliability and Validity

There is an on-going discussion among researchers concerning whether reliability and validity is applicable to the qualitative research area. One common argument is that since the qualitative research tends to study social settings that cannot be “frozen” there is no point in discussing reliability and validity in its traditional sense (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In terms of *external reliability*, as described by Bryman & Bell (2015), chances are that the focus area and concepts used and discussed could be replicated in the future, however a study within the same company can however be hard to replicate. Even if Company X would participate in future research on the topic, differences in regards to respondents and circumstances under which the study is conducted might occur.

The *internal reliability*, according to Bryman & Bell (2015), concerns whether the researchers discover similar findings in the collected data. The initial coding was developed by both researchers, but however applied separately. When summarizing the results, similar findings and connections were made by both researchers. It was also evident that the researchers had similar interpretations from the material In terms of analysis and discussion.

The *internal validity*, as addressed by Bryman & Bell (2015), concerns whether there is a good match between concepts and observations in the study. When going through the collected data and conducting the analysis and discussion it became fairly obvious that the previous research and chosen theoretical concepts were applicable to the results. The theoretical framework made it possible to find connections and relations within the collected material and thus enabled a deeper understanding of the data.

Lastly, the *external validity* described by Bryman & Bell (2015) explains to what extent findings can be generalised to other social settings. However, the external validity is explained as a weak link, particularly in qualitative social research as it tends to use case studies and small samples. This study draws from a relatively small sample within a case study, which makes it hard to generalize in terms of external validity. The results can be used as an indication for what one might find if investigating a similar organisations and context, but cannot be used to explain a population or the field in general.

### **5.5.2 Limitations**

The use of case study design is the most significant limitation to this study. As described by Yin (2018) case study results have little or no ability to be generalised. The sampling method used does not allow for conclusions towards a whole population to be drawn (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Further, the risk of personal bias must always be kept in mind when conducting qualitative research. It is almost impossible to ensure complete objectivity when investigating a social phenomenon through interviews which in turn have to be interpreted and translated. However, by being aware of this potential risk, the hazard of misinterpretation and too far fetched connections are continuously managed throughout the process. Since all of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, there was a process of translating the data into English, this can be seen as a limitation. Quotes used in the results are directly translated to best ability. The access to amount of interviewees was affected by the fact that a new collaboration company had to be found when the process of the study was already initiated. This change occurred due to the current Corona-pandemic, initially access to 20 interviewees was granted. Due to this sudden change of circumstances and the short notice and lack of time in finding a new collaboration partner, access to participants in the new organisation was limited.

### **5.5.3 Methodological Reflections**

Due to current circumstances with the Covid-19 pandemic the risk of spreading the infection forced us as researchers to work from different locations during the crucial interview stage. Therefore the decision that interviewing over the phone was the most reliable and accessible solution to the situation was made, reassuring that all interviews would be possible to conduct. We are aware of the restrictions that comes with this, however it provided us with the opportunity to focus on the content of the interviews and decreases the risk for subjective interpretations.

Another opportunity would have been to use a video chat tool for conducting the interviews. This has similar restrictions and possibilities as interviewing over the phone. Bryman, Bell & Harley (2019) points out that there are advantages for both the interviewee and interviewer to see each other in order to make visual queues possible, such as body language and facial expressions. This can however also be a limitation as information that is not stated might be misinterpreted. When using a technical tool, the risk of technical difficulties is always

apparent. Sine all interviewees were easy to access over phone, this method for conducting interviews was chosen. It would have been beneficial to conduct more interviews but due to reasons mentioned above, this was not possible. As complexity has been found as an attribute of knowledge, this further emphasises the choice of using a case-study design, as described by Yin (2018) as applicable when investigating a complex subject.

## 6. Result

*This chapter will provide the reader with the results found in the collected data. Starting with describing the case, addressing the identified types of knowledge, how the organisation works with it and through what tools. Lastly, the result identifies challenges faced in terms of knowledge sharing.*

All respondents describe a broad variety of activities and experiences from different projects and customers. Most of them have been involved in several different projects during their time at Company X, however one respondent has been employed in the same project for several years. This is in contrast to the junior consultants, who have only been involved in shorter projects and are yet to begin their careers with customers. All consultants confirm that the goal on a regular basis is to be involved in external projects at full time, indicating a limited time put towards internal work. This differs somewhat between consultants and managers, but was addressed by all employees as important. Through the conducted interviews, it has become evident to us that knowledge is subjective, views on what knowledge and knowledge sharing is and its importance differs between individuals in the study. A difference in approach towards knowledge depending on age and level of seniority has been identified, drawing from how interviewees have described their experiences in terms of what type of knowledge they find important to share and how. It is also evident through interviews that knowledge can be divided into different groups that bear different meaning depending on circumstances and the individuals involved. It is therefore likely to believe that knowledge is perceived differently depending on who holds and shares it. Several interviewees lift this aspect as an important factor for prioritising what knowledge to share. Overall it is however expressed that knowledge is very important in this type of organisation since it is what makes a consultant valuable for the customer. *“...Because knowledge is what we deliver to our customers, our foremost resource, competence and knowledge is the most important thing we have” - Senior Consultant*

## 6.1 “Know-that”

A majority of the interviewees describe several different perceptions to what easily expressed and shared knowledge is, its importance and relevance to the organisation. The picture that is mediated by the interviewees is that several types of insights and material mediated through traditional tools, such as documentation, guidelines and methods for work exist. The knowledge that is captured this way is often quite easily understood. In regards to easily expressed knowledge, an overarching amount of interviews indicate that this type of knowledge is easily accessed elsewhere. Examples brought up are Google and other search engines. Therefore storage and structuring of this type of knowledge is not always perceived prioritized, many interviewees experience that they can access and find this knowledge individually, in that sense they are not as dependent on their co-workers.

*“But then I think there is a lot of information and other forums that you can find just through Google and find your way through searching rather than have something documented within the company itself” - Senior Consultant* One respondent also brought up the human factor of wanting to interact with colleagues when facing insecurities regarding some tasks, therefore they tend to look for the information elsewhere than in internal documentation, which respondents refer to as structural capital. *“...And in the end, if you look to how humans act, it will always come to that you ask the question “how do I do this” rather than searching through documentation” - Junior consultant*

The risk of the organisation treating knowledge that in reality is hard to grasp, as something easily accessible by trying to document it was brought up by one respondent. This is explained by the interviewee as leading to heavy documentation which is hard to penetrate and takes an unreasonable amount of time to use and access in relation to the returned value. It can be indicated that there are other types of knowledge that is not documented, which if it was, would be easier accessed and used. One mentioned example drawn from several interviews is that of “who holds what knowledge and experience” and in what field. This in turn leads to the addressed lack of sometimes unfavourable structures of knowledge as is documented in the organisation.

*“...This is what I am thinking, knowledge between people who have different backgrounds and experience, I mean how do I know who really knows what? Who should I approach if I need an answer to a specific question, how should I approach a specific tricky customer or a*

*certain tool” - Junior Consultant*

This indicates that processes for structuring documented knowledge exists, however the concern is addressed as if it is accessible and applicable within the organisation. It has been brought up that knowledge in terms of facts is perceived as easier to share as compared to other types of knowledge.

*“... Yes well, I mean facts are shared because they is much easier to share” - Junior Consultant*

Several interviewees have brought up the term structural capital referring to internal documentation such as documented cases, presentations used internally and externally and methods for approaching problems. Interviewees from both business areas have described a collective digital platform where this type of “know-that” knowledge is stored and accessible for everyone within their own business area. They also point toward the importance of actively creating structural capital for the organisation through summaries and documentation of knowledge and generic information. That way it can be used in several different actions, assignments and activities.

*“This knowledge bank is a way of constructing structural capital if you do something well in a project for a customer, if you run a workshop that we have not done before, then we will try to re-do it and make it generic and add it to the knowledge bank, that is our structural capital” - Senior Consultant*

## 6.2 “Know-how”

An example of knowledge addressed as harder to mediate is knowledge about ways of treating different types of people and dynamics. This knowledge is explained as learned through experience and the people who hold such experiences are mentioned to often know tips and recommendations in regards to handling different groups, individuals or customers in different situations.

*“I also think that the type of knowledge one really needs is simply how to handle people, I mean handling people and handling dynamics, most other things are stuff that you can solve yourself. But the human aspect is often the messiest and the part where people often need tips of how to handle different types of groups...” - Senior Consultant*

When the interviewees talk about this type of knowledge, it appears to be closely related to

organisational culture and their experience of what knowledge and information is perceived as useful and “ok” to share.

The “know-how” knowledge is expressed to best be learned over time preferably when working in a team with others, this is explained as fostering individual development. What characterises “know-how” knowledge from the data collected is that a person cannot just be told how something is done and directly learn from it, but rather it requires an exchange of experiences and hands on learning over time.

*“... it is the same thing as if you are learning how to dance, you can watch Let's Dance but that does not mean that you have learned anything until you have executed it. You understand it in theory, but you have to do it to learn it” - Junior Consultant* Another example of this is the idea that giving someone written instructions of how something is done would be a waste of time. The interviewee refers to the importance of informal learning through continuous on-going processes, that meaning incorporating learning in everyday work activities including exchange of experiences. Competence is considered an asset living within people and/or organisations and thus it always needs to be challenged. *“... Either if it is the person or the organisation, it needs to be continuously challenged with tricky situations or I mean, it needs to continuously grow in some way. Because if it goes to “stand still”, then development stops and it will sooner or later fall into pieces” - Senior Consultant*

The importance of theoretical and practical knowledge might be different between the two business areas, and has different relevance to different tasks. It is described by respondents that for some, practical knowledge is basically the only thing that matters and that fact based knowledge is not as important and therefore neither prioritised. On the other hand, others described fact based knowledge as important. It is also discussed that the structural capital that exists within the organisation is a security because it provides the opportunity to go back and consult and compare with, when in doubt.

### 6.3 What is considered Knowledge Sharing in a KIF?

It has become evident throughout all interviews that both knowledge sharing and knowledge is subjective. When interviewees were faced with the question of “*What is the first that comes to mind when you hear the term knowledge sharing?*”, a broad variety of answers were given, ranging from chatting with someone over the coffee machine to planned education days or documented knowledge.

*“The first that comes to mind I think is to share documented knowledge, that you have created PDF’s or Power-Points with basic material that you can reuse or that maybe can be used for internal education or as a base for giving a lecture for example, but then it can of course be books or podcasts or sharing a link that you have found with a good video or audio summary that you think others might also have use of” - Senior Consultant*

It is addressed by one interviewee that knowledge sharing is the foundation for everything they do. *“That is actually what my job is, to share the knowledge that I have” - Senior Consultant*

Many of the interviewees view knowledge sharing as a broad subject, highlighting the complexity related to the phenomena. One interviewee brings up customers and the importance for a consultant to be able to provide new input and knowledge, thus the knowledge sharing that takes place is between consultants and their customer organisations. This makes it the second time an interviewee brings up the fundamentality of knowledge sharing in the consultancy industry. *“...Knowledge in that manner, is fundamental for everything we do...!” - Senior Consultant*

Nevertheless, there is also an element of juniority and seniority expressed by the interviewees. Knowledge sharing takes place when the younger consultants or others in need of particular knowledge, learns from those with higher seniority, bringing up an element of learning connected to knowledge sharing.

There also seems to be an element of both formal and informal ways to view knowledge sharing and thus indicating a broad variety of methods that can be used. Some interviewees view knowledge sharing as an important internal activity, crucial for keeping their team up to date, and enabling a smooth process and delivery of services to their customers, not binding knowledge to one specific individual.

*“... Everyday work, how we in our teams make sure that not just one person can solve a*



*certain situation, we try as much as we can to make sure that someone else in the team can tag along” - Senior Consultant*

One interviewee mentioned a feeling of bad consciousness for not having enough time to work with internal knowledge sharing. The interviewee also addresses the clash between wanting the consultants to work towards customers and as such secure billable hours, with the need for internal development and learning from each other. It is further brought up that knowledge sharing is important in terms of getting someone else's perspective on questions or situations. That can be if you are stuck and need a partner for discussion, finding potential solutions and ideas, thus the interviewee here indicates the importance of the exchange of perspectives.

## 6.4 Knowledge Sharing Work

### 6.4.1 Culture & Communications as foundation for knowledge sharing

It has been evident throughout all interviews that organisational culture matters, that being directly or indirectly, for the existence of effective and/or useful knowledge sharing. One part of organisational culture, whether that is in the entire organisation, in a group or in a team, brought to attention is the importance of feeling that it is okay to ask and to not know everything. If people are scared to ask because of the risk of losing face, the organisation risks losing one “easily accessible” exchange between employees, that of reaching out and being honest about what they do and do not know.

*“...I have sensed a big difference in different projects where there is sometimes a feeling that you can't really admit what you are not sure of, or that you do not really want to be clear about that. And that leads to decreased knowledge sharing” - Senior Consultant*

The interviewee continues to address the culture by talking about the invisible acceptance created by the organisation and its employees. This is brought up in connection to whether the organisation or teams creates a safe environment for asking questions without questioning the individual's competence in relation to the matter. The interviewee points towards the opportunity for a team/organisation to create an environment that encourages the raising of questions.

*“... I think it is important, there is always a group dynamic which includes the need for being open and trusting within the group, and that does not exist in all groups. Or to a very low*

*degree in some groups” - Senior Consultant*

Another factor brought to our attention by most of the interviewees is that of spending a significant amount, if not all, time working outside of the home organisations offices. This has been addressed as affecting interactions, which in turn affects the collective organisational culture. *“... Most of us have assignments where we have to be in the office at the customers location, and then you are in a situation where you do not meet your “real” colleagues as often as you would like” - Senior Consultant*

The same goes for interaction between other teams in the same business area, not depending on location. *“...There are prerequisites... in order to have interchange with one and other there is a need to care for the relation... and therefore I believe that relationship will die out pretty quickly if you not actively work on sustaining it.” - Senior Consultant*

The interviewee is here referring to the fact that due to changing circumstances, one group will no longer have a natural relationship with another. Because of this, their relationship is at risk even though it appears to be beneficial for both groups to sustain it, further the interviewee brings up the need for incentives in order to remain in contact. This states a potential need or wish for the organisation and its team managers to provide incentives in order to achieve increased communication and thus potential knowledge sharing between groups that are not naturally interconnected. In relation to this, two interviewees also brought up the importance of establishing a personal relationship with other individuals within the company in order for an exchange to take place and thus creating a natural opportunity to ask questions. Whether that being within the same location or business area or not, the personal relation is also considered to be a prerequisite for non face-to-face communication to work and fall naturally.

*“...In order to have an exchange with others you have to take care of that relationship” - Senior Consultant*

Communication has been brought up as a common denominator in all interviews, whether that is face-to-face in everyday work or through digital channels. It is understood that all interviewees find communication to be key in order to reach successful knowledge sharing, whether it is directly stated or indirectly understood. Both informal and formal ways of sharing knowledge through communicating seem to appear. One of the managers talks about the act of highlighting a continuous and organisational learning already in the recruitment

process, since Company X want to foster a learning culture. Further it is mentioned that the chances of making a “traditional” career is in one sense not possible since the hierarchy of the firm is flat, this however points out the encouraged possibility of a “knowledge career” based in the organisations intentions to encourage each individual to learn in everything they do, and to actively seek opportunities develop.

*“... Since it is a flat hierarchy-organisation one can not make a traditional career here, however it is possible to make a knowledge career and continuously learn new things” - Senior Consultant*

The importance of everyone being dedicated in wanting to share their knowledge is brought up as an important trait in the organisational culture. The opposite of a culture where such behaviour is possible and encouraged would be what one interviewee refers to as a “hero culture”, this is explained as experienced in previous work places and is therefore known to be an obstacle if evident in an organisation. Based in this, the interviewee addresses the known importance of the culture as being open and employees being willing to share with each other. The culture within Company X is in this example explained as open and indicates that employees feel free to share with each other.

*“...It is not good to have one of those cultures where, I will explain it as a “hero culture”, That people do not want to share or tell anything because then they will not be perceived as “the best” anymore. I experienced this while working at a different work place. This is not at all existing at Company X, instead everyone is willing to share, that is the culture here...” - Senior Consultant*

One interviewee describes that when they are not assigned to an external project as referred to as “on the bench”, this is when they have time to engage in work directed towards their home organisation. *“... and now I’m on the bench, and then it has been everything from working with different educations that organisations buy... it can be initiatives that we are thinking of testing (internally), if we should try a certain way of working or thingslike that...” - Junior Consultant*

## 6.5 Tools and methods for Knowledge Sharing

### 6.5.1 Digital tools

There is an existing use of different chat functions and these are mentioned as used for both informal communication, such as sharing ideas and work related business prospects or solutions, but also for everyday co-worker interactions such as sharing a video clip or a news article. These functions usually include several channels or threads for different groups and topics of discussion. These tools are also described as filling the gap between planned gatherings, events or other interactions. Making it possible for the consultants to stay in the loop with each other and their different projects, even if they are not able to meet in person. Another digital tool is the video chat function which is frequently brought up as often used. *“... I often, to save time, call them (colleagues) on “Teams” and then I start sharing my screen. That way they see my screen and it has only been fifteen minutes and you don't need to book a meeting cause that would take more time” - Senior Consultant*

### 6.5.2 Structural Capital

Several attitudes towards collecting documentation and creating structural capital has been brought up. It appears to be of importance for the organisation that successful projects are documented and saved for the use and help of others in future similar assignments. In order to do this, a digital platform is used for sharing and documenting. Some of the respondents express the importance of keeping internal documentation of projects that have been successful and turn it into generic knowledge that can be used in future projects, whilst others are of the opinion that it is important to have a common platform where knowledge and information can be stored, but mentions a risk for “over-documenting” making the process of finding what you are looking for extensive in comparison to what you get in return. *“... “Keep it simple”, the minute you let things grow too big it becomes hard to handle, knowledge sharing is good but I believe that you need to limit it in some way in order to be able to make use of it” - Senior Consultant*

It also becomes evident that depending on demands on documentation from the customer side, and demands from the home organisation, levels of prioritisation of internally related documentation varies. This is explained by interviewees as depending on the customer and the size of their organisation and assignment, there can be high demands on traditional

documentation from the customer side, in other cases, verbal exchange of progress is enough, in those cases, demands for traditional documentation are often perceived as less. It is here indicated that in assignments related to high demands of documentation, there is a perceived correlation to decreased amount of time and/or willingness to create further documentation for internal use.

### **6.5.3 Mentoring Programme**

One of the methods used for knowledge sharing, which is also perceived as one of the interviewees as most useful, is mentorship. There is collaborations between young talents and seniors within the organisation, they work together in teams and in that way get a successful exchange of knowledge and experiences. This has been explained as a way for seniors to learn new “cool things” and for juniors to learn from the seniors’ experiences from working in the field for many years. *“... I’m a mentor to many of our young talents, I think that is the absolutely best thing..., it gives the most both ways, for sure!” - Senior Consultant*

Brought up by some of the junior participants is another incentive to create exchange between junior and senior employees. This includes time dedicated towards something knowledge related, which is beneficial to the organisation but also of interest for them as individuals in their everyday work. This is part of the mentoring mentality within the organisation, it is described as a good intention, however it is still in the early process of being established.

### **6.5.4 Team Deliveries**

Team-deliveries are viewed by an overarching majority of the participants as one of the most natural and effective ways of sharing knowledge. As explained by one of the junior interviewees, *“We do not always get to do team deliveries, but when we do, it is super evident that knowledge sharing instantly happens” - Junior Consultant*

Working as a team or being a team of at least two individuals is perceived as providing the opportunity for interaction, it leads to discussions and opportunities to bring thoughts and ideas to light and is pointed out as an important everyday interaction, encouraging effective exchanges. When active in a team delivery, one of the respondents brings up the importance of the daily “check-ups” within the team. Mentioning that doing so is crucial for effective day today work. *“...Every morning, for fifteen minutes or so, we check up on each other on what has happened since last we talked and what the plan is moving forward. In this project that I*

*am in now, things change so quickly that these fifteen minutes are absolutely crucial...*” -  
*Senior Consultant*

### **6.5.5 Formal Activities**

The interviewees present a broad variety of formal activities that takes place in order to socialise and establish relationships within the organisations. Examples of such activities are corporate breakfasts, lunches devoted to problem solving and discussing relevant subjects, monthly meetings and team based check-up on activities. The check-up meetings can be structured differently depending on team and assignment, but are a recurring event throughout the organisation. When corporate breakfasts take place the consultants are encouraged to be at the office and participate in discussions and social bonding, which in turn leads natural knowledge sharing. “... *We have corporate breakfasts ... and then it automatically leads to talking to your colleagues that usually are out on other assignments, and this gives you an opportunity to discuss... I guess that becomes an automatic type of knowledge sharing*” -  
*Junior Consultant* Exchange of expert knowledge has also been brought up as a type of knowledge sharing. This is done through explained educational activities where learning of a specific subject from experts take place. These experts are a part of the own organisation and the learning is done through planned gatherings devoted to a chosen specific subject. This is complemented by seminars, most often is held by an external informant.

### **6.5.6 Informal Activities**

Several informal approaches towards knowledge sharing have been identified in the data. One recurring theme is that of interacting with colleagues without a set purpose. These encounters have been explained as happening over a cup of coffee or on the run in the hallways of the office. These moments are explained as giving an opportunity to exchange quick ideas, thoughts or new ways of doing things. “*A lot of today's work is done just by the coffee machine or similar...discussing ideas and thoughts, finding new ways of doing things... its about just meeting and talking about this and that...?*” - *Senior Consultant* The opportunities for these easy-going interactions are also brought up as a way of getting to know one's colleagues and thus establishing relationships for future effective communication and sharing. The interviewee continues by explaining how a colleague needed help in an assignment which resulted in an informal dinner with a group of colleagues where potential arguments and solutions were discussed. This discussion was later continued in one of the chat tools.

One respondent addresses that during the current Corona pandemic, circumstances have changed. A lot of the informal communication that otherwise often happen when you run into someone at work does not come as naturally when your only opportunity to talk is online or over the phone. The respondent also brings up a change in subjects discussed, and is of the opinion that it is not as easy to address an issue or a topic in these channels unless you have something specific to say. The respondent also brings up the significance of getting coffee together during the work day. This appears to be a forum for bringing up both problems, other subjects and small talk that are not as easily addressed in meetings with set agendas as brought up by three interviewees. *“... I think a lot of the small talk is left out (In online interactions) for example when you go and get a cup of coffee with someone, that might be the time to bring up problems and stuff that do not come naturally in meetings with agendas... But I also like the chit-chatting, I think that's when you build a foundation of trust...”* - Senior Consultant

## 6.6 Challenges

### 6.6.1 Time

When discussing the topic of knowledge sharing, challenges are identified by the respondents, the most frequent one being lack of time. It has more or less been addressed by all respondents that there is a challenge in combining working for the customer and also have time to put towards internal work. This seems to be depending on that as a consultant, you are often expected to be working full time on the project you are hired for by the customer, thus making time the most scarce resource. Lack of time can be shaped in different ways, for some of the respondents it means that they do not prioritise taking part in internal meetings or gathering unless they have a specific reason to do so, indicating a one-way use of collective knowledge. For others it simply means that if they are expected to spend 100 percent of their working hours towards customers.

Several of the interviewees who brings up lack of time as an issue, also touches on the wish for a small amount of their working hours being dedicated towards internal work, or at least working from Company X's office. This does not need to be more than 5 percent in order to increase the feeling of belonging. However, this points towards another challenge, that of following the customers wishes. This indicates the complexity of being a consultant and thus

having several workplaces where the time has to be disposed according to agreements and expectations. *“It would be ideal if the manager could plan 97 percent of all hours towards customers, those 3 percent would open up opportunities to do some other stuff... But I mean, everything besides working directly with customers will end up being over 100 percent of work..” - Junior Consultant*

Another interviewee follows the same topic by explaining that it is crucial to direct time towards internal knowledge sharing. This aspect is however sometimes disregarded in favour of prioritising the assignment from the customer side. *“... it is very hard to take time towards this, thinking “ok now I should not work for the customer”, but instead spend time towards internal documentation for the use of others” - Junior Consultant.* The interviewee describes the lack of time for reflection after a project, this in the long run reflects on the organisational structural capital. Further a challenge seems to lie within balancing expectations from industry culture regarding billable hour with reality. The respondents describe a positive including culture at their employer, but nevertheless it seem that the general “consultancy” culture might differ. It seems that the organisation and its managers are encouraging time for internal work, related to reflection and sharing of knowledge and experiences, however the terms and ways of working when being a consultant are, as earlier addressed with regards to having multiple work places at once, indicating a difficulty in balancing demands and expectation from both directions.

### **6.6.2 Structure**

Another identified challenge is that of creating a collective structure and/or way of working. Due to the entrepreneurial mindset and structure of the organisation, there seems to be a lack of common directives for using tools and structural capital throughout the organisation. However, it is noted that in some regards, having such directives would be effective in terms of common understandings throughout the organisation. This indicates the need for freedom and recommended ways of working in terms of knowledge sharing. These would increase accessibility in many ways as well as decrease questions asked in the wrong forums or to the wrong person, making the forums and other co-workers easier accessible. Since the organisation is structured in different groups within every business area, it is up to each and everyone to create structures and ways of working that suits them best. This could be regarded as a strength, as explained by some interviewees as fostering commitment to the organisation,



but also as a challenge, as the feeling of “reinventing the wheel every time” is expressed. “... *Like the project I’m in now, we still need to kind of reinvent the wheel, there are no directives regarding how we work with change management... there are a lot of theoretical models, but nothing outspoken saying that this is the one we use...So every time we start up a new project, we have to start from the beginning, even though I am so sure that we have done it several times before*” - Junior Consultant

There is also a lack of common guidelines for what type of information that should be stored, where and how. One example of what is lacking could be a framework for naming of documents in the common digital platform or similar. Also directions about who has the right to create and store, but also how to share, use and explain the knowledge bound in the organisation is mentioned as needed. “... *I would like to see some directions from above for how we should share and use, but also create and store information*” - Senior consultant

Different views of the use of communication tools and forums has been identified. One interviewee express that chat tools are sometimes used for “silliness”, however not to a broad extent as mentioned as “less than one would assume”. Another participant emphasises the importance of communicating easily accessible knowledge, such as YouTube clips or other things that are experienced as good or useful but might not be perceived by everyone as directly work related. “... *And also a lot of silliness, but anyhow not as much as you would assume...*” - Senior Consultant

Within the challenge of finding structure lies the wish for a way of knowing who holds what knowledge, who one can turn to when contemplating a specific question. When time is a scarce resource, which needs to be balanced between interests, it is of great importance that finding material is easy and time efficient. Participants would rather know who to ask, and thus reach out to that individual directly. For this to be effective, it would require knowledge regarding who knows what and how to reach them in the right time and place.

The final important point is what one of the interviewees brought up as a generational difference regarding the view on work and the role of the consultant in the labour market. The interviewee explain that in their experience a younger generation have a more collaborative mindset and that their “expertise” is not a specific task, but rather the ability to find ways of working in a continuously changing environment. The interviewee means that previous generations have had focus on learning a task or skill, the longer you work, the better you get

at performing that task. A younger generation however, is not task specific or dependent, but are schooled in collaborating and solving problems depending on circumstances dictating the prerequisites in every specific situation. “...*It is the change that is our expertise, rather than the specific tool or method*” - *Junior Consultant*. The interviewee goes on to address a shift within the labour market between the larger, more bureaucratic organisations have more traditional way of viewing knowledge and thus the need for reading how things work in a manual, like an old machine. Whilst younger companies have their focus shifted towards being a part of the development within the organisation and as such understand how these processes works, due to the argument that things in six months most likely will be different.

## 7. Analysis

*This chapter will present the reader with connections between main empirical findings and the theoretical framework. The study and analysis aims towards knowledge sharing on an organisational level. A model developed from the analysis is presented.*

### 7.1 The Organisation

Results of this study indicates that Company X falls within the frame of a knowledge intensive firm (Alvesson, 2004; Grant, 1996; Walsh & Ungson, 1991; & Ejler, Poulfelt & Czerniawska, 2011) and can thus be connected to the knowledge based view of the firm (KBV) where Levitas (2013) describes organisations as developers, integrators and exploiters of knowledge, which has also been identified in our result. In order to facilitate the process of capturing and progression of knowledge, a constant inflow of knowledge to the organisation is needed. This has both been previously identified by scholars (Levitas, 2013) as well as in this study and as such makes knowledge sharing, transferring and progression relevant. The case reveals that in order for this to work, effective communication is needed.

Communication is found as a crucial prerequisite for facilitating the flow and thus development of knowledge, and as such needs to treat both external and internal knowledge flows to feed the constant development and increase of knowledge. This is strengthened by Cohen and Levinthal's (1990) statement on the importance of structure between the organisation and its external environment.

KIF's tend to operate in fast changing industries, holding fairly high levels of sophisticated knowledge (Alvesson, 2004), therefore one can argue that it would be beneficial to develop and share this knowledge within the firm. In an organisation with individuals holding a great amount of the organisational capability (Grant, 1996), mechanism of integration seem to be of importance and by the use of individuals sharing interpretations through effective communication, organisations can make possible keeping knowledge, which is explained by Walsh & Ungson (1991) as moving the knowledge from the individual level, to the organizational level construct.

## 7.2 Types of Knowledge

The results from this study have provided us with an understanding of the amount and breadth of knowledge inherent in an organisation as well as different views on what knowledge can be and how it can be divided. These results helped identify two different sub-groups of knowledge, which are explained as “know-how” and “know-that” as fitting to the respondents’ explanations and interpretations of the phenomena. These sub-groups can be connected and explained through the theories brought up as tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Further, a connection to Dreyfus’s (2004) expert knowledge is detected, as it is identified that senior and junior consultants in the case hold different knowledge as connected to level of seniority and juniority. Furthermore, the results tell that one of the highly valued types of knowledge is that of expert knowledge as is explained by Dreyfus (2004) and similarly explained by Grant (1996b) as specialist knowledge. It can be seen as if many of the seniors in the organisation are viewed as holding this type of knowledge and are therefore highly valued and seen as competent, they are also often the ones that lack time to share. As it is identified that both groups find it beneficial to work with each other, we found an interesting questioning of the classification of knowledge and what is viewed as competent in this case.

It has become evident that the view on knowledge is subjective and interchangeable between people and different situations, as is the view on knowledge sharing. Respondents refer to knowledge as the foundation for everything they do, as such knowledge sharing is crucial. As addressed by Awad & Ghaziri (2004), there is no one best way of sharing knowledge, which is also stated through the different ways respondents describe that knowledge sharing is done and how they prefer to receive information and/or learn depending on situations and circumstances. This study however indicates that organisations can find more or less suitable ways of sharing knowledge based on their own circumstances and resources, in this case identified as using team deliveries to a higher extent as well as making time for and creating structures in benefit of the ease of knowledge sharing. Due to the subjective nature it is hard to draw general recommendations. If connecting this to Human Capital Theory (Sweetland, 1996; Becker, 1993 & Beer et al. 1984), one can draw the connection that senior consultants holding high amounts of expert knowledge are of high economic value for the organisation. This also indicates a potential win from a knowledge sharing perspective, in terms of working

in “cross-generational” teams, since teamwork in this study has been identified as one of the most effective ways of learning and sharing knowledge between individuals. The younger generation holding knowledge about new ways of working, new ideas and recommendations might in fact be just as important and valuable for the innovation and increased development of a KIF. Based on this connection, one can question the idea that the “more” knowledgeable you are in terms of expert knowledge, the higher value you have for the organisation.

### 7.3 Challenges

Respondents in the study address that consultants in the organisation spend most of their time towards clients, this is also brought of as a norm in the consultancy-industry, which can be reflected in the overarching culture that comes with being a consultant, as explained in the results. This indicates a decreased face-to-face contact, which in turn is a challenge to Schein’s (2010) idea of effective learning leadership. Time has in fact been identified as a significant challenge for knowledge sharing as a natural part of everyday work in a KIF, in this case one that relies heavily on the flow of tacit knowledge. Time is also a challenge associated with the sharing of explicit knowledge. Another identified challenge is that of structure, which can as identified in the results, be closely connected to explicit knowledge but is also of relevance in association with tacit knowledge. There are two types of identified challenges connected to structure, the first being structure in terms of explicit knowledge, what knowledge needs to be documented and collected in the firms structural capital (Duignan, 2016), how and where to store it. The second being a structure regarding through what channels communication on different subject matters is to be conducted. As found in the result, there is a perceived wish for directives and common use of the existing basis of tools. This can be anchored in Grant (1996b) and the idea of rules and directives and group problem solving and decision making as a part of knowledge integration.

Drawing from empirical findings and theory, knowledge is found to be complex and as such we identify complexity as one of its constant attributes. Complexity as such always needs to be taken into consideration when addressing and treating knowledge in all its forms. The found complexity in integration and sharing is strongly connected to tacit and expert knowledge. Explanations to this can in part be found in theory as explained through its lower levels of common knowledge and its complexity in terms of transferability as discussed by Grant (1996b).

## 7.4 Facilitating Prerequisites

### 7.4.1 Culture

Making time, having structures and creating a culture in benefit for communication and building a culture, trying to reach what Schein (2010) refers to as a learning gene can have a significant effect on knowledge sharing in an organisation that has the potential for identifying hidden or undefined knowledge, as inherit in all generations and groups of individual consultants.

A common theme in the results is that of the spoken or unspoken importance of a culture, open for and effective in terms of knowledge sharing in order to reach organisational development and learning. In particular, the importance of feeling free to ask questions without the risk of losing face was addressed. Interviewees also expressed the possibility of making a so called “knowledge career” within the organisation, along with others highlighting the perceived encouragement to learning and sharing with each other both at work and on one's own. This can be related to Schein's (2010) ideas of a learning oriented culture and the nature of an inherent “learning gene”. It is indicated by most interviewees as perceived that the culture at Company X is innovative and encouraging. A perceived difference between culture within the industry (consultancy industry) and the culture within Company X has been brought to our attention. Since the consultancy industry is driven by customer demands there seems to be a prestige in being sought for as an individual consultant, furthermore this could mean that putting time towards internal work for the consultancy organisation, is perceived as holding lower status as compared to being scheduled in an external project. This could mean that internal processes and development are to some extent put aside, and are only dealt with when the consultants are “on the bench”, as also expressed by one of the interviewees. The researchers as such identify culture as a crucial piece in achieving knowledge sharing, as can be seen in our model of the knowledge sharing and development process. We find it likely for this component to appear as relevant in many organisations.

### 7.4.2 Communication

Communication is identified as the second underlying foundation for knowledge sharing in this KIF. Communication is to a broad extent brought up in the result section and is an ever-circulating topic throughout the interviews. It is found to be done in informal or formal ways,

face-to-face or through digital tools. This can be connected to Alvesson (2004) as he points towards a need for communication in order to reach coordination and increased problem solving. Communication can therefore be argued as part of a path towards increased knowledge sharing, or the revealing of hidden or not yet realised knowledge within the firm and its individuals. Hence, it is important for a KIF to identify and give directives on which knowledge is to be stored and communicated, as well as how and through what channels. It can also be argued that it is important to differentiate between the two identified types of knowledge, as in know-how and know-that, the different characteristics of the two make it possible to identify what methods for treating each group may be more effective. Thereby it is important to note that some challenges and ways of working with knowledge works for both types, while other are specifically beneficial to direct towards one or the other. For instance the know-how would preferably be transferred through working in teams or through ongoing collaboration between parties, whilst the know-that is easily transferred through documentation or in other written form.

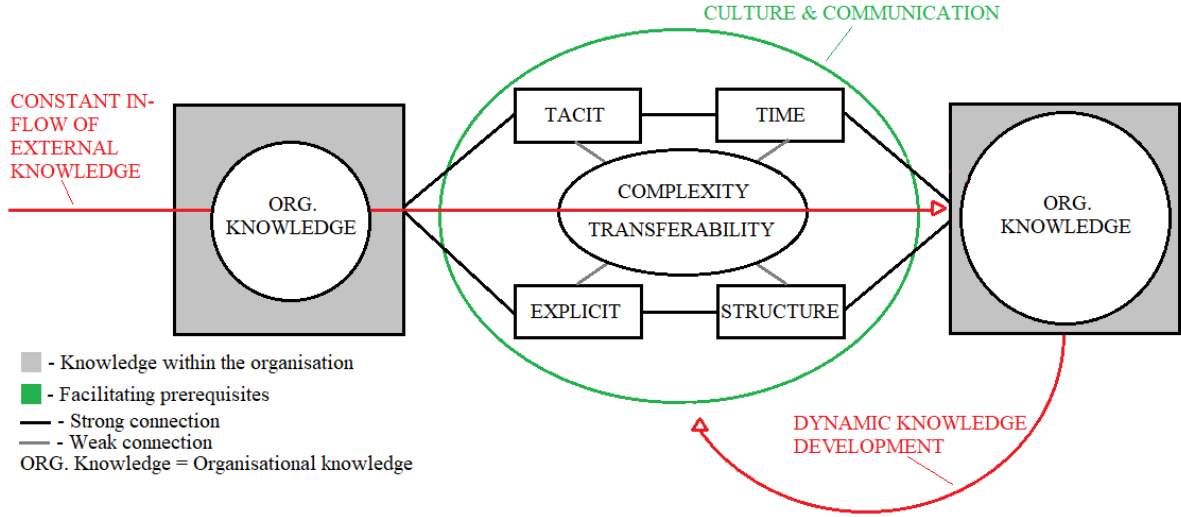
Communication and culture in that manner could be viewed as two crucial mechanisms for incorporating knowledge sharing in regular work. This can be viewed as similar to Grant's (1996) idea of mechanisms of integration. Communication is argued by Walsh & Ungson (1991) as a way of keeping knowledge within the organisation and can thus be seen as increasing organisational memory, it can therefore be argued that the organisational capacities (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) of the firm, in this case referring to the knowledge inherited in individuals can be translated into organisational capabilities (Grant, 1996) as it moves from living within an individual to being part of the firm wide knowledge, founded on a basis of effective communication and a culture encouraging learning, innovation and the raising of questions. As such, these are identified as facilitating prerequisites for knowledge sharing.

Connections to communication can also be drawn from previous research, more specifically so the case study conducted by Monteiro de Carvalho (2014). The author makes the point that time is one of the most scarce resources, which strengthens the same conclusion made in this particular case as well as sheds light on communication genres such as meetings, informal communication and project records. As in our study, Monteiro de Carvalho (2014) also points towards the importance of face-to-face communication as personal contact is viewed as decisive when it comes to effective communication in projects. As face-to-face contact is here

viewed as important for establishing relationships, and also for creating and maintenance of social capital (Häuberer, 2010), which in turn leads to increased effectiveness in communication, one can make the assumption that this can be generalized for some knowledge intensive firms. The lack of time is also brought up as a scarce resource in both cases which indicates another key element and challenge, not just in the case of Company X.

### 7.5 The Knowledge Sharing Development Process

Discussing the importance of culture and communication in regards to knowledge sharing, one can be overwhelmed by its multifaceted nature. It is not only the view on knowledge that is subjective, but also the experience and view of organisational culture as described by respondents, as such; what is viewed as a beneficial knowledge sharing culture? Schein (2010) for example, presents one way of seeing this, but it is not unlikely to assume that there will be as many interpretations to these ideas as there are views on knowledge. In trying to visually communicate the core of this thesis, a model was emerged throughout the study with the attempt to visualise the knowledge sharing process and some of its building blocks, combining theory and empirical results. Depending on context, the flow and circulation of knowledge has different effects, these can most likely be described to eternity.



Model 2



Concluding the analysis, this process can be summarised as the transferring of the external in-flow of knowledge (external learning and information), increasing the pre-existing organisational knowledge through challenges to knowledge sharing, and attributes of knowledge by the use of facilitating prerequisites, here identified as complexity and transferability. These attributes always needs to be taken into consideration in terms of organisational knowledge and the sharing and use of it. This process is done on the foundation of the facilitating prerequisites, which in this case are identified as culture and communication. Due to the case-study design, the stated challenges are case-specific and as such cannot be generalized to all KIF's. However, the structure of the model and the identified knowledge attributes are most likely applicable and viewed as constants, which will be further elaborated in the following discussion.

## 8. Discussion

*This chapter will present the reader with answers to the initially asked research questions, a theoretical discussion, managerial implications and lastly recommendations for future research.*

### 8.1 Answers to Research Questions

**RQ 1:** It is evident that the investigated Company X, through several methods and approaches work with knowledge sharing. Identified methods are mentoring programs, team deliveries, meetings and gatherings. It is apparent that having a culture that encourages discussion, questions and openness provides a foundation for knowledge sharing and increased effectiveness in communication.

**RQ 2:** Knowledge sharing is perceived as important and thus encouraged within the organisation, it is also stated that knowledge sharing is fundamental in this line of work. Positive intentions towards knowledge sharing are apparent, which is confirmed through respondents' individual experiences. In order to achieve knowledge sharing further, and as such gain and use knowledge in the firm, there are yet some challenges to be faced.

**RQ 3:** The main challenges identified from the results are lack of time and the need for structure. Time, as connected to the typical characteristics of consultancy work, being spending significant amount of time with clients. However, having time for internal connections and building useful relationships would benefit knowledge sharing possibilities and enable knowledge in regards to who knows what and thus who to turn to when in need for help or guidance. Establishing relationships is brought up as the foundation for feeling comfortable with and being able to exchange knowledge with others. Structure as the second challenge is divided into the structuring of structural capital in an effective and communicated manner, and structuring ways of using communication channels. Structures related to how communication on various levels is to be done will increase the availability of knowledge. It is of importance to understand that these challenges have been identified based on the fact that a consultancy firm may be different as compared to other types of KIF's since they hold a specific nature to their work. This in turn has an effect on the organisational culture but is also affected by the industry-culture. Lastly, complexity is identified as an attribute of knowledge

which is a constant challenge related to the phenomenon of knowledge and thus knowledge sharing. This is shown through the various ways this topic can be perceived and discussed, since knowledge is both situational and individual and built on personal experience and understandings and as such its transferability can differ.

## 8.2 Theoretical Discussion

The phenomena of knowledge holds an intrinsic complexity to it, this is also the case in relation to knowledge sharing due to its dynamic nature, especially in terms of tacit knowledge which tends to be hard and costly to transfer, as can be connected to Grant (1996b). We argue that this further highlights the complexity of the phenomenon. Important to highlight is that the understanding of knowledge sharing here, is drawn from the theoretical concepts, previous research chosen and empirical findings, and is thus only one combination of many ways in which knowledge and knowledge sharing can be viewed and understood. This could indicate that a potential further increased complexity could be added. Knowledge is identified as highly subjective, and the sharing of it between individuals depends on several factors, such as its transferability (Grant, 1996b), which differs between the know-how and know-that knowledge. We draw the connection between know-how and time as its main challenge, and know-that needing effective structures to increase its already existing communicability and thus accessibility. However, that is not to be misperceived as the only challenges in terms of transferring knowledge and as stated, knowledge is both complex and subjective, depending on the absorptive capacity of the sender and the receiver, interactions with the external environment and the ways communication is structured to the internal and external environment (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990).

Connected to Grant (1996b) and Cohen & Levinthal's (1990) findings we argue that it is important to find an effective way of transferring which is based on the situation and nature of the knowledge. Therefore drawing on the assumption that knowledge to some extent is situational, there is no point in everyone knowing everything, specifically in terms of tacit knowledge. Based on what scholars within the field have previously identified, we believe that working in teams would benefit the application of tacit knowledge and could be an effective way of getting to what is otherwise hard to access.

We believe that the perception of a sharing culture (Schein, 2010) within an organisation differs between individuals and, so it seems, also between generations. The younger half, as can be described as novice, advanced beginner, competent or proficient according to Dreyfus (2004) model, seems to hold a different type of knowledge than their senior, and more expert (Dreyfus, 2004) colleagues. This “younger” knowledge is often used to handle today’s ever-changing market and finding ways of adapting to it in an effective manner. It can thus be assumed that they are knowledgeable and adaptable to picking up on a new ways of thinking which puts them in the position where they have the opportunity to transfer this to their more senior colleagues.

Individuals holding expert knowledge are, by definition specialised towards a specific skill or field, and it is interesting how this can be affected and/or have an effect on intellectual capital or Human Capital Theory. It also increases the potential win in using and exercising effective knowledge sharing between different groups of an organisation. According to human capital theory (Sweetland, 1996; Stewart, 1997; Becker, 1993; Beer et al. 1984) depending on knowledge level, each person holds an individual economic value. In the view of knowledge as holding an economic value for the organisation, it can also be viewed as a type of currency that as Bran (2019) states, needs to circulate. This circulation is explained through the dynamic knowledge development loop presented in model number 2, where the currency, in this case knowledge, develops through the sharing process. One can ask the question of; what potential consequences viewing employees from an economic perspective would have on the general view of human resource management and thus also what consequences this could entail for employees as humans. One could argue that the view of employees as holding pure economic value, would be beneficial from a business perspective and might also be in line with what is addressed as the changing circumstances and demands on the labour market. This could possibly create a basis for a quite inhumane view on individuals as holding sought for knowledge, we argue that this is a potential risk inherent in trying to optimise knowledge sharing through individuals for the benefit of the organisation. Further it can be argued that a combination of the two views discussed above, could benefit both the individual and the organisation as the individual professional competitiveness on the market increases with the increase or development of individual knowledge, which is also indicated by respondents in this study. In today's fast-changing environment (Schein, 2010), the future might demand other types of knowledge than what we have seen earlier. One such difference can concern

expert knowledge, as dependent on if the knowledge is connected to a specific topic or area or whether it is knowledge regarding challenging pre-existing ways of working and finding innovative new solutions to existing problems or situations.

This can further be connected to an understanding of the field of knowledge sharing since new ways of valuing and steering a highly knowledgeable workforce might develop. This challenges Human Capital Theory, or can potentially adapt it to changing times and thus ideas of how we define knowledge, and what value we put towards it. It also increases the potential win in using and exercising effective knowledge sharing between different groups in an organisation. Further it indicates a potential major win in working in teams, as this has been identified as one of the most effective ways of learning and sharing knowledge between individuals, thus making it part of the organisation for future use (Walsh & Ungson 1991). One can thus question the idea of the fact that the “more” knowledgeable you are in terms of what is referred to by Dreyfus (2004) as expert knowledge or Grant’s (1996b) specialist skills, the higher value you have for the organisation. We further argue that it is important in many aspects to work across and between Dreyfus’s (2004) knowledge levels. Expert or specialist knowledge is important, but if combined with the ability to adapt to aspects such as globalism, the information age and knowledge-based organisations (Schein, 2010) and the fact that it is hard to prepare for the future, teams might be able to reach higher collective knowledge levels and innovative results. A question that can be raised in relation to Dreyfus’s (2004) model, is that of; if knowledge will take a different form moving forward, towards what can be described as mind-sets or problem solving skills for handling changes in circumstances in the market, will it then be of interest to categorise types of knowledge in the sense that is done in his model? There are fields in which expert knowledge will always be crucial, such as in the health sector. However, one can view this differently in the case of KIF’s, if moving towards working collectively to a higher extent rather than individually, it will still be important for the organisation to hold individuals with expert knowledge, however everyone does not need to be ‘classic’ experts in order to hold high value. As the world will continue to change and be increasingly complex (Schein, 2010) we come to the conclusion that it will be as important to have the ability to adapt to, improve, innovate and challenge existing ways of working as inheriting expert knowledge. If these valuable types of knowledge are combined, collective competence can be argued to be created, which according to Locatelli Bertolini, Macke & Wolf (2016), is more than the sum of the individual

competences. The topic of collective competences emerged during interviews and is therefore not presented in the theoretical framework.

We agree to Schein's (2010) statement of the importance of being able to adapt to changes and becoming endless learners, however we would like to add the importance of combining types and levels of knowledge as done through working collectively. The combination of two types of tacit knowledge will most likely reach new heights in terms of ideas and results, we do not necessarily need to transfer all of our knowledge to each other, but we need to be knowledgeable enough to understand each other and thus make collective use of what we know. This would require a learning oriented, adaptive and flexible culture, as already addressed by Schein (2010). Teamwork will also contribute to the sharing and thus sustaining and challenging of knowledge in the organization. We argue that time is crucial in order to achieve effective knowledge sharing, this is also addressed by Schein (2010), which strengthens our study. However our second identified crucial resource is structure as also addressed by Grant (1996b) especially in terms of explicit knowledge. It would be easy if the answer to the challenging activity of knowledge sharing was to free time and create structures, however these are not the only obstacles towards knowledge sharing.

### 8.3 Future research

As there seem to be similarities regarding challenges and the importance of communication between this study and previous case studies, connected to Monteiro de Carvalho (2014), a recommendation for future research is a study comparing cases of KIF's in order to be able to draw general connections between similar organisations in the field of knowledge sharing. This could provide for general recommendations and a founded understanding of the importance of the subject matter, which can in turn help organisations assess their own situation and grow their organisational knowledge. As brought up in the analysis, the generalisation that facilitating prerequisites will exist in relation to all KIF's can be made, however the specification of what these are cannot be determined from this study. Therefore it would be interesting to study other KIF's in order to compare and potentially make this generalisation and/or find differences. It would also be of interest to investigate this area from a behavioural economics perspective. This could provide an insight into arguments for how much activities such as knowledge sharing could benefit an organisation in the long run, while still being able to investigate from for a long term economic perspective.

A further practical development is to look closer at ways in which employees prefer to share knowledge. This can provide organisations with an idea of what activities to prioritize as well as provide an understanding for the own work force and their preferred ways of working with knowledge and knowledge sharing. This would most likely be conducted as a quantitative study.

## 8.4 Managerial Implications

As explained in the model, communication and culture are identified as facilitating prerequisites. With these foundations in place it is argued that organisations easier work practically with knowledge sharing in several ways.

Knowledge sharing can be done in different ways and with different levels of ambition depending on the organisation, their structure, size, needs and area of operations. Such levels of ambition can differ between “on-the-job” knowledge sharing as done through spontaneous interactions between teams and individuals over a cup of coffee, or when running into each other in the hallways of the office. Reaching all the way to an ambitious knowledge sharing “system” with the goal to “access” as much individual knowledge as possible and move it to an organisational level construct (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), making it accessible and potentially creating a system or structure for active knowledge sharing. An example of how a structured system can be organised is through the use of databases for storage, using search engine optimization and detailed guidelines for use of both structural capital and communication channels. Recommendations in this manner are dedicated towards explicit knowledge as it holds higher communicability (Grant, 1996b).

The studied organisation lacks time for tasks that are not focused towards billable hours, due to this, one can argue a need for increased structures in order to make knowledge sharing easy and accessible. As such, it needs to be a natural part of the organisation and everyday work, directives for usage can make the structures and existing tools increase in effectiveness.

As we conduct this study, we are in the midst of a global pandemic. As such, the current situation causes us to think differently which also relates to how we view knowledge sharing and the use of it. In a general situation, recommendations for Company X would be to integrate knowledge sharing in everyday work. This can be done through, on its lowest level,

encouraging peer-to-peer interactions and meetings between teams, departments and also office locations. This has been perceived to increase and strengthen relationships, which makes the natural flow of knowledge easier. It helps to have an established relationship with someone in order to be able to “make use of” each other’s knowledge. As the employees due to current circumstances are instructed to work from home, this is not the most relevant method at the moment, however, it might be in the future.

Knowledge sharing can also be done through existing methods in the organisation, with the addition of including general guidelines for increased effectiveness. This is linked to the increased use of digital tools such as chat functions and video link meetings. These are viewed as saving time and are effective in many ways, but also seem to require a relevant culture, as brought up in the analysis as well as solid relationships and knowledge about one's co-workers. It seems that these tools are effective when interacting with people in your close work environment, but maybe not so much for those you do not know, but who could have knowledge that would be of great benefit for you and others. Team-deliveries seem to be another everyday way of making sure knowledge develops and travels between people, in fact this is the one that is perceived among employees as the most effective. However, a potential barrier to overcome in this case is that of customers hesitating to pay for team-deliveries when they have the option to pay for one man for the same task.

Another discussed strategy is that of releasing a few percent of the total work hours towards work that benefits the home organisation, in this case, that of actively working with knowledge sharing. As indicated in the results it happens that consultants need to spend time on what they refer to as “on the bench”, one can argue that if this time was aimed towards structured projects it could be of great advantage for the organisation. Recommendations are here divided into two, (1) Building a knowledge bank optimized for sharing and making explicit knowledge easily accessible and (2) creating structures and directives for how to effectively use and reach knowledge sharing through already existing tools and channels. Such directives come from management and can act as guidelines throughout the organisation or business area, depending on need and potential use of each other. In this particular study, it seems relevant.



Possibilities and difficulties with more or less structured forms and strategies for knowledge sharing are interesting to discuss. It seems that structure can create for other opportunities, such as grabbing a cup of coffee after a meeting, and in this case even the people who are normally not that present in-house will be available for a few minutes. The potential difficulties can be seen as losing the spontaneity and the “fun” in meeting people, when knowing that this is seen as knowledge sharing, there might be a risk of it being perceived as forced and thus losing its purpose and “easiness”.

Structuring sharing can be attempted through creating a structure for how tools and channels, which are already incorporated in the organisation, are to be used in terms of “where we talk about what”. This is done in order to not lose anything in translation or drown in an overload of information. Another key is to create the opportunity for networking through activities where employees from different teams, departments and locations meet. This can create connections and “knowing about existing knowledge” and thus a way of accessing knowledge by creating and sustaining relationships.

All of these activities take time and time is a challenge, but it can be worth the effort in terms of creating more effective teams, increasing the amount of organisational knowledge (as mapped in the model) and thus increase and sustain relevance towards customers.

Consultancy agencies such as Company X gain tons of knowledge from their own consultants operating in external projects. Through storing with effective structures, keeping the information up-to-date and communicating how these structures are to be used, could counter work a perception of an overload of documentation. Could this be done through video-files instead of printed documents, there are many creative ways of doing it. By finding the appropriate way for the own KIF to utilize these suggestions, the organisation moves towards what Awad & Ghaziri (2004) defines as the ideal knowledge organisation.

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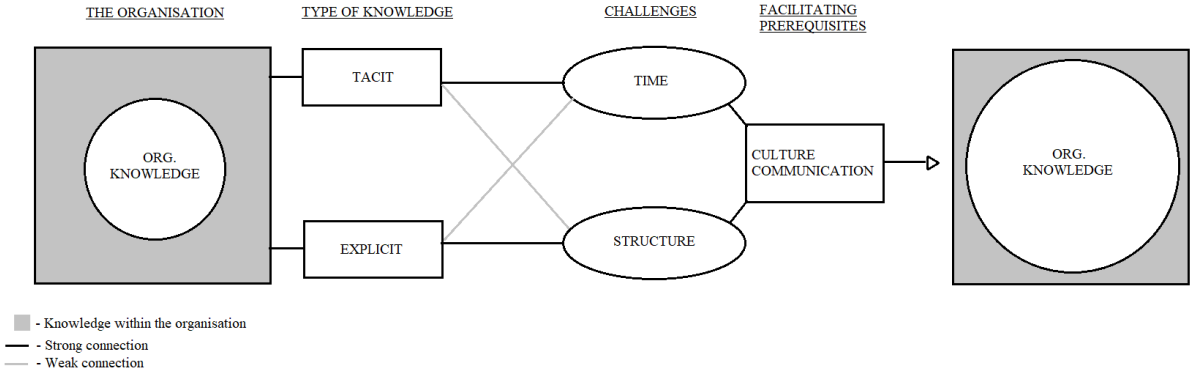
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# 10. Appendix

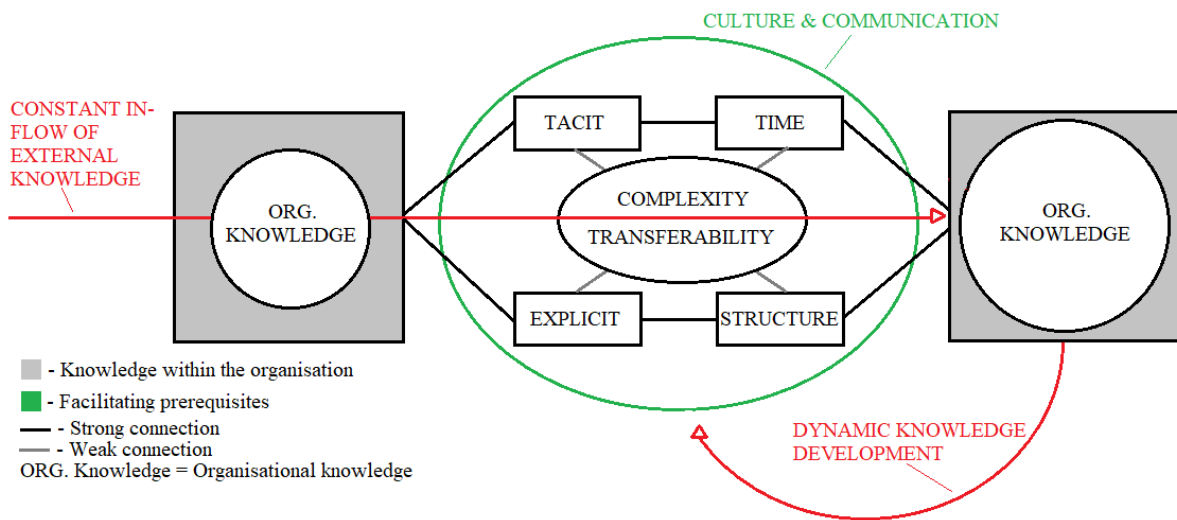
## Appendix 1:

### Model 1



# Appendix 2:

## Model 2



## Appendix 3:

### Intervjuguide (SV)

#### Tema 1:

##### Bakgrund

- Presentera dig själv!
- Vilka ansvarsområden innefattar ditt jobb?
- Vilket affärsområde tillhör du?
- Vad tänker du på om vi säger “knowledge sharing”?

#### Tema 2:

##### Organisationskultur

- Vilka metoder för knowledge sharing används vid företaget/din enhet?
  - Vad behövs för att detta ska vara möjligt? (*ex. dokumentation, kommunikationskanaler etc.*)
- Vilken är din erfarenhet av att använda dessa metoder?
- Hur är sammansättningen av era projektgrupper?
- Vilken slags kunskap tycker du det är viktigt att dela?

#### Tema 3:

##### Knowledge Sharing

- Kan du beskriva en situation där du har upplevt knowledge sharing på din nuvarande arbetsplats?
  - Om ja: beskriv och förklara
- Upplever du att du i ditt dagliga arbete har utbyte med dina kollegor (hur?)
- Hur viktigt är det för dig att investera i din egen professionella konkurrenskraftighet?
- Har ni något forum där ni kan dela framgångar och utmaningar på jobbet?
- Är det något som du tycker borde förbättras när det gäller kunskapsdelning i din organisation?
- Finns det någonting som du/ni redan gör som du tycker att fler borde veta om eller ta del av i relation till knowledge sharing?
- Upplever du några hinder för att kunskap enkelt ska kunna delas och användas inom organisationen?

##### Frågor riktade till managers:

- (Vet du om det)/Finns det en plan för hur ni i organisationen vill jobba med knowledge sharing?
  - Om ja; Kan du ge ett exempel/förklara
  - (Upplever du att man ser) Ser ni knowledge sharing som en viktig del i er organisation och i så fall hur uppmuntrar (man) ni till det?
  - Hur ser ni på kunskapen som era konsulter tar med sig in till företaget

##### Bonusfrågor:

- Finns det (Slack/annan) Kommunikation mellan affärsområden?

## **Appendix 4:**

### **Interview guide (ENG)**

#### **Theme 1:**

##### **Background**

- Introduce yourself
- What areas of responsibility do you cover?
- What comes to mind when you hear the term “knowledge sharing”?

#### **Theme 2:**

##### **Organisational culture:**

- What methods for knowledge sharing are used in your unit/in this organisation?
  - What do you think is needed/helpful for this to be possible? (documentation, communication channels etc.?)
- Do you have any experience of using these methods?
  - Please explain, give example or elaborate
- What does the setup of your project groups/teams look like?
- What type of knowledge do you think is important to share?

#### **Theme 3:**

##### **Knowledge sharing**

- Please explain a situation where you experienced knowledge sharing at your current workplace
  - Explain and elaborate
- Do you experience an exchange with your colleagues and coworkers in your daily work?
  - If yes: how?
- How important is it for you to invest in your own professional competitiveness?
- Do you/your organization have any forums for exchanging professional challenges and successes at work?
- Do you see any areas of improvement in terms of knowledge sharing in your organisation?
- Do you see or already engage in any knowledge sharing activities that you believe should be shared within the organisation?
- Do you experience any obstacles for knowledge sharing or the exchange and use of information at your workplace?

#### **Theme 4:**

##### **Managers**

- Is there a plan in place for how you work with knowledge sharing within this organisation?
  - If yes: give an example and please explain and elaborate
  - Do you perceive knowledge sharing as an important part of your organisation and if so, how do you encourage it?
- How do you relate to/perceive the knowledge that your consultants bring into the firm?



## Appendix 5:



### UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

#### Letter of Intent

This study is a Master Thesis conducted within the Master programme of *Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations* at Gothenburg University Department of Work Science & School of Business Economics and Law.

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**Purpose of the study:** *Assessment of knowledge sharing in a Knowledge Intensive Firm (KIF) conducted as a case study at company X.*

Participation in this study is voluntary and you as a participant can at any time during the study chose to withdraw your participation and your contribution (information/interview answers) will then not be used as empirical material. All participants are guaranteed full anonymity (if nothing else is agreed upon). Readers of the thesis and or other participants can by no means connect certain answers to specific participants.

Data collection will be conducted through interviews and document analysis through access granted by the organisation. By signing this document, you as a participant agree to the recording of your interview (if nothing else is agreed upon). The purpose for recording is the enabling of important empirical data. All data collected will be used for the sole purpose of this study and will be safeguarded by the conductors.

All raw data will be stored in accordance with good research standards and will not be available for anyone other than the researchers (i.e. not in a cloud service or similar). The final version of the thesis will be presented in a written report in line with university standards.

Each interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

If you have any questions about your participation or about the study, please contact us at:

[acm.fransson@gmail.com](mailto:acm.fransson@gmail.com) or +46723-612577

[sofia.langenius@gmail.com](mailto:sofia.langenius@gmail.com) or + 46722-227933

Thank you so much for your participation and we are looking forward to talk to you!

Best Regards,

Anna Fransson & Sofia Langenius

---

Date and signature:

## **Appendix 6:**

### **Information om studie i Knowledge Management (SV):**

Hej!

Vi är två studenter från Masterprogrammet i Strategic Human Resource Management & Labour Relations vid Göteborgs Universitet som nu under våren skriver vår master thesis inom Knowledge Management, mer specifikt Knowledge Sharing in Knowledge Intensive Firms.

Studien bygger på intervjuer som kommer ta ca. 30-45 min var. På grund av rådande omständigheter kommer dessa att genomföras över telefon eller via Skype under mars/april månad. Totalt kommer vi intervjua 10-15 personer från varierande team, ansvarsområden och nivåer.

Bifogat finner ni ett "Letter of Intent" som beskriver lagring och användning av empirisk data. Detta kommer att förmedlas till och godkännas av er som deltagare för att säkra konfidentialitet och förståelse av villkor.

Skulle ni ha några frågor om studien så tveka inte att höra av er till oss på mail eller telefon:

**Sofia Langenius:**

[sofia.langenius@gmail.com](mailto:sofia.langenius@gmail.com)

+46 722-227933

**Anna Fransson:**

[acm.fransson@gmail.com](mailto:acm.fransson@gmail.com)

+46 723-612577

Vi tror och hoppas att detta kommer bli en givande studie för er som organisation men också för oss som utför den. Stort tack på förhand!

Vänliga Hälsningar,  
Anna Fransson & Sofia Langenius