Knowledge Sharing Across Cultures

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Knowledge Sharing Across Cultures:
Useful Guidance and Recommendations
for Growing International Companies

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Foreword

Knowledge Sharing Across Cultures: Useful Guidance and Recommendations for Growing International Companies is a book written with its outset in the experiences of one particular company that encountered great knowledge sharing difficulties as it expanded internationally. This phenomenon is not unique – countless firms experience growing pains when expanding internationally, however, many of them never realize the origins of these pains or how to remedy them.

This book seeks to provide valuable insight for firm managers that have made this realization; as organizations increases in size and scope, knowledge sharing capabilities decrease as a result of larger variances between the organizational members. As such this book is useful as it depicts the stances taken by different subsidiaries of one large multinational corporation on a knowledge sharing initiative. By reading the descriptive accounts of the subsidiary interviews, company managers can better contextualize potential problems of a similar nature that they might encounter when confronted with a comparable situation. As a result of some interview subjects being pro knowledge sharing, and others less enthusiastic, the book provides a well rounded depiction of the problems associated with boosting knowledge sharing activities within large companies and provides workable solutions to overcome these.

1 | Setting the Stage

Knowledge for companies has always been critical. However, as we approach the close of the first decade after breaking the millennium barrier, the significance of optimizing your knowledge base can be argued to be more vital now than ever before. The ongoing authority of the IT revolution and globalization, and the whirlwind of implications they have on companies, leave no room for compassion; either companies optimize their knowledge base and remain competitive or they are removed, one way or another, from the playing field.

Creating and sustaining an atmosphere in which people of an organization are willing and able to disseminate knowledge is thus pivotal to success in any modern knowledge sharing initiative. Yet, as countless companies have discovered, the perception that knowledge equals power is an instinct difficult to dissolve; the natural inclination of humans at every level in almost every organization is to hoard knowledge and unless the right environment is established any attempt to encourage effective knowledge sharing will ultimately prove futile (Atkins and Bridger 2001).

Add to this bleak outset a multicultural environment and the problems related to knowledge sharing are further exacerbated. Companies that have successfully expanded to encompass a variety of differing cultures also have the problems of differing perceptions of how, who and what knowledge sharing should pivot around. Thus, for the multinational company that seeks to circulate useful knowledge around its peripheries, knowledge sharing is a complex matter that most times is never fully utilized.

This book sheds much needed light onto this complicated subject. It is based on the experiences of one particular company that has undergone a rapid acquisition expansion process and now has a very large and wide array of subsidiaries with very differing corporate cultures under its operating umbrella. The problems the company underwent are however not particular; they are typical representations of knowledge sharing difficulties that most large multinational corporations (MNCs) ex-

perience when subjected to rapid international expansion. The analysis and derived insights of this particular case therefore lend themselves to a broader scope of companies and industries and are applicable to any international company suffering from deficient knowledge sharing practices.

1.1 Background

The prolific utilization of knowledge, for humanity, has always been and continues to be a source of great power that is both revered and feared. Centuries ago, while still in the midst of expanding the limits of their empire, the Romans came to the Egyptian city of Alexandria. There, in order to assert the supremacy of the emperor over the conquered land and to install a feeling of fear that, it was hoped, would deter any potential local rebellion, the legionaries set the Great Library of Alexandria on fire. The results were catastrophic: the building, which acted as the repository of most of the human knowledge that had been accumulated until then, and the 500,000 books it housed, were completely destroyed.

Historically, the event is now considered as the cause of the so-called Dark Years in Europe and it is believed to have set mankind back by several centuries in our continuing quest for knowledge. The full extent of the long-term consequences of the loss, however, will forever remain unknown. All we can do is ask ourselves where we would be if it had not happened, if the works contained in the Great Library had continued to be available for the researchers to study them. The sharing of existing knowledge is the essential base on which to create new knowledge. This holds true at the scale of humanity as for modern organizations.

World trade, especially within the developed countries of the world, is on the rise. In large, we chose to label this rise in world trade as 'globalization' and in its wake lie multitudes of assorted international mergers, acquisitions and joint ventures that aim at making organizations more efficient. Common for them all, if they truly hope to reap the benefits from higher efficiency, is their acute need for international knowledge sharing systems that integrate strategies for tackling differences in corporate and national cultures. We see that many, otherwise flourishing, firms fail to accomplish this and nullify a good business opportunity that seemed promising at the outset. Surprisingly often, the cause lays in misunderstandings attributable to corporate and national cultural differences, as well as communications systems that are poorly equipped to handle intercultural issues.

Scholars have researched the topic for many years and consequently the related theory is extensive. Although careful attention has been allocated to analyze the problems of knowledge sharing systems involving intercultural communication possibilities, they nevertheless still cost multinational firms lots of time, efforts and money. Consequently, it is clear that it is important to understand and accept that knowledge sharing in an international setting is, simply put, very difficult and entails many pitfalls and barriers. It is only once this realization has been made that one can begin to conduct the initial steps towards improving the situation.

The Copenhagen based multinational company ISS is a company that has made this realization. Through their rapid growth, the ISS group now operates in a global environment, an environment completely unlike the original mono-cultural setting the company was born in. As a result, ISS is experiencing numerous problems with their implementation efforts of a global knowledge sharing system. In this book, I set out to analyze the imperative issues of one of these problems, namely the problems related to overcoming the knowledge sharing difficulties stemming from differences in corporate cultures across a multinational organization. The goal of the analysis is to emerge with several recommendations as to how ISS, and companies in similar situations as ISS, can overcome these problems and share knowledge globally without losing out to corporate cultural differences.

1.2   The Corporate Partner, ISS

Integrated Service Solutions (ISS) is a Danish company founded in 1901 where it was a small local player but has since grown to become one of Europe's largest employers. The company plays a consolidating role in the facility support services industry (cleaning, maintenance, and tailor-made service packages targeted to specific types of customers) and, following a recent period of organic growth and acquisitions on the international scene, ISS now takes the form of a group of wholly owned, yet relatively independent subsidiaries that operate in 38 countries worldwide. Its market position is particularly strong in Europe, South America and Asia. The headquarters of the group, ISS, are located in Copenhagen and together, the different entities that form the company employ in excess of 265,000 employees, servicing more than 75,000 business-to-business customers.

ISS has a set of four pivotal corporate values that are supposed to guide the decisions and actions of every subsidiary of the group. Hon-

esty is said to be a fundamental value of the company, on which a strong reputation, long-term relationships with the customers, open communication and a better overall working environment can be developed. Entrepreneurship is highly valued, as actions should prime over words. Ideas that can improve the service offered to the customers are welcomed and encouraged to thrive. The importance of responsibility towards colleagues, customers, shareholders, the company itself, and other stakeholders is embodied in the decentralized decision-making process. Finally, quality and professional conduct are ensured by adhering to, and often creating business standards for the industry.

According to its stated strategy, ISS aspires to advance and lead its industry on a global basis. More specifically, the company wants to evolve from offering multi-services to offering facility services; to shape the industry; to be considered as the premier employer in the industry; to deliver global concepts through a strong local presence; and to partner with their customers to enhance their competitiveness. In order to achieve these goals, ISS has launched a strategic plan that entails the internationalization of some specific business sectors (Aviation, Food Services, Damage Control, etc.), a redefinition and re-branding of their services, the development of incentives for their employees, the rapid addition of new relevant businesses, the continued transformation and consolidation of the industry, and the spin-off of some businesses, when it is deemed beneficial for the group. These strategic elements, it is believed, will lead to a doubling of the operating revenues in 2008 (from Euro 4,632 million in 2005 to Euro 8,530 million) and to a stabilization of the growth rate at 6% (there have been wide variations during the recent years).

The implementation of the strategic elements that will render the attainment of these targets possible builds on the afore-mentioned core values of the company, but also on a new, innovative vision of their business. The central control of the international subsidiaries of the group has traditionally been limited to the examination of financial performances, while they were left alone to operate independently in their respective market. Little was ever done to inculcate a common worldwide corporate group-culture to the companies that were acquired or started, which resulted into the parallel development and continued existence of a series of independent and often diverging corporate sub-cultures. Given the effective non-existence of a common corporate culture and the high level of independence traditionally enjoyed by the subsidiaries

of ISS, they are in fact operating as separate commercial entities that have nothing but their parent in common. In the absence of something that can be treated as an ISS corporate culture, I chose to consider the corporate sub-cultures of the subsidiaries as different corporate cultures and to treat them accordingly in this book.

1.3   Identifying the Problem

ISS considers the ability to effectively share knowledge across units a premium source of competitive advantage that has the potential to increase its corporate value and improve the entire organization. Consequently, the company has, for several years, tried to set-up a knowledge sharing system called Business Insight throughout its various subsidiaries located around the world. Some subsidiaries appear to be on the knowledge sharing 'band-wagon' and share the headquarters' eagerness to make Business Insight a success; other subsidiaries are reluctant to give the knowledge sharing initiative a sincere effort. The drastic variation in corporate cultures present throughout the 38 national subsidiaries of the group is considered to be the paramount cause of the difficulties experienced in sharing knowledge between these units. It is also used as the main argument to explain the reluctance of some subsidiaries to join the knowledge sharing initiative. Accordingly, the subsequent portrayal and analyses of the intricacies present at ISS attempts to identify solutions to optimize knowledge sharing activities across its differing corporate cultures.

KEY ISSUE OF ANALYSIS   *How can ISS optimize its global knowledge sharing activities across varying corporate cultures?*

In order to be equipped with the necessary knowledge to give a satisfactory answer to the issue formulation, it is essential to thoroughly analyze two underlying research questions that are related to the above. Proceeding in that manner will facilitate arriving at a complete and well-argued result that will, at the same time, be logical and coherent for the reader to follow. The first research question (hereafter called 'Research Question 1') therefore seeks to shed light on how knowledge sharing is optimally done across differing corporate cultures, according to theoretical models and conceptions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1   *How is knowledge sharing optimally done across corporate cultures?*

The second research question (hereafter called 'Research Question 2') delves into the specifics of ISS and seeks to illuminate the problematic areas of global knowledge sharing within ISS today.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2 *What are the problematic areas of global knowledge sharing within ISS?*

My attempt at formulating a satisfactory answer to the key issue of analysis will first come once these two research questions have been answered.

1.4 Delimitations

The focus of this book is not on the broad topic of knowledge management, but solely on the integrate sub-topic of knowledge sharing. This distinction is very important to make; as will become apparent in the next section (From Knowledge Management to Knowledge Sharing), knowledge management is a much more encompassing concept with which I do not take arms as its magnitude exceeds that which I can credibly confront in this small book. The current work consequently focuses exclusively on knowledge sharing in relation to varying corporate cultures, and on how ISS can achieve optimal results with its current knowledge sharing system and differing corporate cultures. There are numerous other elements that affect ISS' ability to share knowledge between its units, but elements such as geographical hindrances, technical restraints, etc., are purposely excluded from the core focus of this book in order to raise the intensity of the results pertaining to the issues of corporate culture.

The book is not aimed at providing multinational corporations with a blueprint of how to successfully integrate a knowledge sharing system into their organization. I am convinced that there is no golden formula for a globally applicable, successful knowledge sharing system and each initiative must take into account the specific needs and situations of the corporate, national and international environments of the individual organization. I therefore make a conscious move away from proposing a universal knowledge sharing solution, as this would be doomed from the beginning. Instead, I propose several knowledge sharing improvements that are tailored to the specific situation of one company, ISS but can be applied to a wide scope of companies.

This analysis begins after the original impulsion that pushed the company towards making the strategic decision to establish a knowl-

edge sharing system, after the initial required investments had been made, and after the company had embarked on the implementation of its strategy. As a result, I will not discuss the competitive and environmental factors that were at the base of ISS' decision to step up its knowledge sharing activities.

Finally, although technical intricacies and complicated jargon are inherent to a modern knowledge sharing system, this book will not cover the technical functionalities and specifications of any network-based or computer-based supporting systems.

1.5 From Knowledge Management to Knowledge Sharing

As has just been established, this book solely concerns itself with knowledge sharing, and not with knowledge management at large. As a result, I find it imperative to define the topic, to precisely determine its position in the realm of the overarching knowledge management concept, and to situate it in relation to other essential phases of the process. Only in this manner can one fully understand what is covered by the topic of knowledge sharing and what is not, and appreciate the extent to which knowledge sharing has an impact on knowledge management.

Many authors choose, often for the sake of managerial simplification (e. g., Stevens 2000; Bowman 2002; Oakes and Rengarajan 2002), to consider the area of knowledge management as a unified topic to tackle completely, without subdividing it into smaller parts until further down the road of their research process. Other authors, mainly the ones writing within academia, jump right into one precise area and are, from the beginning of their work, very clear-cut in their writings and concentrate on one or a few of the different steps that, together, constitute knowledge management (e. g., Kautz and Vendelø 2001; Mahnke 1998). Similarly, Jeffrey Tan (2000) distinguishes between the different phases of knowledge management and suggests an all-encompassing, yet well-divided and precisely defined set of six subdivisions for knowledge management:

1. Identification
2. Creation
3. Encapsulation
4. Sharing
5. Retrieval
6. Application

I will use this categorization and the explanations that Tan gives of the different stages in order to situate the area of interest in its environment and surroundings. Accordingly, a very brief explanation of each sub-point follows, with an emphasis on the fourth point on knowledge sharing.

Knowledge Identification is the process during which an organization that is hoping to better manage its knowledge has to figure out what interesting knowledge it possesses, as well as where in the organization that knowledge is held.

Knowledge Creation occurs through two different channels. Internal sources generating knowledge are, for example, the actual execution of contracts for clients, the in-house investigations of general or societal trends, and even the mere sharing of ideas between the organization's employees. External sources also produce knowledge that the company must be ready to draw on.

Knowledge Encapsulation covers two distinct processes. The first process, that mostly leaves knowledge in a tacit form, is the indexing of the sources of the knowledge available to the firm. The documentation phase constitutes the second process and aims at transforming some of the tacitly held information into a readily shareable and explicit form.

Knowledge sharing is described by certain authors in terms of physical web-infrastructures that allow for information retrieval by organizational members (e. g. Kautz and Vendelø 2001), while Dirlam (2000) defines it as 'a set of principles and practices that encourage listening and responding positively to others. It bridges the gap between ideas and results and turns strangers into colleagues and customers into partners.'

Such a wide array of definitions, some building on technological arguments and others on human networking abilities, implies that the process of knowledge sharing affects all parts of an organization. Knowledge sharing is the pivotal step that actually allows organizational members to benefit from a common pool of knowledge that has been created by the completion of other operations (Tan 2000). The sharing of knowledge has as its principal goal the dissemination of existing knowledge within the organization. It involves the sharing of data in verbal, written or any other form that allows data to be transmitted from a source to a recipient and consequently entails creating the ability of people throughout the company to search out others and work effectively with them (Dirlam 2000). Prerequisites for knowledge

sharing include a common understanding of the communicative form and of its underlying assumptions, and the previous occurrence of the first three steps of the knowledge management process. It is important to recognize that knowledge sharing involves at least two parties who can communicate in a collective forum. A typical way for an organization to jump-start the actual sharing of knowledge is to adopt a push strategy towards its members. Under such a strategy, the areas of interest of a team or an individual are mapped by the organization, so that any knowledge that is later identified as relevant to that given person or group will be pushed onto them so that they cannot ignore it altogether.

Knowledge Retrieval relates to the pull approach to knowledge sharing. At this step of the process, members of the organization have developed the reflex of looking themselves at the knowledge bank of the company whenever they are faced with a challenge.

Knowledge Application justifies and supports the knowledge management infrastructure of the company. At this stage, the firm monitors which pieces of knowledge are used for which purposes, and with which results, in order to ensure that the available knowledge is used in an efficient way. From then on, it should be required for new projects to assess the already-known elements of knowledge that are going to be used, thereby avoiding inefficiencies.

Knowledge identification, creation, encapsulation, sharing, retrieval, and application are the building blocks of the overarching principle of knowledge management. Although all these steps are essential for an efficient knowledge management system to be put in place in an organization, I believe that knowledge sharing is the most crucial phase. Its success justifies both the preceding and the following actions; its failure makes knowledge identification, creation, and encapsulation appear as wastes of money, while it is likely to hinder the rolling-out of the retrieval and application phases. Given the relative importance of that part of knowledge management, it becomes the topic I dedicate the remainder of the present book to.

1.6   Book Structure

I decided to construct this book in a manner that promotes fluency while simultaneously allowing for in-depth analysis of a few selected areas. The book is therefore organized in two main parts. The first part forms the theoretical background to the study (chapter 3), while the

second part is empirical and covers an analysis of the interviewed subsidiaries (chapters 4 and 5).

The first chapter, the present introduction, provides the reader with an overview of the issues that will be treated in subsequent parts of the text, as well as with a general idea of the direction in which the work will be heading. It is in this part that the delimitations of the field of interest are stated and the topic of knowledge sharing is situated in the more encompassing realm of knowledge management.

Chapter two deals with the methodology that has been employed to complete this research project. There, I thoroughly explain the choice of methodology linked to the primary and secondary data. I also make an in-depth analysis of my motivations for preferring certain techniques of data collection, analysis and interpretation, and utilization of the primary and secondary data, and justify the selection of some methods of analysis that allow me to extract meaningful data from the interview material.

Chapter three marks the beginning of the work that will lead to answering the research questions. Having situated the topic of knowledge sharing in its broader environment in chapter one, I here proceed to introduce a series of theoretical views, referring to several authors, that identify different environmental and organizational factors influencing the processes of knowledge sharing in a modern, multinational organization. I then go on with a look at the founding theories behind the idea of corporate culture. Although both areas are of pivotal importance, I analyze the theoretical aspects of knowledge sharing first, as it is of the utmost importance for a thorough understanding of this to be acquired. Furthermore, having acquired an understanding of the fundamentals of knowledge sharing that are particularly relevant to this work, it will be easier for the reader to understand in which context knowledge sharing should be applied with respect to corporate culture. The explanation of the theoretical aspects of corporate culture thus comes after the theoretical views concerning knowledge sharing. From the knowledge exposed in the first parts of the chapter, I will proceed to answer Research Question 1.

Chapter four and five are closely connected. The former covers the description of the specific organizational and environmental characteristics of the four international ISS subsidiaries with which interviews were conducted, and reveals the observations and findings for each one of them. In the latter, the gathered data is systematically arranged into
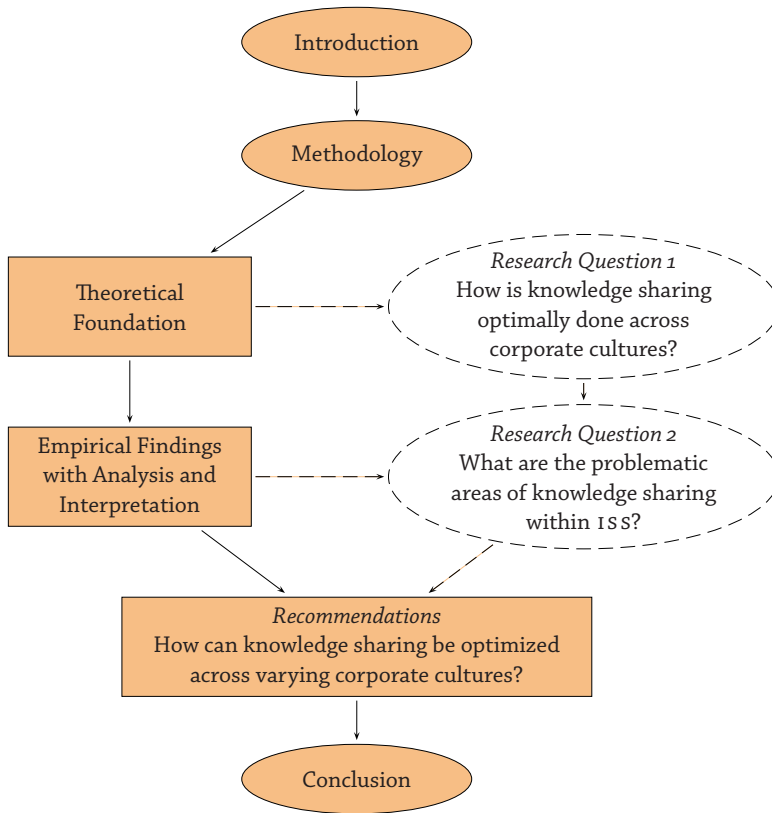
FIGURE 1.1   Structure of the book

four areas that are recurrent for each subsidiary, thus preparing it for further processing. I first analyze the data trying to identify interesting similarities and differences across national subsidiaries. The trends and patterns that emerge along with the part-conclusions I can ascertain are then projected against the theoretical backdrop, in order to spot the discrepancies and similarities of what is actually being done, compared to theoretical suggestion as to what should be done. I then proceed with a further analysis of the same data, identifying the linkages between the areas of the individual subsidiaries, and explaining the possible causes and implications of these links. The knowledge acquired from the analyses and interpretation of the empirical data, along with the projected results onto the theoretical findings, lay the path towards answering Research Question 2.

Having answered Research Question 1 in chapter three and Research Question 2 in chapter five, I proceed, in chapter six, to provide deliberated recommendations as to how ISS can better the implementation of their knowledge sharing strategy, taking into account the numerous different corporate cultures of their national subsidiaries. Thereby, I will also develop an answer to the key issue of analysis.

Figure 1.1 graphically illustrates the structure of the work throughout the present book. The two smaller rectangular boxes on the left side of the figure represent the two main parts, which each lead to the answering of a research question, represented by the triangular shaped polygons to the right. Please note that Research Question 2 is answered in part by the empirical analysis, but also by the answer to Research Question 1, as is indicated by the arrows. This is because it is the combined findings from the specifics of ISS, along with the theoretical interpretation and its compatibility, or lack thereof, with ISS' specifics, that provides the fodder for answering Research Question 2. This step-by-step process, aided by two research questions, seeks to simplify and structure the analytical approach towards being able to answer the ultimate key issue of analysis. I found it useful to progress in this manner, as a book dealing with ethnography and the tumultuous human repercussions that this can have on dispersion of knowledge can quickly become confusing and unclear in direction. Hence, I, and hopefully the ambitious reader as well, are better served by dividing the project as a whole into manageable and digestible portions.

2 | Procedural Considerations

The central purpose of the present chapter is to provide the reader with an understanding of the methodology employed throughout the bearing pillars of the various aspects of this research initiative that transcends national borders and empirically investigates the intricacies of human behaviour. This understanding is not a content summary of the pages that follow, as it is more of a structural nature. My aim with it is not to uncover what is to come, but to explain the procedures I have used to reach the result.

The work has given rise to a series of methodological issues on which a stand had to be taken. Theories on which to base my ideas and work, type of data, collection methods, analytical frameworks, validity, reliability and utilization of data were all topics that required critical contemplation and called for decisions that would affect the rest of the working process. In order to sufficiently and thoroughly be able to cover all these areas, I decided to proceed in the following manner: in the first section of this chapter, I begin by covering the topic of how the primary data was handled. The primary data used in this book consist of qualitative data obtained through interviews at the headquarters and at various local subsidiaries, complemented by quantitative data obtained directly from the ISS headquarters. Within this first section, I start by analyzing under which circumstances qualitative and quantitative data are optimally utilized. This, in essence, sets the scene for justifying my choice of primarily utilizing qualitative data opposed to quantitative data throughout the book. This is followed by an illumination of the secondary data. The secondary data used in this book consists of already existing theories on knowledge sharing and corporate culture proposed by several noted authors, complemented by relevant pamphlets and articles from ISS on their knowledge sharing attributes and corporate culture. The secondary data has laid the foundation on which I base my theoretical analysis of knowledge sharing and corporate culture. Upon completion of this, I continue by explaining the methodology used in connection with the primary and secondary data. In this part, I discuss

the procedure in which the data has been collected, the approach used for analyzing and interpreting the data, along with a discussion of the precautions that were taken in order to ensure that the data I was using was relevant, valid and reliable; and finally comments are made about how the data can be best utilized. In the third section of this chapter, I comment on the interview guide and survey questionnaire, where the style and use of the guide and questionnaire are relayed. This is concluded by a section that reveals my own personal shortcomings and the restraints that are inherent to a research endeavour of this nature.

2.1   Primary Data

The empirical data that was collected in the initial phase of this work forms the backbone of the present research project. In this section, I present a detailed discussion of the data that will be used later. I begin by briefly looking at the debate between the use of qualitative and quantitative data in order to rationalize my use of a combined approach, and then go on to explain the methods that will be employed to collect, analyze and interpret the data. Lastly, I will list some organizational issues, closely related to the two research questions, that are helpful in further understanding my ultimate choice of data utilization methods.

The Qualitative-Quantitative Data Conundrum

There is great ambiguity, within the research community, regarding the respective merits and shortcomings of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data helps understand the peculiar; quantitative data helps explain the general. Notwithstanding the more recent debate about the dissociation of types of data and collection methods (Hentschel 1998), I believe that there is an unavoidable link between the two. Therefore, data collection methods are still, to a certain extent and often for reasons that are of a practical nature, dependent on the type of data to collect. A choice therefore has to be made between qualitative and quantitative data before one is able to identify the optimal methods. That choice will affect the rest of the study and it is therefore not an easy issue; it poses a dilemma that must be resolved in the course of just about any research work. A team that embarks on the journey represented by the study of a sociological phenomenon of some order will have to decide on the type of data it wants to collect but, although that decision is consciously made, it might not be completely voluntary. Rather, it is suggested that the research questions that are formulated

in the beginning, the object of the research project, its general topic and ultimate goals should be determining factors in deciding the extent to which one gravitates towards a qualitative or quantitative bias (Andersen 1990; Mechanic 1989).

The present project is the result of a collaborative process between a small research team at the Copenhagen Business School and a company that has solicited outsiders' help to shed light on an internal problematic situation. While it would (and surely will) be interesting for both parties to discover principles and rules of thumb that are generally applicable to situations similar to the one that is being studied, there is an avowed interest to get a more specific analysis, directed at the actual issues. Accordingly, this work presents a unique opportunity to get virtually unrestricted access to the sources of data connected to knowledge sharing and corporate cultures that I deem relevant for analysis. The company understands the potential benefits of this collaborative process and therefore opens itself fully to the investigation and frees the emerging results for the benefit of a wider audience.

The possibility for me to be close to the organization as a whole, as well as to some of its individual members, is an incentive to try to get an understanding of the issues, rather than to merely explain them. By reaching that comprehensive and contextual view of the problems, my ambition is not simply to explain their nature and their occurrence, but to help ISS, and companies suffering under similar situations, to better their situation by ultimately providing some key recommendations. The peculiarities of this project, being much more contextually based in the specifics of unique situations rather than formalized statistics, made it a natural choice to focus much more on qualitative data than on quantitative, and my collection methods were selected accordingly.

According to Andersen (1990), an increasing number of academics believe in the power of a mixed use of the two types of data, as a way to check their respective validity, their relevance, or simply because of their availability. In the following, I have used quantitative data that was made available by the corporate partner regarding the use of the knowledge management system by the individual national subsidiaries. This quantitative data is represented in a spreadsheet displaying the number of hits (how frequently it is used) the current knowledge management system gets from the users at the various local subsidiaries over a specific time period. From this, it becomes obvious which subsidiaries use the system more frequently than others. My main goal

in establishing this aspect first was to identify the subsidiaries that were located at the extremities of the hits' continuum and consequently would be particularly interesting to study more attentively. Therefore, a quantitative analysis of the number of hits on the established corporate knowledge sharing system by the individual subsidiaries allowed me to single out the specific parts of the organization that would yield the most interesting and useful results in face-to-face interviews, as well as the topics that I would have to bring up with them. In other words, quantitative data is at the basis of, and a guide for, my further work with qualitative data.

2.2   Secondary Data

The secondary data used in this book is based on the works of several authors who have proposed theories pertaining to knowledge sharing and corporate culture. Furthermore, ISS has been an important provider of secondary data in the form of pamphlets and articles concerning information about the different local subsidiaries and the headquarters. This information spans from specific knowledge sharing approaches throughout ISS, down to illustrations of how corporate culture is perceived at the subsidiary level. Naturally the Internet and school based research tools and banks, such as EBSCO and pro-quest, have supplemented the depth of the secondary data, allowing for an all-rounded depiction of corporate culture and knowledge sharing.

Although the importance of the secondary data used has repercussions throughout the entire book, it clearly plays a paramount role in the theoretical foundation. In the chapter addressing the bearing pillars, it was consciously decided that the secondary data should solely plough the way towards answering the first research question without the aid of empirical data. In this manner, we will receive an untainted and pristine impression of how noted authors believe knowledge sharing across corporate cultures is to be accomplished, without polluting it with the specifics of ISS. Consequently, the secondary data attained from ISS was not used in this chapter as it was firm specific and not 'neutral' to the topics of knowledge sharing and corporate culture.

Throughout the rest of the book, neutral secondary data, such as that used in the theoretical foundation, along with specific secondary data, such as that obtained from ISS headquarters and local subsidiaries, united help answer the succeeding research question and the overall issue formulation.

2.3 Methodology Used in Connection with the Primary and Secondary Data

In order to construct a solid foundation on which to help base the results, it was absolutely essential to advance in an extremely structured manner when dealing with and managing the primary and secondary data. Hentschel (1998) proposes a four-step research approach comprising of data collection, data analysis, data interpretation and the utilization of data, which helps structure and, more important, make sense of the empirical, as well as the theoretical, parts of the research. Although this approach is of the utmost relevance when working with quantitative data, I believe it to be more laborious to respect clear-cut divisions of the different steps when gathering and processing qualitative data. Therefore, I have modified Hentschel's proposed approach into a three-step scheme where the analysis and interpretation of data are intertwined since I feel that these two steps are practically inseparable when dealing with qualitative data. While quantitative data allows for an analytical part that yields numerical results that can later be interpreted, it is difficult to conduct an analysis of qualitative data that never refers back to the desired or actual situation. Such a comparative way of analyzing qualitative data invariably entails some interpretation and consequently, I have chosen to merge the two steps into a single one. As a result, I follow a three-pronged approach which, when viewed in its entirety, can be thought of as the research design. The three steps, which will be discussed in detail below, are data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and the utilization of data. Within the first two steps (data collection and data analysis and interpretation) the primary data and secondary data are tackled individually, a separation not made in the final step (data utilization) since it is the combination of the two data forms that I use to answer the overarching research issue formulation.

Data Collection of the Primary Data

Within the data collection process, there are two important aspects that must be considered which define the base on which the subsequent empirical analysis builds; namely the methods of data collection used and the data type that is collected (Hentschel 1998, 4).

As has been established in the above section, the data collection method has primarily been rooted in the qualitative approach. To be able to obtain the exact data we were searching for, I decided to further

narrow the scope within the spectrum of qualitative data, to contextual data. I found this type of data appropriate as contextual data, like qualitative data, attempts to understand the human behaviour within social environments but furthermore, it also specifies its focus to specific localities (Hentschel 1998, 9). Exactly this was of primary importance as the interviews in the local subsidiaries were being conducted. Therefore, in accordance with this, I proceeded to conduct the interviews in the following manner with the following purposes:

The Interviews

At the outset, interviews were conducted with the staff at the headquarters, the main initiator of the common knowledge sharing system and the entity that deals with the problems on an up-close basis. This helped identify possible problem areas as seen from the headquarters' and an implementer's viewpoint. This data was useful as it provided an idea of the complexities involved with the situation and introduced me to the specifics of the ISS situation. Furthermore, data from this early interview helped mould part of the interview guide, which was a helpful tool during the subsequent interviews with the different subsidiaries.

Subsidiaries at both ends of the knowledge sharing spectrum were identified; the subsidiaries that diligently use the current knowledge sharing system and those that are more hesitant. The purpose of selecting extremes was to provide insight into the factors that might promote the use of the knowledge sharing system, and the factors that are present when not using it. Interviews were conducted at the headquarters of ISS A/S in Copenhagen, Denmark, along with four subsidiaries: ISS France in Paris, ISS Italia in Milan, ISS Österreich in Vienna and ISS Danmark in Copenhagen. The specifics of each interview are portrayed below:

ISS *(Headquarters):* Several interviews were conducted with different employees who had relevance to knowledge sharing within the ISS headquarters. All of these interviews were conducted in Danish so to minimize language deficiencies in the respondents.

- *Interview 1:* with Peter Ankerstjerne, Group Business Development Manager at ISS, who is in part responsible for the integration of a well functioning corporate knowledge management system within ISS. Peter Ankerstjerne was a crucial person to interview as he represents the main link between the company's upper level head-

quarter management and the subsidiary level contact person. Furthermore, Ankerstjerne's role in relation to the knowledge sharing system and its corporate wide implementation made his comments even more relevant. No interview guide was used for this initial interview, as it would have been premature to have specific questions about ISS at this early stage. The interview lasted about two hours and helped mould my perception of the ISS situation along with the interview guide that would prove useful in the succeeding interviews. The atmosphere throughout the entire interview was very relaxed and informal, yielding a productive brainstorming of ideas, as no momentum was lost due to formalities. This free-flow of ideas is especially helpful in the initial phase of a research project such as this one, as it reduces the risk for potentially relevant topics to be overseen.

- *Interview 2:* with Martin Broberg, Group Communication Manager at ISS, who works on a daily basis to ensure a smooth flow and operation of the current knowledge sharing system. Mr. Broberg was deemed relevant to interview because of the pivotal role he plays in, and his in-depth involvement with, the knowledge sharing processes throughout the entire ISS corporation. Essentially, Mr. Broberg's function is to act as the screen through which all information, be it between subsidiaries or between subsidiaries and the headquarters, normally transits. I thus considered him to be of utmost importance to the knowledge sharing process and I consequently devoted extra time and effort to extract data from him. The then structured interview guide was applied to help cover the interesting areas of concern throughout the interview. Having dual interviews with headquarter representatives allowed for a stereoscopic interpretation of the revealed elements which helped add validity to the emerging results.

ISS *France:* Interview with Chouky Le Quilliec, Communications Manager for the French subsidiary of the group. At the level of the national subsidiary, she acts as the portal through which information that circulates between the headquarters and the subsidiary transits. As such, she receives, interprets and relays corporate information, ensuring that relevant pieces of data reach the right people within the organization. The interview was conducted in French, the native language of both the interviewee and one of the research assistants who was conduct-

ing the interview, at the head-office of ISS France, in Paris. The interview lasted two hours, entirely spent solely with Ms. Le Quilliec, in her office. The interview guide proved very useful for this particular interview as the research assistant had to rely on a preset structure. Therefore, the interviewer could draw from the guide to ensure that all topics were thoroughly covered. However, the French subsidiary quickly revealed itself as not being very participative in corporate knowledge sharing initiatives and consequently, the interviewer was forced to reorient and modify questions so to be applicable to the unique French situation. Note taking was particularly important during this interview, since the notes and the oral comments of the research assistant would be the unique source of knowledge about the interview. The atmosphere was semi-formal and the interview was sometimes interrupted by some of Ms. Le Quilliec's colleagues who needed her assistance in other matters. This proved helpful, as it provided a candid and real impression of the seemingly haphazard working methods of the French ISS employees.

ISS *Danmark:* Interview with Steen Otterström. Mr. Otterström is the Communication Manager of the Danish subsidiary of ISS and as such, his functions include concerning himself with the knowledge sharing system. The interview was conducted entirely in Danish, at the head-office of the subsidiary, in the Greater Copenhagen area. This interview was especially interesting and relevant, as ISS Danmark operates under a completely different corporate culture as the headquarters. Furthermore, ISS Danmark is one of the least diligent users of the existing knowledge sharing system, among the subsidiaries of ISS. The interview lasted almost two hours and was characterized by a very informal atmosphere. Once again, the interview guide was utilized in order to orient the discussion towards relevant topics.

ISS *Österreich:* Interview with Magistrate Gudrun Heiden at the Austrian head-office in Vienna. Ms. Heiden is the assistant to the chief communication manager of the Austrian subsidiary. Although it was not possible to go directly to the communication manager himself in this interview, Ms. Heiden proved very competent and was able to deliver extremely detailed and concise information regarding the knowledge sharing activities throughout the subsidiary. This was a direct consequence of Ms. Heiden working on a daily basis with the knowledge sharing system and being employed by ISS for a significant length of time.

Her organizational position being slightly lower than the other interviewees', special care was taken to stress the importance of her answering in a manner representative of the entire subsidiary. He interview was conducted in German and it lasted about one hour. As this was a single researcher representative interview, the interview guide once again played a key supporting role throughout the interview. The atmosphere throughout the interview was formal yet relaxed; although formal language was used, the conversation was casual and free-flowing.

ISS *Italia:* Interview with Carlo, Gianfranco and Roberto Garavaglia, the two sons and the grandson of the founder of the original Italian company. The interview lasted 6 hours and took place at the Italian subsidiary's head-office in Milan and was conducted by the research assistant who speaks fluent Italian. Carlo Garavaglia is the official president of the rather small Italian subsidiary; Gianfranco, although not allocated the title of president, shares top managerial responsibilities with his brother; and Roberto, third generation of Garavaglia in the company, is responsible for marketing. Due to the relatively small size of the subsidiary, the three fulfil many job roles that would otherwise be delegated to separate individuals, and are consequently not endowed with diverse titles such as communication manager. As a result, all three play key roles throughout the communication flow of the subsidiary and hence were deemed interesting to interview. The first three hours were spent in the president's office, where the actual interview took place. The interview guide set the structure that loosely guided the conversation for the duration of the interview. The atmosphere for the actual interview was initially formal but soon turned more casual as a relation of confidence was established between the parties. Nevertheless, the polite form of the Italian language was continuously used by the interviewer to address the two senior interviewees. Upon completion of the actual interview, the entire group proceeded to lunch where the topics were discussed in a much more casual setting. This part of the visit, although unplanned, also provided valuable insight into the relevant topics and how they are perceived. After lunch, the interviewees gave a tour of the premises where further insight was gained as the topics were further discussed and illustrated. During the last three hours of the interview, the interview guide was naturally left aside. However, directly upon completion of the more informal parts of the visit, the interview guide was

consulted and the informal, yet relevant bits of data where added to the guide.

Logic behind the Chosen Interview Methodology

Since data from one interview might not correspond with data from another interview and may even conflict, albeit being in similar situations (Fielding and Fielding 1986, 59) it was necessary to conduct several interviews. Therefore, by interviewing several subsidiaries; two located at the poor end of knowledge sharing activity spectrum and two at the high end, it was hoped to broaden the sample variety and the inputs from the interviewees, thereby giving more credibility to the emerging outcome (the broadened sample variety is still very modest and would be better served with even more interviews. More on this in the section Personal Delimitations,).

When possible, the interviews were conducted by in duality by me and my research assistant so to avoid personal influence of the obtained data. According to Andersen (1990), the interviewer is influenced by the study and possibly also influences the study in a manner that is not pristine. The consequent result is that the data gets flawed as it is tainted by personal judgment and individual viewpoints. Thus, having two people conduct the interviews decreased the chance of misleading the data.

Interviews were conducted in person at the various local subsidiaries in Denmark, France, Italy and Austria. The purpose of this was threefold. First, to be able to receive an up-close and personal understanding of what the interviewee deemed relevant to mention about their knowledge sharing aspects. This approach limited the barriers or static that can occur when interviewing over the Internet or telephone and consequently increased the intensity of the findings. Face-to-face meetings favour a fuller exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee, which ultimately contributes to the richness of the interpretation of the words. Second, since the interviewee is not always aware of the problematic areas present at the subsidiary, I was able to receive a candid interpretation of the aspects that were deemed connected to knowledge sharing but were not directly expressed by the interviewee. Third, for me to be able to discreetly note and receive an impression of the local corporate cultures, an impression the interviewee might not be able to voice himself.

Interviews were conducted in the local language, i. e. French, German, Italian and Danish. The purpose of this was twofold. First, by con-

versing in the local language the interviewee would not be hindered by language barriers to express herself in the exact manner she found appropriate. I found this to be of the utmost importance as my primary goal was to receive an exact depiction of the variables at the local subsidiaries. Second, I felt that by conducting the interview in the local language, it would promote a casual atmosphere; an atmosphere more prone to disclosing information. Furthermore, it allowed me and my research assistant to identify the contextual meaning of the words, as well as alternative meanings that could suggest other interpretations of what was actually being said. Details of the actual construction and development of the conversation were useful to reach a higher level of understanding. Silences, gaps, hesitations, jokes, and laps of the tongue are all factors that help determine both the first-degree meaning of the words, and possible alternative interpretations, exemplifying the multiple senses carried by the speech. Selecting the native language of the interviewee ensured that the value of these elements was not lost.

Although mostly coincidental, the interviews were conducted about one year after the introduction of the current knowledge sharing system. This turned out to be an excellent time frame to follow up on the progress or lack of progress on the diligent use of the system, as one year is adequate time to allow people to get accustomed to using the system.

The interviewees were notified by the headquarters that they would soon be interviewed and were given a brief update as to what the interview was about. The purpose of this was to install a sense of importance and urgency about the interview. The fact that the headquarters promoted the interviews to the international subsidiaries increased the seriousness in which I, as a researcher, was approached with. The brief update allowed the interviewee to prepare herself mentally for the appropriate topic and helped her understand what I wanted to get out of the interview. I specifically did not send an interview guide in advance for the interviewee to study, as I feared this might affect the validity of her response if she has had time to cater them. I felt this was best served by asking her the specifics of the inquiry directly on the spot.

The interviews began by assuring that I and my research assistant were not corporate 'spies.' I was aware that the interviewee might have some reservations about disclosing information to us because of the fact that the headquarters would, at some point, receive this information. This was rectified by introducing the topic, the intents and overall

purpose of the interview in an honest and non-threatening manner. This eased the tension the interviewee might have been harbouring regarding the inquiry, as she realized that the outcome would be purely productive and non-incriminating down the road.

The pre-made interview guide was only loosely followed and used more as a guide to conduct topic-focused interviews, as suggested by Casley and Kumar (1988). As the cultures and situations of the various subsidiaries differed dramatically, I found it inappropriate to follow a predetermined standard for conducting the interviews. In order to extract as much data as possible and cover all areas of relevance in each subsidiary, I found it more useful to suggest a question or idea and allow the interviewee to roam freely around the topic; disclosing what she found important about that specific topic. In this fashion, I received a holistic impression of the specifics in each subsidiary. The guide was divided into four broad areas of investigation that would later facilitate the codifying process.

Throughout the interview, a form of verbal triangulation was conducted. Questions and issues on a specific topic would be reformulated and addressed from various angles, thereby testing for consistency in the interviewee's responses. If diverse approaches on a singular topic support a unanimous outcome, then confidence in the results was increased (Fielding and Fielding 1986, 24) and conversely if no consistency was found, the obtained data may lose some credibility. Hence, the purpose of this was to confirm the data that I was receiving so to have a more credible foundation on which to base the results.

Towards the end of the interview, the discussion would carry over into more of a socializing phase. The purpose of this was first, to provide the interviewee with a little feedback and second, and more importantly, to build up goodwill and confidence in the interviewee so I would be received positively when asking follow-up questions.

The Survey

In order to complement the data sets collected during the interviews that were conducted with the managers of the selected national subsidiaries, some data that was collected through a survey questionnaire was also utilized. In collaboration with the corporate managers in charge of the knowledge sharing projects at ISS, a qualitative questionnaire was developed that covered a series of areas similar to the ones covered during the live interviews.

Since the survey questionnaire formed part of a project that followed up on the progress of the implementation of the knowledge sharing system a year after its launch, the headquarters of ISS maintained control over the practicalities and ensured the validity of the results. Respondents were selected from the group of users of the system in each national subsidiary, who were notified that they were to complete the questionnaire electronically; this greatly simplified the treatment of the answers, a process that the data handlers at ISS were competent to take care of. I subsequently had access to the results of the survey, as well as to the individual, anonymous answers that were given to the questions.

Note on the General Validity of the Empirical Data

Having collected the empirical data, yet before progressing to the methodological issues pertaining to its analysis and interpretation, I strongly believe that it is essential to discuss the validity of the collected data. In the context of natural sciences, the observer's paradox is a disturbance that has been described as the impossibility to truly examine a phenomenon, since the conditions that are necessary to enable the researcher to study the given phenomenon have an influence on it.

In an organizational research such as this, the problem is unavoidable. I am aware that, being sent from the group's headquarters (all of the appointments for interviews were facilitated by my contact at the head-office, while the survey was directly administered by the headquarters), some people within the subsidiaries might paint rosy pictures on their eagerness to use the knowledge sharing system, and on their diligence in using it. This is what I have chosen to label as the observer's paradox in this research; as I came to observe the natural behaviour of ISS employees, they changed their ways for specific reasons. I worked especially hard on preventing this during the interviews and purposely aimed at installing a very relaxed atmosphere that facilitated a feeling of trust and opportunity for improvement. In doing so, I remained conscious of the imminent danger of losing some of the objectivity that I enjoyed as an outsider to the organization but was able to convey the message of mutual benefits and insuring a good balance of our combined interests. The necessity to reach such a balance is central to the productive outcome of face-to-face interviews and influences the genuineness of the data (Fielding and Fielding 1986, 54).

A further technique that was employed to increase the degree of validity of the data was a form of investigator triangulation (similar

in type to the triangulation method discussed in the previous section on Data Collection, subsection Logic behind the Chosen Interview Methodology') where more than one researcher examines the same situation (Fielding and Fielding 1986, 25). In the cases where I and my research assistant were present at the same time in the interview-room, the same topics were covered with each of the interviewees individually. In the course of each single interview, the same topics were approached from several different angles, and the same questions were asked using different formulations and at different moments of the conversation. Whenever possible, we attempted to resolve any evident discrepancy in the answers that were given in the course of the interview. When inconsistencies were discovered later, (e. g., while reading interview notes), complementary questions were sent to the relevant persons, in order to shed further light on the situation.

Data Collection of the Secondary Data

The collection of relevant secondary data was accomplished through the research tools available at the numerous university libraries, notes, documents and pamphlets made available from professional sources at the Copenhagen Business School, the Wirschaftsuniversität in Vienna, the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration and finally from the ISS headquarters and subsidiaries. The collected secondary data is directly applicable to the topics this book concerns itself with.

The data obtained from the above sources, along with previous acquired knowledge obtained through earlier research initiatives of a similar nature, provided an earnest overview of the issues pertaining to corporate culture and knowledge sharing from a theoretical perspective. However, since the literature on corporate culture and knowledge sharing is very extensive and varied, it quickly became apparent that a limitation for appropriate literature was in some manner needed. I therefore proceeded to collect literature that differed in context and style so to bring as many views and opinions to the topics. By doing so, I hoped to avoid getting drawn into a form of group-think by the authors' partiality and rather receive an array of view-points from which I could compare results and draw carefully heeded conclusions.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Being content with the data collection method, I proceed to explain my procedure of turning the data into usable knowledge. Therefore, the

next logical step involves the selection of a method to analyze and interpret the data in a fashion that is clearly defined and agreed upon in advance.

Primary Data

Most learning from qualitative interviews is obtained by writing descriptive summaries about the interviews and thereafter collating and sorting these summaries into categories of responses (Casley and Kumar 1988, 9). This essential analytical procedure of sorting summaries into categories of responses is termed 'coding,' which essentially aids in recontextualizing data, thereby providing a new context for viewing and analyzing it. However, coding extends further than simply giving categories to data; it also conceptualizes the data, allowing for the formulation of new questions and levels of interpretation to rise (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 31). Coding is therefore about breaking the data apart into analytical relevant parts, thereby allowing for the progression towards a further understanding of the data. I found this technique to be very auspicious and it was consequently selected as the preferred method of analyzing and interpreting the primary data.

The segmenting of data using coding can be achieved in a variety of ways as long as the coding process is compatible with the research framework. The key thus lies in choosing a coding process that correlates with the research framework and the overall intent and research objective. Keeping this in mind, I opted to choose the method of coding from the foreshadowed issue formulation that inspired the research project as suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996).

I only applied the coding process to the empirical interview data, as it alone had the richness and depth necessary to support the extent to which I wanted the data analyzed. This richness and depth stem from the interviewees' comprehensive perception of the knowledge sharing intricacies within ISS, which sometimes led them to bring up side discussions. Although many of these discussions did not seem to be directly relevant to the topic of knowledge sharing from the outset, they often yielded interesting and important results by allowing me to better understand certain conditions specific to the subsidiary, as well as their implications for the rest of the group. In fact, interviewees have often used these deviations from what should have been the focus of the field research as a possibility to tell us about the specific conditions that seemingly justified their reaction or standpoint towards the rest of the company. Being of a more superficial nature, the survey data obtained

from the questionnaire is deprived from such richness and depth and I consequently found codification to be inappropriate for it. As a result, the survey data played a complementary role, principally representing the thoughts and opinions of the group of subsidiaries that I could not practically interview. Throughout the analysis and interpretation, the input from the survey data therefore helped confirm certain deductions and findings from the codified interview data.

The Codification Process

The codification process began by grouping the interview data into four generic areas from which a general thematic content would emerge. The generic areas are in the form of short phrases and read: (a) the local corporate culture, (b) Business Insight's match with the existing knowledge sharing processes, (c) the ideal knowledge sharing situation and, finally, (d) hindrances to the achievement of the ideal knowledge sharing situation. Naturally, for each area, multitudes of supporting questions were asked during the interview to allow me to arrive at these broad areas. The rational of dividing the interview guide into four areas was to aid in making easier comparison of the responses that would emerge in the same areas across all interviews. This is a key step in codifying as it allows for the categorization of responses and it sets the stage for the interpretation of data.

Having selected, fragmented, coded and categorized the obtained data, I was now ready to systematically explore it so to generate meaning. Correctly interpreting the coded data is vital as it lays the foundation for the further analysis of this research. Therefore, it was without coincidence that this particular phase of data handling was devoted particular attention.

The Interpretation Process

As was just explained in The Codification Process, the recontextualized data was arranged in a systematic fashion thus comparing the same areas across interviews was easily readable. This was accomplished by bundling together the relevant data bits relating to each area so the data was not only easily readable but also able to be explored further. By having four or five codes to plainly sum up one area of an interview, it became much easier to explore the data as a result of being able to easily see the codes repeat themselves. These repeated codes within the same areas but across different interview sections suggested the emergence

of patterns, themes or regularities that then could begin to be scrutinized. Similarly, irregularities and contrasts between data areas were also interesting phenomena to scrutinize, as it became interesting to explore why there were discrepancies. Essentially, the bundled codes provided dimensional interpretation of the data and allowed me to think more creatively about some of the themes, or lack of themes, that were identified in the coding process and it paved the way for posing further questions, enabling me to speculate and hypothesize instead of remaining anchored in the interview notes and observations alone.

These speculations were subsequently projected against the earlier obtained theoretical findings and compared to the survey data, shedding light on the diverse, or unanimous, outcomes and implications of these different sources of data. Thereafter, I referred back to the situation and viewpoints of the different subsidiaries I had interviewed, which enabled me to identify the organizationally poor knowledge sharing features and characteristics, an essential step towards the completion of this work. Thereto, in the cases when there still remained uncertainty and ambiguity with the outcomes, I would refer back to the raw, un-coded data in the hopes of extracting more insight to further illuminate the subject matter. An unfortunate side effect of coded data is that some data gets lost in the codifying process. Therefore, returning to the un-coded data, still embedded in the actual context of the specific situation, sometimes allowed for deeper insight into a specific event (more on this in the following section, Shortcomings of Codification). Only once a form of agreement among the diverging data parts emerged was it possible to draw conclusions and claim that the data had been satisfactorily interpreted.

Shortcomings of Codification

Although I am pleased with the results the codification process is able to deliver, I feel it is warranted to denote the shortcomings that this particular procedure harbours since coding has been used as the chief method of analyzing and interpreting the primary data.

To begin with, the codes used in this book are structured according to my personal interpretation of organizational behaviour and are consequently unique creations identified and selected solely by my composite understanding of the theme. This is important to mention because others might have coded the data differently as their perception of organizational behaviour differs from mine. This implies that a researcher's

preconception of a situation can, and most likely will, have repercussions on the project outcome. Therefore, there will always be a certain level of ambiguity connected with coding.

The reasoning behind constructing the interview guide in four areas was to facilitate the extraction of topic specific data for each interview. However, the nature of qualitative data means that data relating to one particular topic or area is not found neatly bundled together at exactly the same spot in each interview (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, 35). Hence, it was not uncommon to have to delve into, for example, the second or third area in order to find data relating to the first area. This form of skipping back and forth in order to extract topic specific data muddles the analytical approach and suggests that codifying according to areas is not as pristine and straightforward as it appears at the outset.

Finally, when conducting the interviews, the interview informant would seldom reply to the inquiries with a simple and direct response but rather lead an answer down a long and complicated path of reminiscences in which he could more easily illustrate his point. However, when codifying the interviewee's elaborate explanations, I essentially dissect his 'stories' and am thereby in danger of losing the context in which the point was told. This implies that the codifying process leaves out bits of information that are, at the time, considered fruitless to codify but nevertheless supply the context in which the coded data is imbedded. The current codes tried to represent the essence of the entire story, but I acknowledge that some data gets omitted in order to be able to sum up a 10-minute story with two or three suitable codes.

Secondary Data

For the secondary data, the analysis and interpretation of the collected data involved less complicated procedures than exercised with the primary data. Nevertheless, special care was taken in order to fully comprehend and conceive the pertinent data, which often resulted in revising and restudying it.

Since the data had already been processed by the original authors who had first hand insight into the material, the work that was based on this data was essentially an assimilation and re-projection of the authors original works. The major risk one runs when using secondary data is that the analyzed data is somehow biased by the original author's bearings. These bearings can sway the objectivity that other researchers may desire when applying the data and hence, not provide others with

a pristine view on the topic. I sought to overcome this problem when analyzing and interpreting the data by not relying heavily on one single perspective but rather gather a multitude of impressions from several authors who, united, could provide an undefiled impression of the topic at hand.

Utilization of Data

Once the primary and secondary data had been collected, analyzed, interpreted, and its validity verified within reasonable limits, the decisive final stage of correctly utilizing it remains. Without this last step of the process, the data remains meaningless to the overarching purposes of the research initiative; the organizational data has been applied in the previous sections, but the results of the analysis and interpretation have to yield some kind of answers in order to be fruitful.

My ambition with the present research is to utilize the gathered data in a manner that provides insight for the corporate partner that lays the foundation for the research and to make these insights applicable to a wider audience of corporations in similar situations that aspire towards achieving healthier knowledge sharing practices. Remaining within this vein, I seek to utilize the primary and secondary data to arrive at well defined answers to the two research questions and ultimate issue formulation. Accordingly, utilization of the data will occur three times throughout the research process. The first will be to answer research question 1, an answer solely based on theoretical secondary data. The second will be to answer research question 2, where the empirical data is projected onto the secondary findings. The final time will be to answer the problem identification where recommendations relating to optimizing knowledge sharing initiatives across cultures are dispensed.

2.4 Comments on the Interview Guide and Survey Questionnaire

As mentioned earlier, the interview guide was used more as a leader than as a manual through which point-by-point aspects were methodologically followed during the interviews. Because of its guiding role, it is short and the interviewer always formulated the requests in an open-ended form, giving precisions whenever necessary. The interview guide covered mainly four broad topics: an investigation into the local corporate culture, already existing knowledge sharing processes, the

ideal knowledge sharing process and, finally, the factors hindering the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation. Accordingly, dividing the interview guide into four easily digestible sections was an important part of facilitating the codifying process in which I would later analyze and interpret the obtained data.

The interviewees were on no occasions given access to the guide. This 'restriction' was considered important in order facilitate the possibility of the respondent feeling completely free to bring up any topic they deemed relevant at any point in time, rather than keeping bits of information for a potentially upcoming later moment. This procedure allowed me to uncover interesting linkages between topics that, although they appeared unrelated in the beginning, were of paramount importance in the reasoning processes of the people at the subsidiaries.

The survey questionnaire that was sent to selected users of the knowledge sharing system aimed at providing qualitative inputs similar to the ones that were gained through the use of the interview guide. The questions covered two main areas: the general state of knowledge sharing within the company, and the particularities of utilization of the existing knowledge sharing system. Specifically, there were questions about the general opinions and viewpoints on the company's knowledge sharing processes; the perceived obstacles to knowledge sharing in the company; the intensity of use of the knowledge sharing system and the reasons motivating this intensity; the possible improvements to the system; the possible improvements to the communications regarding the system; and the users' expectations to form and content. For the details of the survey questionnaire, see the Appendix.

2.5   Personal Delimitations

Since most of the current data concerns itself with qualitative data, i. e. that dealing with human behaviour, emotions, practices, etc., it entails a certain implicit complexity that is far greater than that of quantitative data (Andersen 1990, 28). The aspects of the human psyche cannot be thoroughly scrutinized by pure logic reasoning and hence demands at least some level of psychological understanding. Whether I, as author of this book, am endowed with an understanding sufficient to tackle these issues therefore becomes a reasonable question to raise. Although I feel adequately equipped to discuss the issues pertaining to the human capital in this book, I must pay respect to the fact that the human psyche, lying clearly outside the realm of my educa-

tion, is a subject whose intricacies stretch beyond my academic comfort zones.

Furthermore, the chance exists that the data obtained from the ISS employees can, in some way, be misleading. This acknowledgement resides in the academic limitations of the ISS staff to appropriately explain the actions and complex behavioural traits of the entire unit. The middle managers that were interviewed throughout the ISS corporation correspond to the definition of key informants put forth by Casley and Kumar (1988), who can provide information about themselves, others and about specific situations or conditions existing within the discussed field (Casley and Kumar 1988, 24) and consequently were the employees best suited to answer inquiries regarding knowledge sharing and corporate culture. However, these employees are not experts on human behaviour and are subject to personal judgment and interpretation when delivering their impressions of the entire subsidiary. Their standpoints are essentially susceptible to biases that stem from any inaccurate or distorted judgments that the interviewee might possess. Consequently, it is not certain that the interviewee has correctly depicted the illuminated topic in a manner that the rest of the subsidiary would agree with. Although the interviewee was asked to reply not only for himself, but for all intended users of Business Insight and several interviews were conducted so to minimize occasional misleading data, I do recognize the risk that, due to the tough nature of this topic and due to the potential shortcomings of the interviewees' ability to answer holistically, the interviewees may unwillingly deliver incorrect data. Along the same vein, I too am susceptible to biases and hence, my shortcomings and consequent distorted perceptions of the interviewees' remarks might also have added to the imprecision of the actual outcome.

Finally, it would have been desirable to interview more ISS subsidiaries and attain a broader sample of data to support the results. The benefits of this would be colossal as the accuracy of the recommendations could be increased and the possibility of flawed data decreased, as the founding research would have become more individualistic. However desirable this may have been, it was unfortunately never a possibility as personal limits on time and economy would not allow for it.

3 | Addressing the Bearing Pillars

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the underlying fundamental aspects of the theoretical issues pertaining to knowledge sharing and corporate culture, and to provide a thorough depiction of the complex features related to these aspects. By supplying these rudiments, I hope to raise the intensity in which knowledge sharing and corporate culture can be discussed throughout the remaining part of this book, and thereby allow for more topic specific issues to be addressed. Therefore, attaining a complete understanding of the present is essential in order to follow the evolution this book will undertake in the following chapters.

As an initial step in this chapter, I begin by investigating several aspects of knowledge sharing, as this acts as the bearing pillar of the analysis. Thereafter, I shift my focus towards an analysis of the dimensions of corporate culture. I believe that proceeding in this manner facilitates the flow in which corporate culture will be perceived in relation to knowledge sharing, making it more intuitive. Upon reaching the conclusion of this chapter, the then-exposed theoretical perspectives will build the bedrock on which I ultimately answer how knowledge sharing is optimally done across corporate culture, my first research question.

3.1 Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge itself is power (Francis Bacon, 1618)

Be they scholars or managers employed by companies, most people who remotely have to deal with the value of knowledge in the course of their daily work have shown an increasing level of interest for the topic of knowledge sharing over the recent past (Kautz and Vendelø 2001; Mahnke 1998). While managers attempt to implement knowledge sharing systems and measures to help their enterprise perform better in our competitive world, academics are more preoccupied by studying the phenomenon, the ways in which companies actually affect it, and the relative efficiency of the diverse corporate attempts (e. g., Chen

1997; Dash 1998; Yang 2000). In the following sections, I do not redefine knowledge sharing, as my definition was already proposed in chapter 1 'From knowledge management to knowledge sharing.' Instead, I focus on the organizational issues that significantly influence the existence and efficiency of knowledge sharing within a multinational corporation.

Decentralized vs. Centralized Knowledge Sharing

The first organizational issue to take into account with respect to knowledge sharing is the relative degree of decentralization of the organization. Throughout the last decade, decentralization strategies have been very popular means for companies to reap benefits that required expert knowledge of specific market conditions (Yang 2000). These strategies are often met with success, but it is now clear that there exist areas in which a certain degree of centralization of the activities is suitable. Hence, we are currently witnessing an evolution that is likely to lead to a new type of corporate equilibrium. Cerny (1996), through the account he gives of the past evolution and of the present situation of Lexington Labs, describes a series of problems that are likely to plague any decentralized organization that wants to introduce a company-wide knowledge sharing system. Regional managers (often locally recruited or incorporated in the company after the acquisition of a local enterprise), who have been left alone to conduct the totality of the operations of their subsidiaries for too long, are difficultly convinced of the advantages of using their valuable time to share their expertise with colleagues that they have always considered as pertaining to a different, unrelated, organization. This kind of negative attitude towards group-initiative is even more likely to arise in subsidiaries that are doing relatively well at the time when the project is presented. In such situations, Cerny leaves no doubt about the suitability of a centralized organizational model of knowledge sharing, an opinion strongly supported by Stevens (2000), who states that a centralized organization is in a better position to implement a company-wide knowledge sharing system. Taking these authors bearings into account, and the weighted debate they present, I side with the notion that modern large companies, that are more reliant on ethnocentric management techniques than on polycentric knowledge inputs, are best served with centralized knowledge sharing structures that publicizes valuable knowledge from a central origin.

Middle Managers

Knowledge sharing has everything to do with the employees of an organization (Dash 1998; Dirlam 2000; Stevens 2000; Yang 2000). The diverse levels of an organization's management especially have specific responsibilities that vary with the task at hand, with the project that is being considered. The nature of these very same responsibilities, however, normally varies according to the relative rank of the manager in the organization. The same holds true for the project of implementing a knowledge management system. But once the system is in place, knowledge sharing activities have to continuously permeate every aspect of the business. Managers at different levels of the organization therefore have an enduring responsibility to ensure that this does happen.

Because of their remoteness from field activities, top-level managers have an overall strategic responsibility that is limited to making the rules and the atmosphere of the organization favourable to knowledge sharing. However, the establishment and implementation of the actual measures that will promote this sharing at the operative levels is the responsibility of middle managers. In sum, they are the ones who have to make the crucial decisions that will result into a successful start-up phase of the knowledge sharing system, and who have to take the actions that are necessary to ensure the continuous adherence of key organizational members to this same system. Frontline managers participate actively in the knowledge sharing system by giving helpful feedback to their hierarchical superiors, thereby making sure that the internal activities of the firm and the manner in which they are carried out are constantly connected to its environment.

As a simple consequence of their specific responsibilities, middle managers appear as key elements in the process of establishing and successfully maintaining a knowledge sharing system. Their strategic position makes them the interpreters of top-management's decisions for the people who are actually going to carry out the tasks, the frontline managers. Consequently, they detain a considerable power to influence the way in which organizational strategies are carried out and therefore, I deem that their case deserves special attention. Particularly interesting, due to its similarity with the empirical part of this work, is the research conducted by Janczak (1999), on which the following classification and explanations are based.

Depending on the specific types of actions middle managers under-

take to search for, identify, and thereafter promote the sharing of rel-
evant knowledge between members of the organization, middle man-
agers can be classified into three broad categories: the problem solvers,
the entrepreneurs, and the negotiators. Through each stage of a project
– start-up, development, and closing – there are approaches to knowl-
edge sharing that are characteristic of the different types of managers.

Problem solvers focus mainly on applying existing, often external,
solutions to organizational problems. They judge their accomplish-
ments according to the end-result of their actions and therefore, they
sometimes concentrate on finding problems for which they already have
a solution.

In the start-up stage of a project, when organizational needs (op-
portunities, goals, and vision) and the necessary resources (budget,
material, manpower, equipment) must be identified, problem solvers
typically interact with their environment (internally and externally,
with regard to the organization) to find matching solutions to the
sub-problems they can divide the project into. Once a set of appro-
priate solutions has been put together, problem solvers process the
newly acquired knowledge in order to present it to top management
in a digestible way, leaving the responsibility for decision-making at
the highest level. As stated earlier, the focus of a problem solver upon
completion of a project is on the attainment of an efficient result. His
satisfaction is in having used already-existing knowledge to carry out a
task in a somewhat standard way. On one hand, the sharing activities
are limited to the persons who completed the search for knowledge,
mainly at the middle-management level. On the other hand, the ac-
quired knowledge is easily standardized and formalized, thus making it
readily transferable for later uses by outsiders.

Entrepreneurs are more preoccupied by the process than by the fi-
nal result in itself. Their working methods can often be characterized
as trial and error, they experiment vastly, and pivotal for them is en-
hancing the knowledge the organization acquires and shares while the
actions are performed and the project completed. Entrepreneurs tend
to distance themselves from problem solvers in the initial phase of a
project, in that they act as investigators and catalysts. In other words,
entrepreneurs make sure that they are well aware of the organization's
members' respective fields of expertise, so that they later can gather
the relevant people and encourage them to collaborate in the comple-
tion of the task at hand. Far from behaving like their colleagues pertain-

ing to other categories, entrepreneurs normally put to work the knowledge they have identified by making people interact together in new and multiple ways. The results that will be presented to top managers are not merely theoretically possible solutions to the problem; rather, they are working prototypes of arrangements that are ready to be expanded to the whole organization. The special working philosophy of entrepreneurs favours the creation of new knowledge among collaborating employees, and exchanges at all levels of the organization. At the end of a project, this knowledge has normally become tacit and is deeply embedded in the participants. The consequences of that are twofold: while the employees who were implicated in the sharing process have become experts and have acquired and developed new knowledge that they can use in other areas, it remains difficult for the organization to eventually share that knowledge with outsiders to the project.

Negotiators are the political type of middle managers, in that they generally proceed through a project by constantly negotiating on expectations, goals to be achieved, and on resources, with the influential parties involved. This type of middle managers will strive to satisfy each individual at one point or another during the process and, although the chosen solution might be effective, it is not necessarily the most efficient one from the point of view of the organization.

The behavioural pattern of negotiators upon embarking on a new task is similar but far from identical to the entrepreneurs'. While the latter do not discriminate in their search for resources and capabilities, negotiators tend to seek the approach to the problem that best suits the resources they have previously identified as readily available, and they establish connections between persons whose interactions they deem will promote their favoured solutions. Substantially more original than problem solvers but not as open as entrepreneurs to free knowledge sharing at all levels of the organization, negotiators generally adapt existing knowledge to new problems. By interacting with their peers, their subordinates, and top management, they reach solutions that are based on proven experiences that differ only slightly from the situation at hand. Thus, the possibility for radically new knowledge to emerge is low but nonetheless existing. For negotiators, the most important source of knowledge to be shared is not to be found in the outcome of a project in itself, but in the codification of the adaptive process that led the organization to that precise outcome. Competitors can easily and rapidly replicate an outcome but if an organization can internally spread knowl-

edge about its own development process, it has acquired an advantage that is not easily imitated.

This analysis of the different categories of middle managers allows us to discern the various influences they will have on the process of knowledge sharing in the organization. In resume, each type of manager takes on a particular role in the organization and consequently has a different role in respect to knowledge sharing: problem solvers are generally the ones promoting the swiftest knowledge sharing about concrete tasks, entrepreneurs favour the creation of new tacit knowledge, and negotiators are good at sharing procedural and methodical knowledge.

The Costs and Benefits of Knowledge Sharing

While knowledge management at large and knowledge sharing in particular have now for quite some time been considered as premium sources of competitive advantage for organizations and their value-creating strategy (Davenport and Prusak 1998), the costs that are related to these operations are often overseen (Mahnke 1998). However, once the fact that these costs do exist is acknowledged, a more thorough cost/benefit analysis of the knowledge sharing process should occur, in order to determine whether the whole strategy is actually creating or, on the contrary, destroying corporate value and competitive advantage (Mahnke 1998). Notwithstanding the possible drawbacks implied in the process of sharing knowledge, some researchers argue that a company that mainly relies on tacit knowledge limits its own ability to leverage and control the corporate body of knowledge effectively enough to create a competitive advantage (Sanchez 1997). In light of this dilemma between potential competitive advantage and competitive disadvantage, I here review some of the costs and benefits pertaining to the processes of knowledge sharing, based on the work of Mahnke (1998).

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter (the section From Knowledge Management to Knowledge Sharing), the establishment of a knowledge sharing system by an organization implies some sort of prior codification and standardization of the body of tacit knowledge that is 'contained' in its individual members. The tacit-explicit transformation is the first step (after having identified the knowledge, of course) that the organization that envisions increasing its degree of internal knowledge sharing must take, in order to allow the members to benefit from each other's competences. Before that can be achieved, however, the people who actually detain the tacit knowledge to be

codified and eventually shared must be convinced that the whole operation is virtuous and that they too can benefit from it. First, the time and means that are consumed winning the favour of these key people, to overcome their natural tendency towards protecting their self-interest, result in agency costs that will have to be taken into account when calculating the total cost of the sharing system. Second, once the sought-after bits of knowledge are standardized and/or codified, the infrastructures that will actually allow the sharing to occur (be it by means of meetings if the system is an arrangement of human networks, or by means of computer networks in the cases of database-based systems) have to be set up and their constant efficient functioning assured. Third, the time that workers will use to search and retrieve relevant knowledge in the system should also be accounted for. It should be seen as an investment insofar it yields satisfying results and reduces the time dedicated to reinventing already-existing solutions.

The above-mentioned costs are all real and unavoidable for the wannabe-sharing organization. There is, however, one more type of costs that is worth taking into account, although it is only potential: the knowledge that once was tacit having taken an explicit form, the danger for leakages that would benefit competitors increases considerably. Such leakages can happen in different ways: workers can get hired by other firms and share what they know with their new employers, network hacking can give competitors access to the system if it is computer based, etc.

Fortunately for organizations, knowledge sharing systems are not only about costs; there are also some substantial benefits to be gained. One of the obvious advantages of systematically putting knowledge into an explicit form is that it allows the organization to better integrate useful information that was previously dispersed among its members, often in a tacit form. This pooling of information creates a possibility for leveraging the body of knowledge of the organization across users and uses, thereby yielding economies of scale and scope. Furthermore, the knowledge, having been transformed from a tacit into an explicit form, is bound to the organization in a stronger way; should the expert-member leave, the knowledge will remain. Insofar the system is built in a logical and intuitive way that entices the employees to use it, it should reduce the costs related to knowledge search and retrieval, and almost eliminate the relatively costly operations involved in replicating and recreating knowledge that already exists in the organization.

Last but not least, the creation of new knowledge is likely to be boosted by the facilitated exchange of knowledge, which can eventually leave the company with an increased competitive advantage. It therefore becomes important that these vantages are visible and realized by all intended knowledge sharers so they do not simply focus on the costs.

Hierarchical Structure

Marschan (1996) suggests another issue closely related to a company's ability to share knowledge and understand foreign inputs better. According to her, less-hierarchical companies operate like networks, beyond the constraints of formal, bureaucratic structures. They are coordinated and controlled through informal mechanisms, such as personal relationships and interlocked boards of directors, which inadvertently results in complex flows of knowledge (Marschan 1996, 436). Consequently, less-hierarchical companies can experience difficulties sharing knowledge as the knowledge flows become personal and private exchanges rather than publicly accessible for all to share. Therefore, in order to un-complicate the flow of information and ease the knowledge sharing process, adopting a more hierarchical structure can make some information more understandable to others as it is no longer imbedded in personal understandings of the informal mechanisms and social networks.

Common Goals

Hill and Storck (2000), following their analysis of a successful system transition at Xerox, identified a series of key principles that were found to significantly influence the success of the implementation of new processes, such as those involved with the introduction of a knowledge sharing system. The existence of mutual interests is one of these key principles that they emphasize in their analysis of the implementation process. They argue that smooth implementation of a new system is best achieved by jointly setting common goals from the outset, involving all categories of intended users of the system. Such an early personal involvement in the strategic development of the system is likely to motivate the diverse organizational members to cooperate towards the achievement of objectives that are important to all of them (Hill and Storck 2000). With respect to knowledge sharing, this implies that the entire organization shares the will, motivation and goals the knowledge sharing initiatives set forth.

Managerial Commitment

Another organizational issue related to the intricacies of knowledge sharing involves the level of commitment expressed by the top managers of the organization. These managers must ensure the genuine commitment of the whole organization to the knowledge sharing strategy, a pivotal factor involved in the successful implementation of a new system (Zack 1999). To ensure the active participation and the maximum efforts from all organizational members, top-management must take visible measures that demonstrate the high priority they give the strategy. Zack explains that the management of the organizations that are best at managing their knowledge generally follow three steps. First, they understand their organization's strategic knowledge requirements; then, they devise a knowledge strategy that fits the firm's business strategy; and finally, they implement an organizational and technical architecture that is appropriate to the organization's knowledge processing needs. The mastery of these three steps plays a considerable role in the successful implementation of a knowledge sharing system, and it enables the entire organization to apply maximum effort and commitment to knowledge sharing (Zack 1999).

Incentives

A further issue organizations must consider in relation to their knowledge sharing strategy is the extent to which incentives should be given. Winning the approbation of the targeted users when implementing a knowledge sharing system is of crucial importance. However tempting it may be for a company to develop an incentive program to get its employees to use the system in the intended fashion, there seems to be evidence suggesting that this might not always be a good idea. No matter how justified some national subsidiaries may seem to be in requiring incentives to share their knowledge, real-life examples show that this is often not an appropriate long-term solution. Ellis (2001) describes the case of a company that tried to jump-start inter-unit knowledge sharing by offering direct incentives proportional to the knowledge being shared. Although the strategy proved efficient as long as the incentives were given to teams and individuals, it did little to develop a genuine sharing spirit among them and most of the sharing activities were discontinued when the incentive program was rolled-back. The system in itself was simply not deemed good enough by its users. Other companies have been very successful in adopting different approaches, keep-

ing clear from the use of direct incentives. Stevens (2000), for example, advocates the long-term advantages stemming from the involvement of individual organizational members in multiple teams pertaining to different units. This kind of strategy, as opposed to the attribution of direct incentives, has proved very efficient in achieving durable employee participation that lasted beyond the introductory phases.

System Specifications

A final issue that organizations must consider is the actual setup of the system that is going to be used to implement the knowledge sharing strategy. Although authors are unanimous about the idea that the user interface of any computer-based system should be friendly enough to encourage the targeted users to actually use it, there are diverging standpoints in the literature as to what 'friendly' means. In an article that sums-up a conversation she had with one of her colleagues, Orubeondo (2000) exposes and discusses different opinions. While developing a system, an appropriate balance has to be reached between making the system easy to use even for novice users and satisfying the demands of more experienced users for advanced features; depending on the use that will ultimately be made of the system (technical, accounting, communicating text or images, etc.), it should involve more or less typing and mouse clicking. Furthermore, the degree of layering of the information and the customizable features should be adjusted in accordance with the level of flexibility required, and with the computer literacy of the intended users (Orubeondo 2000). Referring specifically to network-based knowledge sharing systems, Kautz and Vendelø (2001) give an example of successful development of such a system, in which end-users were involved and ready to accept the system. Such a real-life example supports the idea that the clarity and the user-friendliness of the part of the system that is seen by the users (the interface) promote the success of the venture. Gross (2001) touches the topic of user-friendliness only briefly in his article, but his observations and reflections summarize in a very concise way the relative character of this issue. According to him, it is important for a knowledge sharing system to make the information available to its intended users in a way that is clear and makes sense to them, and at the time and place that suit them best.

In further accordance with this, Kletter (2001) suggests that the establishment of smaller communities assembling members with com-

mon professional interests is an essential success factor for a wider knowledge sharing system. The creation of such sub-groups along functional lines but across national subsidiaries, for example, will streamline the topics discussed internally within these groups, making them more focused and thereby more relevant to the organizational members who will have chosen to participate. The increased interest that should naturally follow the higher degree of relevance of the discussions for the individual, it is believed, will lead to a higher perceived usefulness of the system (Kletter 2001).

Criticism of Knowledge Sharing

In the above section, I have identified a series of organizational issues that authors have identified as exerting an influence on the implementation of a knowledge sharing strategy into an organization. This selection of issues corresponds to my perception of pertinent factors that I suspect will be useful in the course of the further empirical work. I consequently acknowledge that there potentially exist other organizational issues that also can affect the process of knowledge sharing but that are not included in the above assertions. The cause of this weakness resides in the possibility of me having falsely deemed certain factors not relevant to include within the realm of organizational issues that actually do affect knowledge sharing.

   A further criticism is that the theoretical development of the above mentioned organizational issues makes them vague in calibre because they are effectively impossible to directly apply to an organization that finds itself in the midst of implementing a knowledge sharing strategy. Such an organization would demand each of the above issues to be delicately intertwined with its own intricacies in order for them to be useful and applicable. It is my opinion that a purely theoretical definition deprives managers of this benefit.

3.2   Corporate Culture

Most everyone has an idea of what Corporate Culture is but only very few can accurately depict it. Fact is, most people cannot readily tell you what their (corporate) culture is, any more than fish, if they could talk, could tell you what water is. (Schein 1999)

It is tempting, and at some level also valid, to state that corporate culture is 'the way things are done around here' or 'the company cli-

mate.' Although these definitions are simplistic, they satisfy the lay-men's understanding of corporate culture and deliver a common perception of what corporate culture is. However, in this following section, I make a conscious move away from 'common speak' towards providing an in-depth and more accurate definition of the term Corporate Culture in order to thoroughly comprehend the complexity and consequences of it.

Unfortunately, even scholars, who specialize themselves within the field of corporate identities and business, at times, deliver basic definitions. Charles Hill (2005), established writer in the field of international business and corporate strategies, enthusiastically supports the view that corporate culture is plainly 'the organizations norms and value systems' (Hill 2005, 518) without further developing that statement. Perhaps it was not within his interest to further develop the idea but the curious reader will nevertheless demand to know what is meant by 'norms and value systems' and to what extent are people involved when referring to the 'organization.' Therefore, in attempt to answer these and other issues pertaining to corporate culture, I, in the following, draw from several authors, who I feel contribute constructively to defining corporate culture, in order to provide an in-depth and all-rounded depiction of the complex term 'Corporate Culture' and answer the question of what is meant by corporate culture and how extensive it is.

Corporate Culture Defined

The fact that corporate culture cannot be seen, nor touched nor easily observed makes it a complex phenomenon to define. It reflects the organizational atmosphere and leadership which influence the participation and attitude of the personnel (Asp and Uhmavaara 1992, 4). It is a set of elusive, soft variables that are usually regarded as important but nevertheless often mistakenly seen as having no direct influence on the fate and direction of a company. Corporate culture refers to the underlying values, beliefs and principles that serve as a foundation for a company's social system as well as the set of practices and behaviours that both exemplify and reinforce that organization (Denison 1990, 2).

A productive method of conceiving corporate culture is to realize and accept that it exists at several levels and view it from several perspectives so a greater understanding emerges (Schein 1999, 15; Martin 1992, 4). To help visualize the different levels of corporate culture, figure 3.1 illustrates a four-layer model that depicts corporate culture from its
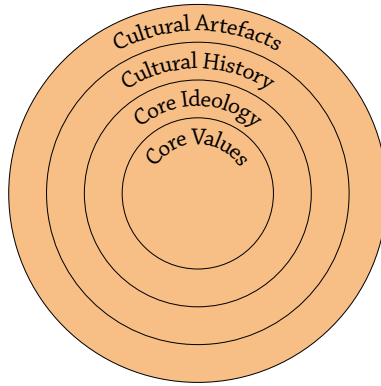
FIGURE 3.1   Four levels of corporate culture (adapted from Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 37)

more superficial, easier recognizable levels to the deeper, less understood levels.

Cultural Artefacts

The most visible and superficial level of corporate culture in any organization begins with its cultural artefacts. It essentially represents what you see, hear and feel as you enter a specific organization (Schein 1999, 15). The company's physical facilities, formal policies about promotion requirements, hours of work, official documents such as an organization chart that reveals the hierarchical levels of the company, etc. can provide some clues as to what the firm values and thereby suggest a certain corporate culture that this firm operates under (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 36).

To further explain this level, it can be helpful to examine opposing scenarios of corporate cultures each located at their extreme of the corporate culture spectrum. In one organization employees are very informal, talk openly, share offices and desks and it appears that everything is very fast-paced. In another organization, everything is very formal, employees work behind closed doors and there is a sense of careful deliberation and slow movement in the corporate atmosphere. Although it is tempting to already here label these companies with specific corporate cultures, it would be premature. All that is known from these impressions are that these organizations have specific and particular ways of presenting themselves and dealing with each other (Schein 1999, 16). To understand what it all means and make sense of their

actions, it is necessary to delve deeper into the essence of corporate culture.

Cultural History

With the exception of newly founded start-ups, all companies have, to some extent, at least the beginning of a cultural history. Exploring a company's cultural history can undoubtedly be rewarding as it contains insights into operating procedures that are rarely gained from even the most thorough review of official company handbooks on policy and procedures (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 38). For insight into the corporate culture at this level, it is necessary to talk to insiders or informants who can explain the organization and reveal the collective internal memory of that which is truly rewarded and punished within the corporation (Schein 1999, 17; Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 38). These memories represent strategies or actions from the past that have either worked well and ensured survival or failed and left scarred memories in the employees (Denison 1990, 2). These corporate memories that are collected by longstanding employees manifest themselves through rites and rituals, stories told about corporate heroes or heroines or through symbols (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 38-39). Occurrences of each could be rewarding employees for a job well done, a story told about a specific employee who procured rapid promotion, or company logos, respectively.

Core Ideology

Rather deeply imbedded in a company's corporate culture is the core ideology which, in essence, can be compared to the company's overall vision and ethical standards. The core ideology usually consists of statements that are highly informative and sacred and can display the cultural imperatives, in order of priority, that guide decision making within the firm (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 40). It can be in the form of documents, pamphlets or short papers that describe the company's basic values, principles, ethics and visions (Schein 1999, 17). The core ideology is very helpful in determining the nature of a corporate culture in that it reflects the mindset that the management is trying to install throughout the corporation's employees. If effective, this mindset will, in turn, have repercussions on the manner in which employees conduct their daily professional routines and hence, thereby constitutes a major part of a company's corporate culture. However, even at the depth that this level reaches, it is necessary to delve even deeper into the final level of

corporate culture to get a comprehensive and undiminished definition of the term.

Core Values

At the deepest level of corporate culture lie the core values. Normally the core values are imposed onto the organization by the founders of the company and represent the values, beliefs and assumptions of what they think successful business is about (Schein 1999, 19). These values, beliefs and assumptions can be highly visible and explicitly discussed within the group or they can be so deeply rooted that they become undiscussable and translucent (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 41). In either case, the core values are powerful guides as to how business should be conducted, and consequently, management tries to attract and retain others who can align themselves with these beliefs (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 41; Schein 1999, 19). The difficulty in fully understanding this final level of corporate culture stems from the fact that these values, beliefs and assumptions gradually come to be shared and taken for granted and, in effect, become tacit assumptions about how success is achieved, at least within this specific company (Schein 1999, 19). This essentially means that the employees themselves may not be able to describe the values and beliefs dominant within their firm, but are nevertheless complying with them, probably at some unconscious level.

In sum, corporate culture is not the exclusive preserve of the CEO or general manager but has much wider-ranging scopes and implications and embodies everyone and everything within the company walls (Lessem 1990, 2). Consequently, the essence of corporate culture actually first gets exposed when all the four levels have been investigated, rationalized and understood. With this in mind and having understood the complexity the four levels of corporate culture include, I feel that corporate culture can justifiably be defined as 'the significant shared meanings that allow employees to collectively make sense of their co-workers actions' (Asp and Uhmavaara 1992, 4).

Criticism of Corporate Culture Defined

The above definition of corporate culture is based on several noted authors who give their contribution to the topic. As is often the case when many researchers investigate one specific area, several impressions are revealed, most of which contain a certain level of validity. This multi-impressionistic result can further complicate a topic while, simul-

taneously, also give it a deeper, multi-perspective twist. In the case at hand, the authors cited in corporate culture defined do not themselves entirely agree upon an exact definition and dismemberment of the term corporate culture and consequently leave much of the conclusion making up to the individual reader and his preconceptions of what corporate culture entails. Furthermore, since the authors' work usually is done in close collaboration with a specific company and its managers and employees, it is possible that their otherwise pristine view on corporate culture gets tainted by the specifics of that particular company. These two problem areas can present real barriers towards obtaining a holistic understanding of the terms and thus it is helpful to develop them further.

Pertaining to the first problem area, many of the authors support their arguments with an example of a single scenario at a particular company. Although using examples is a helpful way of relaying a message on a topic that is difficult to define, it limits its value because it does not provide a universal definition. Using a singular and memorable example is entertaining and most likely true to that specific situation but is not consistent enough to be considered necessarily applicable to all organizations. Hence, if the author's definition lies mostly or solely in an example, he may be limiting himself from a common definition of corporate culture.

Pertaining to the second problem area, several of the above mentioned authors have attempted to dissect corporate culture into various layers. When doing so, there is no unanimous decision on how many layers exist and what pertains to the different layers. Fairfield-Sonn (2001) proposes four layers whereas Schein (1999) proposes three layers and others, such as Lessem (1990), propose only one layer that is intertwined with many different aspects. Since corporate culture is a complex term, the fact that the authors do not all share the same exact view is understandable and maybe even helpful in providing an all-rounded definition of it. However, it becomes problematic when the authors disagree on which levels are deeper and which are more superficial. Schein (1999) believes corporate history to be the most deeply imbedded element of corporate culture (Schein 1999, 19) where as Fairfield-Sonn (2001) ranks corporate history as rather superficial (Fairfield-Sonn 2001, 37). The fact that the authors themselves have not reached a unanimous decision on the layering of corporate culture implies that my above definition of corporate culture is equally ques-

tionable as its foundation is based on the ambiguous results of several authors.

The Importance of Corporate Culture

Corporate culture plays a dominant role in the thoughts of the general management, the employees and the overall success of a company (Lessem 1990, 3). If the managers of an enterprise are able to make good use of the prevailing corporate culture, and with the help of it can find a suitable strategy, then the enterprise increases its potential for success (Asp and Uhmavaara 1992, 4). Likewise, a productive corporate culture can increase job satisfaction for all employees, intensify their ambitions and work-level and aid in recruiting a more sought-after staff, thereby further lifting the potential of that company. Consequently, corporate culture matters because it is a powerful, latent and often unconscious set of forces that determine both our individual and collective behaviour and contribute to determining strategies, goals and modes of operating which, in turn, can improve survival chances (Schein 1999, 14). Hence, paying particular attention to the nature and applicability of an organization's corporate culture can be the key tool in aligning the combined efforts of the employees within that organization.

Corporate Culture in Motion

The asserted definition of corporate culture given above provides a thorough description of the term, its respective parts and determinants and the elements connected to each. However, at the same time, it also only provides a snapshot of corporate culture; a static impression of a complex term that is constantly evolving. Therefore, it seems only fair to give corporate culture momentum so it may viewed in its natural environment; namely that of a rapidly changing world.

Below is a modified depiction of Denison's (1990) impression of corporate culture influenced by the current environment and time. It provides a dynamic illustration of the above-mentioned determinants of corporate culture while also providing direction. This illustration gives insight into how the four levels of corporate culture are positioned, how they interact and how they, through a united front, constitute corporate culture.

Everything represented within the enclosed bold lines of the above framework denotes the elements expressed in the definition of corporate culture. History, being an integral part of corporate culture, influ-
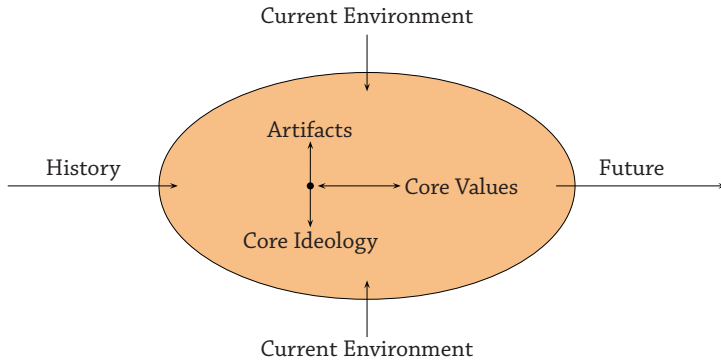
FIGURE 3.2   A framework for studying corporate culture in motion (modified
framework from Denison 1990, 5)

ences the three other elements which, in turn, all interact to various
degrees. (Note that the different font sizes illustrate the varying im-
pact that the four levels have on corporate culture.) The current envi-
ronment is an external power that can influence the direction in which
the company goes and, equally important, influence the nature of the
corporate culture within the firm. However, since it is possible for two
firms operating in the same geographical and business area to have com-
pletely different corporate cultures, the extent to which the current en-
vironment has a direct influence on corporate culture is questionable.
Despite this, when speaking of corporate culture in dynamic terms, it is
nevertheless fair to include it as an important external factor that can
influence corporate culture since it is imaginable that a sudden or grad-
ual change in the current environment could have some impact on the
nature of a company's corporate culture. Hence, albeit not certain of the
exact extent of its impact, the environment in which a company is em-
bedded plays a role in forming the ultimate shape of an organizations
corporate culture.

3.3   Answering RQ1: How to Share Knowledge Across Varying Corporate Cultures?

In the present chapter, I have thus far been preoccupied with explain-
ing the exact meanings of the two core terms of the research work:
knowledge sharing and corporate culture. The definitions I have given
to each of these two terms, and the precise topics they engage, have con-
sciously not been subject to stringent restrictions. Nevertheless, their
final shape and content have evidently been influenced by the fact that

Knowledge sender   Knowledge receivers
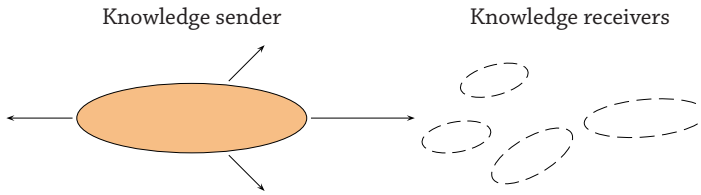
FIGURE 3.3   Random Knowledge Sending (arrows – knowledge being transmitted
from unit)

they would have to lead us to what follows; a theory-based answer to
the research question that now arises: how to share knowledge across
different corporate cultures.

In order for knowledge sharing across corporate cultures to success-
fully occur, it requires a two-sided strategic approach focusing on the
nature and conditions under which the knowledge is being sent, and
on the environment and conditions under which it is received. To help
guide the arguments of both sides throughout the following part, I use
the aid of figure 3.3 to visually support the reasoning. The left part of
the diagram represents any given organizational unit that attempts to
disseminate knowledge. Within the large bold circle there is an endless
supply of information, which at times gets transmitted in the hopes
that someone will receive and understand it. The arrows depict mes-
sages being sent from this unit in a random and standard fashion to
any eventual receivers, in forms that are characteristic of the original
unit's particular corporate culture. The smaller circular shapes on the
right part of the diagram represent communication partners of the first
unit. They vary in shape, positioning and size, so to illustrate their vary-
ing corporate cultures.

In the previous section, it was established that corporate culture con-
sists of four separate levels that united construct a firm's corporate cul-
ture. It is the common understanding of these different levels, span-
ning from the easily recognizable cultural artefacts to the more com-
plicated and implicit core values, that allows for a unit to collectively
decipher and make sense of their co-workers' actions and messages.
Therefore, before attempting to send knowledge to employees operat-
ing under a different perception of corporate culture, the utmost im-
portant question must be asked: Is the knowledge that is being sent
in a form that can be understood by the intended receivers of another
corporate culture? The knowledge sender must understand that not all

Knowledge sender   Knowledge receivers
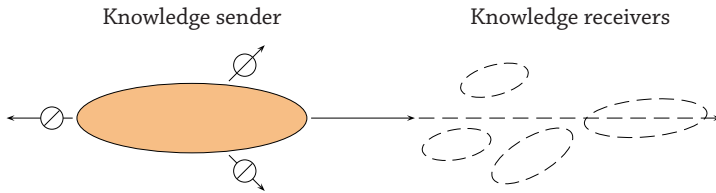
FIGURE 3.4   Directed Knowledge Sending (arrows – knowledge being transmitted
from unit, dashed arrow – knowledge sharing track, ⊘ – no symbol)

knowledge has the potential to be transmitted and properly received by the intended unit, despite this knowledge making perfect sense internally within the sender organization. The specifics of one corporate culture, for instance a distinct core ideology, may make certain knowledge that is imbedded in this core ideology non-comprehensible to another organization as a result of dissimilar core ideologies. Hence, the knowledge is not properly received because a certain understanding of the first unit's core ideology is required in order to correctly decode the message. Consequently, the sending unit must acknowledge that the array of potential knowledge that can be sent is limited and sending knowledge that is rooted in a specific understanding of a corporate culture might and probably will result in a failure to communicate if the receiving unit does not share a similar corporate culture. Therefore, all attempts to send knowledge that does not relate to another corporate culture are bound to encounter difficulties in being deciphered. The medium and style that is used in the sharing process therefore becomes of paramount importance. Official documents, case studies, technical descriptions, histories, anecdotes, articles, values, assumptions, etc. have to be in a form and nature that allow all the intended users to easily and clearly understand what is meant. The message has to get across with as little distortion as possible and that can only be accomplished if the sender selects and possibly even adapts knowledge so that it is understandable to a foreign corporate culture.

The knowledge that is rooted in a corporate culture too distant from the intended receivers' (represented by the arrows with the 'No-Symbol' on them, in figure 3.4) will simply act as noise to the intended receivers because they cannot understand the message. The knowledge that is compatible with foreign corporate cultures (represented by the arrow without a no-symbol on it) is the only knowledge that is fruitful to transmit, as it is the only knowledge not too deeply imbedded in its own

tacitness and that has the potential to be understood by the intended receivers. The dotted arrow represents an extension of this knowledge and is termed 'the knowledge sharing track.'

Having determined that the knowledge sender must send relevant knowledge in a manner that is compatible with varying corporate cultures, it now becomes equally important to acknowledge that the elements of knowledge receiving have just as a profound impact on the successful ability to share knowledge as knowledge sending. In order for the knowledge receiver to understand the message being sent, the unit must be willing and capable to interpret the message. Factors that are susceptible of enhancing the willingness of the individual organizational member to receive and correctly interpret pieces of knowledge are often underestimated and it is taken for granted that all units are of the mindset that sharing knowledge is constructive and beneficial for all partners. Therefore, before becoming capable of knowledge sharing, it is important to get willing.

To get the individual organizational members willing to promote and adopt a proactive attitude towards knowledge sharing, the participants to the strategy must be convinced that there is a reciprocity principle. In other words, they have to know that the benefits they will enjoy from actively participating to the strategy will in some way be related to the extent of their input. These benefits can take the form of useful knowledge that will be made available to the participants or recognition granted for having productively used the opportunities created by the knowledge sharing strategy (Angus 2000).

A further way of increasing the will to share knowledge is to openly acknowledge that the successful exploitation of the knowledge sharing strategy is for the overall benefit of the company, an outcome that should be in the interest of all organizational members. The setting of common goals, as suggested by Hill and Storck (2000), is likely to motivate the diverse organizational members to cooperate with a knowledge sharing initiative and increase the will with which they participate in the related activities. The genuine commitment of the top management or headquarters is an equally important factor that promotes the general will of the employees to strive towards making the knowledge sharing initiative a success (Zack 1999). The recognition that one's superior is completely devoted to the initiative increases the likelihood of active participation from all the employees and raises the assertiveness of their efforts.

The infrastructure and processes through which knowledge will be shared are essential constituents of the knowledge sharing system, an inherent part of an organization's knowledge sharing strategy. Making this system as simple and user-friendly as possible is another factor that will make the employees more willing to share knowledge with each others. Orubeondo (2000), Kautz and Vendelø (2001) and Gross (2001) emphasized the importance of the users encountering a simple and straightforward means in which to share knowledge in order to decrease user frustration and dissatisfaction with the system. In addition, focusing the knowledge that each organizational member gets exposed to, through the system, in order to make it especially relevant to the individual, will work as an encouraging factor that will ultimately increase the acceptance and long-term use of the system. As Kletter (2001) suggests, the establishment of smaller communities assembling members with common professional interests or working in similar functions will achieve this and consequently increase the employees' will to address the initiative sincerely.

Creating the will to share knowledge in the employees is a prerequisite for them to welcome a knowledge sharing initiative. According to Scholes (1999), welcoming a new strategy and being open to the changes and new concepts it bears is a vital mindset that the employees must possess if the implementation of the strategy is to provide value to the organization as a whole. In extension to this, the implementation of an encompassing knowledge sharing strategy does therefore not occur simply because it is considered to be desirable by the management; the employees must be promoters of the change process as well and welcome the new strategy (Scholes 1999, 399). In order to achieve this, it is extremely important that the employees perceive the strategy in a positive light. Boyd, Larréché, et al. (1996) state that the successful implementation of a given strategy is more likely when the employees regard it as being functional and competent and possesses the appropriate mechanisms for coordinating efforts (Boyd, Larréché et al. 1996, 234). In other words, the more useful and beneficial a newly introduced strategy is perceived to be, the more likely it is that the employees are eager and willing to full-heartily address the implementation process. Taking the implementation process seriously is an absolutely crucial step towards being able to integrate a newly adopted strategy (Boyd, Larréché et al. 1996; Weitz and Wensley 1984; Scholes 1999; Carroll, Dromgoole et al. 2000). This implies that the mindset of all the employees must es-

Knowledge sender   Knowledge receivers
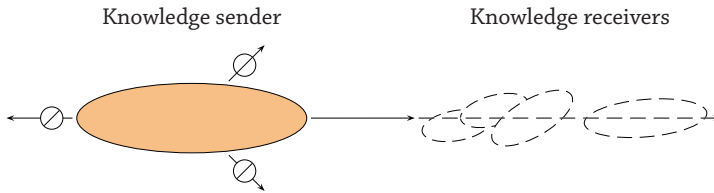
FIGURE 3.5   Optimal Knowledge Sharing Across Corporate Cultures (arrows –
              knowledge being transmitted from unit, dashed arrow – knowledge
              sharing track, ⌀ – no symbol)

sentially be programmed to give the implementation endeavour a sincere attempt or otherwise, the hoped-for results will not be attained. In continuation, Schein (1999) suggests a final factor that can increase the will to share knowledge. He believes that if the employees of an organization are open, communicate freely and operate on an informal basis prior to the introduction of the knowledge sharing strategy, the employees will have an easier time adapting to the new knowledge sharing processes. In other words, the new knowledge sharing strategy will not appear as alien if the employees already possess many of the 'sharing' qualities that an informal and open corporate culture harbours.

Assuming that the will to share knowledge is now present, being capable of receiving the knowledge from the knowledge sender becomes the next problematic encounter. Although the knowledge sender makes an earnest effort in not localizing the information to its own corporate culture but tries to make it universally applicable through an array of cultures, the knowledge will inevitably never be as straightforward as the receiving unit would have formulated it if it were for their own internal use. Consequently, the receiving unit must 'stretch' its patience and abilities to adapt to other corporate cultures. In the final depiction of knowledge sharing across corporate cultures, figure 3.5, the other units, with whom the original sender attempts to share knowledge, make minor alterations or adaptations within their local corporate culture so to align themselves along the knowledge sharing track and thereby allow themselves to be capable of understanding the intended message.

The corporate cultures of the receiving units are not transformed but take on a wider adaptability spectrum so to be able to successfully process knowledge emanating from cultures peripheral to their own. The units that want to 'stretch' their capabilities in order to align themselves onto the knowledge sharing track can do so by first, in-

stalling an atmosphere that favours the development of specific individual traits in its members. Building oneself a reputation for being reliable and trustworthy, taking responsibility, forming enduring relationships, exceeding job requirements, establishing rapports with others, being well-prepared, and other similar behavioural patterns are generally typical of a well-functioning organization, and determining for the success of knowledge sharing processes (Dirlam 2000). An organization that succeeds in making its members develop such characteristics will experience an increase in the confidence level among colleagues and, as a result, the members of the organization are likely to become more prone to share knowledge (Stevens 2000).

Once the desired individual traits have been developed in organizational members, there remains the important step of increasing the units' level of knowledge about other units' activities and particularities. The benefits of the sharing communities as expressed by Kletter (2001) above also help raise cross-unit awareness and understanding. Through the incremental increase of the level of mutual understanding and reciprocal knowledge, an organization can achieve a higher efficiency in its attempts to share knowledge, as having insight in the peculiarities of the counterpart in the communication process enhances contextualization of the knowledge and allows for a more sensible interpretation and intuitive understanding. This important step increases an organization's understanding of foreign corporate cultures and consequently allows the unit to 'stretch' its capabilities of understanding knowledge stemming from foreign corporate cultures, thereby enabling it to align itself along the knowledge sharing track.

Another aspect that allows an organization to 'stretch' itself onto the knowledge sharing track concerns the nature of the corporate culture. Although a strong corporate culture is generally viewed as a positive addition to a company's portfolio of strengths, the units must be cautious not to get too internally oriented and focused on their own ways. According to Alvesson and Berg (1992), a shared way of thinking creates a mutual understanding among the employees and thus a predictable action, even when faced with a complex phenomenon that cannot always be verbalized or written. This implies that employees working under a shared way of thinking act in a specific manner that is not straightforward and simple to understand for outsiders and conversely also have difficulty taking into account foreign information and actions external to their limited organizational aspects (Alvesson and Berg 1992, 117).

Therefore, in order to better understand knowledge originating from sources external to their organization and to help other units interpret knowledge from that specific organization, it is helpful to avoid having the employees of the various units operate under a too narrow or shared way of thinking.

A final consideration that can aid differing units in 'stretching' their capabilities towards being able to understand foreign knowledge better, closely relates to Marschan's (1996) hierarchical argument made earlier. Less-hierarchical subsidiaries are prone to operate under complex knowledge flows, deeply imbedded in personal understandings of informal mechanisms and social networks, whereas more-hierarchical organizations free themselves of this impediment and have a consequent easier time sharing knowledge. Therefore, adopting a more hierarchical structure can help improve an organization's explicit knowledge sharing activities. Much in accordance with Marschan's point, Cerny (1996) points out how more centrally run organizations avoid problems of differing regional priorities that are likely to plague a company-wide knowledge sharing strategy. He therefore advocates that the centrally run organizations have an easier time coordinating global knowledge sharing activities, which results in a more complete alignment of organizational units along the knowledge sharing track.

Through the accomplishment of the above points, the knowledge-sharing track is now able to penetrate all designated units for whom the knowledge was intended. Albeit this knowledge is likely to have a more profound impact on some units compared to others, depending on the extent to which the characteristics of the corporate cultures are aligned, they are all now capable of meaningfully accessing the knowledge that is being shared.

In the example that I have used to illustrate the reasoning throughout this section, I have consciously decided to keep both sender and receivers constant, for the sake of consistency and clarity of the argument. One could however easily imagine a situation in which one of the receiving units took the sender's role, in which case the previous sender would join the group of the receivers.

4 Knowledge Sharing at ISS: A Description

The previous chapters of this book were dedicated to the exposition of ground-laying information that forms the theoretical foundations of this research. The theoretical background forming the backbone of the work was defined, and the choice of methodology was explained and justified. This chapter marks the beginning of the empirical part of the research, where the focus shifts towards the actual knowledge sharing issues appearing in different parts of the multinational organization of the corporate partner, ISS.

In the first section of the chapter, I introduce the network-based knowledge sharing system that ISS has already introduced to its multinational organization, Business Insight. Intricacies pertaining to Business Insight are important to disclose in order to allow for a thorough understanding of the rest of the section, since the data obtained from the subsidiaries are influenced by the existence of that system. I then proceed to individually present the data pertaining to each one of the four subsidiaries of ISS with whom interviews were conducted (ISS Austria, ISS Italy, ISS Denmark and ISS France).

The codification method of analysis that I have applied to the interview data has yielded recurrent themes and patterns that appeared across the answers given by the interviewees, regarding four selected areas: Corporate culture, Appropriateness of Business Insight, Characteristics of the ideal knowledge sharing system, and Hindrances to the achievement of the ideal knowledge sharing system. The opinions and ideas that were expressed by the interviewees are exposed in this chapter and subsidiary-specific codes are extracted from this data. The purpose of this process is to yield the two elements (subsidiary-specific knowledge and codes) required to complete the analytical process at the core of the next chapter: ISS: Analysis and Interpretation.

The data, descriptions and deductions exposed in this chapter exclusively concern the management of the company, not the other categories of ISS employees, e. g. the cleaners and maintenance crews who are not directly related to the knowledge sharing initiatives. The knowledge sharing strategy of the company does not take them directly into

account and the system is not intended for their use. Moreover, their relatively independent work and their typical isolation from the local national circumstances prevent them from really influencing the corporate culture of the subsidiaries.

The descriptive and analytical sections of this chapter and the next concentrate on the subsidiaries. While the interviews that were conducted with the managers of the local subsidiaries of ISS provided the specifics of the implementation and utilization of the knowledge sharing system at the subsidiary level, the aim of the interviews with organizational members pertaining to the headquarters of the group was different. These latter interviews were completed to acquire background knowledge about the corporate knowledge sharing strategy. They allowed me to learn more about the coordinating mechanisms used by the headquarters, about their goals within the area of knowledge sharing, as well as about the means that are favoured to reach them. I used this information in order to better the interviews with the subsidiaries and to evaluate their actual performance compared to the expected situation in the analytical sections of chapter 5. Furthermore, this information contributes to the ultimate recommendations pertaining to knowledge sharing across cultures.

4.1 Business Insight

Business Insight is the name of the network-based knowledge sharing system that has been launched in March 2001, by the headquarters of ISS. Although there is a very small increase in the overall usage of the system, it is still far from the level that is considered optimal for good knowledge sharing activities to occur. The system is accessible to selected end-users at various managerial levels in all thirty-six national subsidiaries of the group, for a total of some 4000 organizational members. The information that is readily available through Business Insight in form of articles, technical data and case studies includes descriptions of procedures for standard tasks, models of forms and contracts, rules of conduct in various situations, etc. English has been adopted as the standard language of the system and the responsible managers at the headquarters post the information, normally after having consulted knowledgeable employees about the topic at hand. The headquarters of ISS want to retain the control of the system to ensure the quality and the relevance of the information, but it is a stated goal for Business Insight to allow dynamic exchanges between subsidiaries.

4.2 Subsidiary Specifics

The body of this investigation into each subsidiary is divided in four parts, corresponding to the four codification areas mentioned earlier. The local corporate culture exposes findings related to the corporate culture of the individual subsidiary, including how it is influenced by such factors as national culture, managerial style, and previous evolution. I have purposely not divided the description of the individual subsidiaries corporate cultures into the four layers exposed in the theoretical findings because not all four layers reveal applicable elements. As suggested by the second problem area in the section Criticism of Corporate Culture Defined, corporate cultures are not always neatly stacked in four easily dissectible layers. Consequently, the theoretical model has provided the understanding of what to look for, but needs not be followed layer by layer. The second header, Business Insights match with existing knowledge sharing processes covers the series of clashes and adaptations that the subsidiary has to go through (or to reject) in order to adapt (or to chose not to adapt) to the new group-wide knowledge sharing system. Whether and how this adaptation process is made will invariably determine how successful the subsidiary is at using the system.

The last two areas, The ideal knowledge sharing situation and Hindrances to the achievement of the ideal knowledge sharing situation are two aspects of one larger area. In the former, the goal is to identify the criteria that, in the mind of the managers of the subsidiaries, make up the best possible knowledge sharing situation. In the latter, I strive to identify hindrances, mentioned by the interviewees themselves, related to the individual subsidiaries that will make difficult the realization of an ideal knowledge sharing situation.

After having completed the description of the individual subsidiaries' local corporate culture, their views on the appropriateness of Business Insight against their already-existing knowledge sharing processes, their perceived best-feasible knowledge sharing solutions, and the hindrances they foresee, I extract the codes that will feed the successive analysis, which in turn will later lead to answering the second research question.

ISS Austria

The ISS subsidiary, ISS Austria was a particularly interesting subsidiary to analyze as it is one of the few subsidiaries that showed very positive

results concerning the corporate knowledge sharing system, Business Insight. From pure quantitative data, it is easy to note that the daily activity on the knowledge sharing system surpasses that of most other subsidiaries. Consequently, the following is a qualitative analysis of the underlying factors that will reveal the particularities of why ISS Austria performs so well.

The Local Corporate Culture

The corporate culture at ISS Austria was expressed as being informal and content. The subsidiary does not regard itself as a company that operates under the typical more formal and strict Austrian working culture, but employees are rather portrayed as being very relaxed and casual. This is nicely exemplified by the colourful and positive artefacts visible throughout the offices and the informal use of the German language that is used not only to communicate with lower ranked colleagues but also to higher positioned leaders. People are 'per du,' meaning on an informal and first name basis. There is a decentralized, non-hierarchical structure permitting all employees, from the top manager to newly employed lower ranks, to mingle freely and converse without formalities. Furthermore, the decentralized structure allows for communication to flow freely and unhindered throughout the company. The employees have been described as being serious and hard working but also down to earth with the unrivalled ability to simultaneously have fun.

Historically, ISS Austria has been a well functioning, independent cleaning company. Its cultural history reveals that this success has been attained through hard work, and the pride the employees take from the previous accomplishments of their company is still apparent today and fuels their will to continue working hard.

When working on a certain task, there is a structure or order that is followed in order to complete the task in accordance with the set norms and standards predominant at the subsidiary. These set norms and standards may be in a written form or simply implied, depending on the degree in which formal guidelines are deemed necessary by the management. Since the subsidiary consists mainly of Austrians, it is likely that some norms and standards that normally are in written form are not in a written form at ISS Austria since everyone takes it for granted because of their homogenous background. This implies that a certain understanding of the Austrian working culture is necessary

to be optimal in ISS Austria. However, when necessary, the subsidiary is flexible enough to break out of the preset structure allowing for the adaptation to specific circumstances.

The core values of ISS Austria's corporate culture emphasize the notion that hard work, respect for others and loyalty towards the company, complemented by the ability to enjoy yourself and be friendly, will serve the company best in the long run.

Codes for ISS Austria's corporate culture: happy, informal, non-hierarchical, relaxed, hard working.

Business Insight's Match with the Existing Knowledge Sharing Processes

Before the introduction of Business Insight there was no formalized knowledge sharing system within ISS Austria. It was generally conducted through informal communication, meetings and training seminars which all allowed for discussions and trading of knowledge and ideas on a very informal basis. The primary knowledge sharing method was simply to pick up the phone and call the relevant counterpart and extract the appropriate information. Although simple in nature, this venerable method of knowledge sharing allowed everyone to receive pertinent data about specific issues quickly and efficiently, and consequently functioned very well for a long time. When communicating with the headquarters in Denmark, it could often take some time before the correct person was available and able to speak over the telephone and reach a common understanding. There would generally be a lengthy story or explanation told before headquarters would understand the specifics of the subsidiary's inquiry but soon thereafter a satisfactory outcome would emerge.

The introduction of Business Insight was welcomed despite ISS Austria experiencing success with the already established and well running knowledge sharing methods. The employees did not see Business Insight as a threat or substitute to their current knowledge sharing methods, but rather as an extra possibility from which pertinent data could be retrieved and consequently approached the new system with an open and positive mind. It was interpreted as a positive sign that ISS incorporate a global knowledge sharing system as it would prove profitable for ISS Austria as well as the ISS organization as a whole. Furthermore, since ISS Austria was a growing company, the subsidiary felt that it was due time to get a formalized knowledge sharing system since effective communication might not continue to be as simple and straight for-

ward in the future as it was back when ISS Austria was smaller and more independent.

It was viewed very positively that Business Insight is not the exclusive preserve of the top management because it appreciated the authority middle managers have when sharing knowledge and respected the influence they have on the successful incorporation of such a system. Thereto, it was felt that the depth and usefulness of the system would increase proportionally to the increase of people who had access to the system and used the system. In other words, the more people who use the system, the more useful the system becomes.

The fact that Business Insight is in English interestingly enough circumvents the language barriers ISS Austria previously experienced when communication outside Austria despite not everyone within ISS Austria speaking fluent English. Before Business Insight, employees sometimes feared speaking English to, for example the headquarters in Denmark, and consequently felt less confident in their ability to express themselves clearly. However, through the use of Business Insight, knowledge sharing with the headquarters has increased because the knowledge sharing becomes passive (reading from a screen) which for some is easier to do than active knowledge sharing (calling someone on the phone). Thus, where an employee might have hesitated in calling Denmark or not called at all out of fear in not being able to express herself, she is now more prone to look it up on Business Insight with the aid of her dictionary but without the humility of language deficiencies. It is felt that the advantages of circumventing these language deficiencies are greater than the disadvantages of time spent looking words up in a dictionary or simply not calling.

Codes for Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes: welcomed, useful, efficient.

The Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

Although ISS Austria, in general, is pleased with the current knowledge sharing situation and the employees realize that their knowledge sharing activities surpass many of the other subsidiaries, they do recognize that the situation is not optimal and there is room for considerable improvement. For ISS Austria, the ideal knowledge sharing situation entails the ability to easily receive all relevant information directly from the appropriate source without hindrances and likewise being able to transmit the precise asked-for data from the most knowledgeable

source directly to the inquirer without losing any of the meaning due to technicalities or personal shortcomings. For this to occur, a high degree of coordination among the subsidiaries must be present. In the opinion of ISS Austria, such global coordination should stem from a managerial source at the corporate headquarters. Furthermore, it entails the active involvement of all the subsidiaries, not just a few, so that communication is made possible throughout the entire ISS group.

Another area that was suggested for improvement towards the attainment of the above was the general layout of Business Insight. Although using Business Insight becomes easier with time, it is a very confusing system to get used to and consequently gives rise to frustration and anger during the introductory encounters. Flashing news windows and other distracting pop-ups quickly become distracting, as they constantly demand an eye to monitor the events and add to the frustration first time user's experience. It is felt that a more relaxed and user friendly layout of the system would promote the use of Business Insight and act as a considerable improvement for the initial impressions.

A further step towards the ideal knowledge sharing situation would be to create a link to an employee database of all ISS employees with access to the system. Here it would be possible to localize the exact person one wishes to contact in order to extract information by refining the search to countries/cities, professions or specialties. Today, much time is wasted searching for the exact person one feels might be able to provide useful information about a specific topic because the art of finding the correct person is not a straightforward task. However, by being able to type two or three key words into a search engine (such as Milan, manager, Gerbraldi account), the knowledge seeker can quickly find all relevant people, their direct contact information, precise job description and anything else deemed relevant in order to connect these people; in this case, the manager in Milan of the Gerbraldi account. This allows for a pinpointing of relevant personal and thereby greatly facilitates the information seeking process.

A final suggestion towards the ideal knowledge sharing situation is creating common division areas that act as virtual conference rooms for specific divisions across all 38 subsidiaries. Within these virtual conference rooms, division specific data will be readily available allowing an employee with an interest only in one area to obtain in-depth and precise data about that specific area. For instance, the establishment of a marketing area where the entire ISS group has access and can share

ideas that pertain specifically to the intricacies of marketing. Within such an area, ISS marketing personnel throughout the entire world have the possibility to extract information relevant to marketing and pertaining to their exact needs. The information would become more specified since it only relates to marketing issues and peripheral data, such as financial data, would be excluded and stored in the virtual finance area, where all the finance employees from the ISS group gather and share data. Currently, the marketing department of ISS Austria contacts the other subsidiaries once every two years to get them to send commercial products and commodities to Austria so the Austrian marketing department can learn from the intuitiveness of other ISS marketing departments. Through the establishment and active use of a virtual marketing area, this process could be greatly simplified and made more cost efficient.

Codes for the ideal knowledge sharing situation: coordination among subsidiaries, active involvement of all ISS subsidiaries, user-friendly layout, personal data links, establishment of virtual division areas.

Hindrances to the Achievement of an Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation
The complex and disturbing layout of Business Insight that hinders employees to participate actively in knowledge sharing activities as they seek to avoid the frustration they often encounter when using the system, the lack of a link to employee databases within ISS that would facilitate the information seeking process, and the lack of divisional virtual areas for topic specific discussions are the three pivotal points that ISS Austria feels hinder the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation. Naturally, simplifying the Business Insight layout and establishing the employee database link and virtual discussion rooms are the obvious and natural first steps in overcoming these hindering factors. However, there are other factors hindering the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation that are not necessarily as straightforward as the above mentioned factors.

First, if the divisional manager is not the one endorsing the use of the system, the likelihood that Business Insight serves a useful purpose decreases. ISS Austria feels that if the order to use it comes directly from the Danish headquarters to the end users, the effect of that order will be minimal as the employees will down-prioritize such a distant order compared to an order stemming from their immediate boss. However, if the divisional manager actively circulates the subsidiary prompting

its use it is felt that the effect will be much greater. Consequently, it becomes essential for the headquarters to focus on the divisional manager when promoting the knowledge sharing system and ensure that the he is enthused and eager about the knowledge sharing system. Therefore, without the headquarters acting as the key promoter and enthusiast of the system towards the divisional manager, the divisional manager will lack the power to promote the system internally throughout his division.

Second, it is perceived as problematic that the headquarters can and will filter all the information given into the system. The headquarters in Denmark does not necessarily know what the subsidiaries consider relevant knowledge to include on Business Insight and what can be excluded. This discrepancy resides in the existence of diverging agendas; the headquarters prioritizes knowledge that is directly correlated to financial gains, whereas ISS Austria has local prioritizations to take into account as well. A sole focus on data pertaining to financial results, such as those ISS headquarters would be prone to favour, deprives ISS Austria of vital information that could prove useful for their alternative needs. This difference in corporate priorities suggests that the headquarters is not a good judge of what should be included on Business Insight and consequently lessens the combined value of useful information on the system.

A final consideration of the factors that hinder the ideal knowledge sharing situation is that everyone within ISS Austria, and almost all other subsidiaries that use the system, are using the system in a language other than their natural tongue. Although it was stated above that knowledge sharing on Business Insight occurs in a passive opposed to active mode, thereby decreasing language barriers, the fact that some employees have great difficulty comprehending English clearly still acts as a major hindrance towards the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation.

Codes for hindrances to the achievement of an ideal knowledge sharing situation: not user-friendly system, lack of useful links and virtual areas, lack of headquarters endorsement to divisional manager, difference in headquarters-subsidiary priorities, language barriers.

ISS *Austria Conclusion*

In sum, both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that ISS Austria is comparatively one of the best ISS subsidiaries to diligently use

Business Insight. Nevertheless, this subsidiary clearly has some problematic areas, which clearly is to be expected, within the realm of knowledge sharing that need correcting. However, it appears as if ISS Austria tackles any enduring problems in a very calm and sensible manner allowing for a logical and structured dismemberment of the problematic issues, thereby facilitating the problem-solving phase. This trait acts as a powerful tool when dealing with complicated issues, such as the establishment of a global knowledge sharing system, and will probably result in ISS Austria being one of the ISS divisions with the best knowledge sharing results in the future.

ISS *Italy*

The Italian subsidiary of ISS has retained all the characteristic of a family controlled, relatively small business, with a strong entrepreneurship spirit. The market in which it operates is much more fragmented than is the case in most other countries and it has retained traditional cleaning as its almost exclusive sector of activities. Such an environment calls for adaptability and innovative solutions and naturally, the subsidiary is one of the top-users of the Business Insight system. In fact, the Italian managers keep pleading for the further development of knowledge sharing initiatives at the corporate level, since they consider them as their main source of inspiration for local business growth and improvement.

The Local Corporate Culture

As is the rule rather than the exception all through the ISS group of businesses, the Italian subsidiary was bought in its entirety but was at the same time allowed to retain most of its independence and freedom of decision and action. In essence, things continued to be run as they always had been when Garavaglia Wash became ISS-Italy and consequently, the cultural history of the company retained all its importance. Whereas the employees and the managers had long been proud to be associated to the Garavaglia name, which stands for quality and reliability in the Milan cleaning industry, they are now also proud to be associated to the ISS banner, which stands for quality and reliability in the worldwide facility management industry. The core values of former Garavaglia Wash matched very nicely those of ISS and thereby, all risks of a value clash were avoided.

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The subsidiary having, by its very origins and because of the evolution it has experienced, the characteristics of the Emilian-style small enterprise, the original values are still prevailing. The top-managers, being sons of the founder, there is a special aura of respect around them on the part of the employees. Their being brothers make their relations much less formal than could be the case in most other situations. But critiques and comments are welcome no matter who they stem from; the subsidiary operates in a very open and straightforward manner, direct contacts between the relatively small office staff – including the members of the Garavaglia family – being the preferred form of communication. The doors to the top-managers' offices remain physically open even during meetings, and interruptions are frequent and expected. The warehouse for the cleaning material necessary to the fulfilment of the contracts is in the basement of the building where the offices are located, which makes it easy and convenient even for the employees at the operational level to personally contact any of their superiors if they want to.

The original entrepreneurial atmosphere is still very present at ISS-Italy. This is exemplified by the constant efforts the subsidiary makes to widen the array of services it offers its clients, but especially by the ad hoc manner in which managerial and office tasks are accomplished: whoever is best qualified to complete a given task spontaneously steps forward and takes care of it, without further formalities. Entering the ISS group was also seen as an energetic entrepreneurial move, as the Garavaglias hoped that the association would help their company meet the demand for new services, from new categories of clients. In fact, entrepreneurial thinking has been the cornerstone of ISS Italy's success since the middle of the 1940's and is clearly represented in the mindset of the management. This mindset is incredibly apparent and consequently 'rubs' off on the rest of the employees at ISS Italy and acts as a shared assumption of how success is achieved. Entrepreneurial thinking thus lies at the core value of ISS Italy's corporate culture as it manifests itself in values and beliefs of the entire company.

Codes for ISS Italy's local corporate culture: entrepreneurial, openness, informal, initiative, pride in the name.

Business Insight's Match with the Existing Knowledge Sharing Processes
Because of the relatively small size of ISS-Italy, internal knowledge sharing has traditionally happened by means of personal networking.

Employees pertaining to a certain category normally know their colleagues, whose advice or assistance they seek whenever they need it. Even in more complicated cases, simply contacting somebody at a superior level in the hierarchy of the company will generally be sufficient to be put in contact with the holder of the sought-after knowledge. Until ISS takes further steps to increase the scale or scope of its activities in Italy, this way of communicating internally will remain the rule in the Italian subsidiary, as it is considered optimal.

ISS-Italy has traditionally been inclined to look at the international scene to gather new ideas and better its methods. Prior to its entry in the ISS group, people from the then independent company had already been sent out on missions to look at some similar companies in Japan and around Europe, in order to pick up new business ideas and working procedures. Therefore, it seemed only natural for the managers of ISS-Italy to build relationships and maintain regular contacts with other subsidiaries of the group, mainly the Swiss one – its geographical proximity makes it convenient (the trip there and back from Milan, by car, and the meeting can easily fit in a normal business day) and it was actually through a Lugano-branch of that subsidiary that Garavaglia Wash was originally acquired by ISS.

Although it makes their contacts with international correspondents more frequent and easier than before, the managers of ISS-Italy feel that Business Insight is not nearly sufficient to fulfil the needs for knowledge sharing of a company like ISS. In their own words, they were genuinely shocked to find out that such a system was not in operation three years ago, when the subsidiary was bought up. In the process of examining the buyout proposal put forward by ISS, the Garavaglia brothers considered the company as a good basis for further development of their business; they were hoping for constant and high-level cooperation with the corporate level and the other subsidiaries of the group. Their association with ISS was done with the avowed goal of learning and benefiting from a common pool of experience and the transaction was viewed as the ideal way to develop new businesses on the Italian market. Logically, they therefore welcomed the Business Insight initiative, but nevertheless consider that the system is already lagging behind in light of the challenges that the evolution of the market poses the subsidiary in Italy, and the group on a worldwide basis.

Codes for Business Insight's match with the existing knowledge sharing processes: welcomed but long overdue, useful yet currently underdeveloped.

Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

As is now evident, employees at ISS-Italy are somewhat unpleased about the progress that has been made in the knowledge sharing processes through Business Insight. This dissatisfaction does not stem from the use that is actually made of the system, but rather from the potential benefits that could be extracted from its use but are left unexploited. At ISS-Italy, the general feeling is that the achievement of an ideal situation for group-wide knowledge sharing would build on an expanded version of Business Insight that would incorporate numerous functionalities. A greater utilization of the system by a greater number of subsidiaries is also considered essential to an ideal situation regarding knowledge sharing.

The key component of such a system, still according to the subsidiary's people, is a strong central commanding body. A strong department of knowledge sharing at the corporate level would have a better vision of the whole company and of its requirements, and would thereby be in an optimal position to make the best possible decisions for the group. Thus, coordination from the corporate headquarters is an essential element of an ideal knowledge sharing system. ISS-Italy expects that such an organization of the knowledge sharing processes would boast at least two characteristics that are presently missing: international coordination and a deeper insight into the subsidiaries' particular environments. On one hand, an increased degree of coordination, it is believed, would link the diverse parts of the company, eventually helping them in securing international contracts that would benefit more than one national subsidiary. Increasing the headquarters' level of awareness about the peculiarities of the individual subsidiary, on the other hand, would potentially yield positive results, in that central advice and support could swiftly be given whenever necessary, which is not the case presently.

Codes for the ideal knowledge sharing situation at ISS-Italy: active participation from the corporate level, world-wide group coordination from headquarters, international participation.

Hindrances to the Achievement of an Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

As mentioned earlier in this section, the management of ISS-Italy is of the opinion that the knowledge sharing system presently in function is good but far from sufficient. Several factors are considered as being hindrances that must be overcome if the group is to get nearer the ideal knowledge sharing situation according to the subsidiary.

Firstly, the managers of ISS-Italy interpret the lack of involvement of the corporate level of the company into the subsidiaries' business and environment as a lack of interest. Actual situations were described, in which ISS-Italy had to forego considerable benefits because of that perceived disinterest that stems from insufficient or inefficient communication between the headquarters and its subsidiaries. For instance, ISS-Italy has experienced being prevented from bidding on big contracts because it did not have, on a national level, the minimum annual turnover required from contestants. Had they been backed-up by their headquarters, this problem would have been easily overcome. Hence, it appears that more involvement of the central body into the divisions' business would be deemed suitable.

Secondly, several of the subsidiaries – particularly the big ones – seem less than enthusiastic when confronted with the idea of actually sharing their knowledge with other parts of the company in an effective way. As a result, resources are ineffectually spent on inventing or developing similar solutions in different parts of the group, while they could be much more economically sourced from the organized pool of common knowledge that a well-functioning knowledge sharing system should be. This lack of effort in promoting and participating in sharing on the part of some subsidiaries has resulted in lost business for other divisions. Existing or new clients would require the provision of certain services that were new for ISS-Italy, but for which expertise already existed elsewhere in the group. However, because that expertise was not made readily available, the transfer of knowledge never happened and, once again, resources were wasted, or clients turned to competent competitors. The passivity of some parts of the group in regards of the knowledge sharing system is therefore another key obstacle that lies on the way to the ideal situation.

Thirdly, there is confusion in the distribution of the responsibilities between the headquarters and the subsidiaries. Nobody at ISS-Italy seems to be really sure of whether one of their responsibilities is to develop new business areas and to publicize them on a group-wide basis. The same type of confusion is also found in the tasks related to targeting businesses that could be acquired by ISS, in the development of standard forms, contracts and measures, and in initiatives to get together with people from other subsidiaries to discuss common problems. As long as the respective responsibilities of the headquarters and the subsidiaries are not clearly identified and publicized, knowledge sharing

cannot be achieved in an optimal way, as one never knows if he is basing his work on a correct and approved piece of knowledge.

Fourthly, the unexpected costs that the setting up of the knowledge sharing system imposes on the small subsidiaries of the group have already acted as a hindering factor. When the directive, according to which the subsidiaries have to equip themselves with network capacity and computer material of a certain technological level, arrives from the headquarters in the middle of the budgeting year, for example, it is relatively more difficult for the small divisions than for the big ones to find the resources necessary to undergo the upgrading of their hardware and netware.

Finally, ISS-Italy expects that there are problems related to the fact that the subsidiaries of the group operate under a whole array of national languages. The standardization of the system by the adoption of a common language (in the case of Business Insight, English) does not go without creating its own series of problems, especially for the subsidiaries located in countries where the teaching of foreign languages is given a relatively low priority in the school system. Although this problem is real, the managers of ISS-Italy (which, it could be argued, is one of the subsidiaries operating in a problematic linguistic environment) are of the belief that a knowledge sharing system could be made so good that the advantages related to its use would make the subsidiaries work their way around any eventual language barrier. Locally, they have designated a super-user of Business Insight among the managerial staff, who is in charge of putting his English skills to the service of the other users who might need them. The small size of the subsidiary and the very limited number of people working in its central managing office (about fifteen persons, including clerical employees) made such a solution possible.

Codes for the hindrances to the achievement of an ideal knowledge sharing situation: low commitment of the headquarters, lack of will from some subsidiaries, confusion of responsibilities, unexpected costs, languages.

Conclusion

As has now become evident from our analysis of the Italian subsidiary, its environment, its origins, and its corporate culture in this section, there are no fundamental obstacles to the establishment of an optimally functioning knowledge sharing system to be found there. The

managers and the employees of ISS-Italy have long been proactive in learning and teaching better working methods and new procedures, and their entrepreneurial spirit makes them prone to pick-up new ideas, as they consider them as unexploited opportunities to increase their revenues. But yet, the eagerness and impatience expressed by the people of the subsidiary might in fact be the problematic factor, when considering it from a group-perspective. ISS-Italy is relatively small, it can move swiftly, and the fact that it is still very much family-controlled promotes a type of working atmosphere and culture that is much faster paced and passionate than what is realistic to expect from the bigger subsidiaries. Therefore, ISS-Italy will eventually be imposed a compromise that it might well have difficulties to accept, in order to make it progress with the rest of the group.

ISS *Denmark*

The Danish subsidiary of ISS, herein called ISS Denmark, was of particular interest to analyze since it is one of the poorest performers regarding the regular use of the corporate knowledge sharing system, Business Insight. Although many ISS subsidiaries do not diligently utilize Business Insight, the fact that ISS Denmark is one of them strikes me as being abnormal as it is contact-wise and geographically very close to the corporate instigators of the knowledge sharing system. One might expect that a subsidiary from the same country as the headquarters and sharing so many similar traits would also share the eagerness to use Business Insight. The following is therefore an explanation of the distinct factors that cause this peculiar outcome.

The Local Corporate Culture

The corporate culture at ISS Denmark is characterized as being very informal and relaxed. This is exemplified through the artefacts and casual dress of the employees, jeans being accepted as perfectly decent office attire and the very seldom use of neckties. Employees are on an informal and first name basis and include each other in the specifics, be they problems or joys, of their private lives. The subsidiary regards itself as being old fashioned and less appreciative of the modern business techniques which rely heavily on computer know-how and technical expertise. The subsidiary's structure is portrayed as being decentralized and non-hierarchical permitting all employees, from the top manager to newly employed lower ranks, to mingle freely and converse without

formalities or hesitation. The employees have been described as being earnest and sincere and very good at doing their jobs, characteristics that are promoted by the subsidiary's strong cultural history.

ISS Denmark is a subsidiary that considers itself good at what it does. It has experienced financial success in many previous years, which installs confidence in the manner in which it conducts business. Its cultural history therefore exerts a significant influence on the subsidiary's overall corporate culture. The employees, especially longstanding ones, possess memories from past strategies or actions that have worked well, thereby reinforcing their beliefs and values about the conduct of good business. These beliefs and values are so deeply imbedded in ISS Denmark's corporate culture that they manifest themselves as deep as the company's core ideology. Although not explicit, these values, beliefs and assumptions act as powerful guides as to how business should be conducted and unknowingly propel the employees towards a unified mode of thinking, one not prone to accept new and radical ideas. At the core value of ISS Denmark's corporate culture is the belief in integrity and old-fashion values, as well as helping and supporting fellow employees when necessary.

Codes for ISS Denmark's local corporate culture: informal, relaxed, non-hierarchical, old fashioned, integrity, unified mode of thinking.

Business Insight's Match with the Existing Knowledge Sharing Processes
People at ISS Denmark feel that they fit poorly into the corporate knowledge sharing plans; their dissatisfaction was expressed through the manner in which the new knowledge sharing system was introduced. The subsidiary's communication manager heard of Business Insight through the corporate IT department, rather than through a formal representative from the headquarters who, he feels, should have come to present and launch the system. Therefore, from the outset, it seemed like a project that was half-heartedly believed in from the headquarters' side and consequently, not something ISS Denmark needed worry too much about. Furthermore, the Danish subsidiary feels that the headquarters is trying to go through a transformation process that asks for many changes; changes that, in the eyes of the managers of ISS Denmark, are too drastic and probably not attainable. This effectively discourages ISS Denmark to make use of the knowledge sharing system, as people feel it is simply one of the corporate headquarters' many initiatives that might be a dud in half a year's time anyway. Con-

sequently, the subsidiary is far from impressed with the whole Business Insight concept and it does not have any specific expectations of it.

ISS Denmark also possesses an internal knowledge sharing system that was established and well functioning before the introduction of Business Insight. The system, called 'Vidensbank' (Danish for 'knowledge bank'), functions as the medium through which procedures, models and cases are exchanged internally, within the subsidiary. This form of knowledge sharing, complemented by networking and communicating directly with the relevant people, is the preferred one among the employees of the subsidiary. They feel it works well, is manageable and sensible, where as Business Insight is more complicated and less precise. Consequently, ISS Denmark's members perceive Business Insight with great scepticism and clearly prefer and continue to use their established and still well functioning knowledge sharing methods. If anything, it is felt that Business Insight can supplement their established ways and act as a library-like, look-up tool for any eventual data that cannot be attained through their preferred knowledge sharing ways.

ISS Denmark questions the headquarters' eagerness to integrate knowledge from the thirty-eight subsidiaries into one giant knowledge sharing system. The general feeling at the Danish subsidiary is that the people in, for instance France, have little input as how to help or provide information to a situation that ISS Denmark has to deal with and, conversely, ISS Denmark has little to offer ISS France when dealing with local French issues. At ISS Denmark, there is a strong belief that the subsidiary's people are the experts on the Danish market and consequently would be downgrading the quality of the attainable data if they acquired it from foreign subsidiaries that do not know the specifics of the Danish market, instead of seeking that information internally, among themselves.

Codes for Business Insight's match with the existing knowledge sharing processes: poorly, not taken seriously, half-hearted implementation attempt, not welcomed, useless.

The Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

As a natural consequence of ISS Denmark being content with their current knowledge sharing capabilities and harbouring no major ambitions of expanding their knowledge sharing operations to other subsidiaries, they feel that they are pretty close to the ideal situation as it is. Hence, when asked to explain how ISS Denmark could attain the ideal

knowledge sharing situation, there was little to be explained and only minor suggestions for improvement of the already established knowledge bank 'Vidensbanken' and other internal knowledge sharing methods were made. The paramount suggestions included quicker access to colleagues through the expanded use of cell phones and better utilization of the knowledge bank, thereby facilitating the knowledge extraction process. For ISS Denmark, the ideal knowledge-sharing situation clearly did not include Business Insight. Therefore, in order to make our inquiry at this interview applicable to the coding process, it was important to emphasize the question of how the ideal situation would be with the use of Business Insight.

ISS Denmark views Business Insight as a system that lessens the value of ISS knowledge, as knowledge sharing goes from their national divisions to a process of gathering knowledge centrally and reorganizing it company-wide from the corporate level. Therefore, the whole concept of a knowledge sharing situation with the use of Business Insight being ideal appears paradoxical to them; they believe that Business Insight destroys the uniqueness of the data, so to make it applicable globally, thereby depreciating the value of the knowledge that is shared. However, when asked to look aside from this paradox (a paradox that is relevant and will be addressed later), ISS Denmark stated the following criteria as being essential to an ideal knowledge sharing situation involving the use of Business Insight.

First, when logging onto the system, there should be a brief daily overview of a few (three-five) ISS related subjects that have potential interest for all of ISS' employees all over the world. This overview would, in essence, act as a corporate newspaper where employees could keep up to date with current ISS activities abroad and, if possible, get inspired and motivated from them and introduce the events or activities locally. The overview should consist of a few brief titles, including a 5–10-word description of the underlying article acting as a teaser to get more information. It is essential that the overview is not more extensive than this because it is felt that the attention span for employees to bother looking at this overview is incredibly short. If the overview is too long and demands too much effort from the users, it is feared that frequency with which it should be used will decrease and daily visits to this 'corporate newspaper' will cease.

Second, if one of the titles, and subsequent 5–10-word description, caught an employee's interest, there should be a link allowing the user

to read the entire article instantaneously. This article should contain several other links within the bulk of the text allowing the user to redirect and refine his interest towards the exact area that he initially found interesting and continue his information search. Furthermore, contact details of the employees over whom the article was concerned must be made available in the near vicinity of the article so the user can call or mail the person immediately, while the topic still is fresh and engaging in the users head.

Third, incentives should be given by corporate initiators of Business Insight, who ISS Denmark feel have been completely invisible thus far, to use the system. This is especially important during the initial phases of growing accustomed to the system and how to optimally use it and contribute to it. There must be pressure from top corporate managers at the headquarters to promote the use of Business Insight and not, as currently done, through the promotion from IT people. The incentives should be given in order to attain the appropriate level of marketing and promotion of the system, a level that is currently far too low. By doing so, it will provide the early adopters with positive experiences from using Business Insight, not only in the form of gains from the incentive, but also from gains in knowing more about the entire ISS corporation. ISS Denmark feels that through positive experiences with the system the eagerness to use the system will increase thereby allowing for more people to contribute knowledge into the system. The positive repercussions of an incentive scheme will therefore help complete the vision of an ideal knowledge sharing situation.

Codes for the ideal knowledge sharing situation: easy overview of topics, links to relevant subtopics or employees, incentives.

Hindrances to the Achievement of an Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation
The primary factor hindering the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation for ISS Denmark is clearly the paradoxical situation that arises when attempting to improve the current local knowledge sharing capabilities. ISS Denmark strongly believes that the quality of data will be compromised when it has to be regurgitated by the headquarters and assimilated by the local subsidiaries. Therefore, according to ISS Denmark, the ground-laying notion behind Business Insight, the notion which intent was to improve knowledge sharing, paradoxically acts as the predominant factor hindering the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing. However, ISS Denmark did list other factors, some

in junction with the paradox, that hinder the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation but had the potential to be overcome.

First, in order for the data to pass through the corporate 'screen' at the headquarters and be relayed to all the other subsidiaries through Business Insight, it has to be of importance to at least some of the other subsidiaries. ISS Denmark feels that in order for this to occur, the headquarters has to remove certain local details of the data stemming from one specific subsidiary so it can be applicable to all other subsidiaries. However, by doing so, the data losses its relevance because the specifics of the situation might have been the determining factors for the outcome. As a result, because of the central origin of the knowledge flow, Business Insight becomes flooded with useless information, offering very little relevance to any given individual throughout ISS' national divisions.

Second, ISS Denmark feels that the headquarters, through Business Insight, short-circuits some of the hierarchical levels within the divisions. The communication between the headquarters and the local middle managers of the national divisions can cause uncertainty as to whom the middle managers should report to: divisional managers or headquarters? Through the use of Business Insight, local middle managers will have more direct contact with the headquarters opposed to solely reporting to the divisional managers. It is feared that the use of Business Insight might therefore result in the confusion of goals as middle managers receive information from both divisional and corporate managers. In other words, ISS Denmark fears that the divisions can be forced to surrender some of its sovereignty and, in the extreme, result in divisions becoming centrally controlled rather than controlled by the national division leaders. ISS Denmark feels that the knowledge sharing system, Business Insight would therefore be better severed if it was the exclusive preserve of the top management.

Third, the priorities of the various national subsidiaries might get overlooked as the headquarters attempt to promote what they deem as a priority. This problem is rooted in the difference between divisional and corporate priorities. ISS Denmark feels that the headquarters have one primary stakeholder, namely the shareholders, whereas the divisions have more stakeholders in the form of customers, employees and local surroundings. Consequently, the different goals pursued will hinder effective communication between the headquarters and all national subsidiaries as they will disagree on which areas to emphasize.

Fourth, ISS Denmark is under the impression that the headquarters are not endorsing Business Insight to the divisional managers. In order for Business Insight to function ideally, it must be believed in from the headquarters and the divisional managers. Thus far, the sole promotion of Business Insight the Danish divisional managers have received was from the IT department and not from the top managers at the headquarters. This is an important factor hindering the attainment of the ideal knowledge sharing situation because it lessens the seriousness with which Business Insight gets further promoted internally in the national divisions. If the divisional managers are the ones who should promote the system within the divisions, then the headquarters needs to promote the system directly to them so divisional managers do not feel 'run over' or circumvented.

Fifth, the ideal knowledge sharing situation must be carried out by a system that does not suffer under technical restraints. When ISS Denmark attempts to use Business Insight, they are often met with frustration and anger as they encounter technical difficulties that hinder the efficient and quick use of the system. Currently, the access to Business Insight is not instantaneous and requires the managers at ISS Denmark to waste valuable time simply getting hooked up to the system. They feel that the time spent logging on to Business Insight could be better utilized if they instead used the time searching for the information through their traditional and well established knowledge sharing methods. Therefore, the technical problems that Business Insight often experiences, along with a relatively slow logon process, act as hindrances towards the ideal knowledge sharing situation.

Sixth, although ISS Denmark is one of the most sceptical subsidiaries when it come to the knowledge sharing project Business Insight, they do acknowledge that the system will never work unless it has the unanimous support and voluntary contributions from all the subsidiaries. ISS Denmark feels that it will be incredibly difficult to get all the subsidiaries to contribute time, effort and money into the system so that Business Insight reflects the entire ISS group. According to ISS Denmark, the reasoning for this is that the benefits Business Insight can offer the individual subsidiaries simply do not outweigh the costs needed to be put in by the individual subsidiaries. As a result, the costs-benefit structure of Business Insight is inadequate and consequently does not promote the subsidiaries freely giving their input to the system, thus acting as a hindrance towards the ideal knowledge sharing situation.

The final factor hindering the attainment of the ideal knowledge

sharing situation according to ISS Denmark is language. They acknowledge that this problem is more relevant in other subsidiaries than in the Danish unit, where the standard of English is comparatively high. However, if the Danish Subsidiary will be required to communicate with a subsidiary with extremely poor English skills, then the fact that ISS Denmark speaks almost fluent English will not be enough to establish a smooth communication flow. For Business Insight to work, it will require that every user of Business Insight throughout the world has at least a working level knowledge of the English language, something that many subsidiaries currently do not have.

Codes for hindrances to the achievement of an ideal knowledge sharing situation: Central control of Business Insight, Business Insight is not the exclusive control of the management, difference in headquarters-subsidiary priorities, lack of corporate managerial endorsement, technical restraints, inadequate cost-benefit structure, language barriers.

Conclusion

Although ISS Denmark clearly comes across as being one of the most sceptical subsidiaries in regards to a corporate knowledge sharing system of the divisions that we encountered, we nevertheless feel that they provided some excellent suggestions towards an improved knowledge sharing system. Ironic as it may seem, the extreme scepticism of this division actually sheds light on some relevant thoughts for improvement not yet thought about by divisions who are pro Business Insight.

It appears as if ISS Denmark is not aware, or simply does not believe in, the added value that could stem from a global knowledge sharing system and hence are generally satisfied with their current knowledge sharing methods. Consequently, they are less interested in contributing to Business Insight because it is felt that benefits of Business Insight will never outweigh the costs of contributing to it. Furthermore, the management of ISS Denmark feels that the different employees within the division do not necessarily all share the same viewpoints and ambitions. This might explain why the management of ISS Denmark is sceptical towards a knowledge sharing system that involves lower-ranked managers as well.

ISS France

France has long been considered as somewhat of an exception in the European landscape, and that perceived difference has always been a

source of national pride for the French people. The French subsidiary of ISS is to the group, what France is to its neighbours: an entity that functions according to its own beliefs and interests, that is often difficult to collaborate with on an equal basis, but that is simply too big and important to be ignored altogether. Since the introduction of the system, ISS France has simply chosen to do without Business Insight, a course of action that clearly goes against the intentions of the group's headquarters. Given the relative size of the subsidiary, this non-stated decision (no manager has officially said that ISS France was not to use Business Insight) is an important negative signal that the corporate level and the other subsidiaries cannot avoid listening to.

The Local Corporate Culture

Characteristic of most French organizations are the complex hierarchical relationships that are maintained between the diverse categories of employees. These divisions between the operational, the lower managerial, and the other types of organizational members are often related to the type of education they received and, directly linked to that factor, to the previous positions they have occupied in the course of their professional career. ISS France is no exception to that aspect of French national culture, and the offices are laid-out in such a way that one clearly understands what exactly is off-limits for oneself – the higher the floor in the building, the higher the hierarchical level of the people working there. The remarkable formality of the working atmosphere at the subsidiary's headquarters in Paris is underlined by a series of cultural artefacts: doors are closed and locked, business suits are worn by everybody, and no form of the French language but the polite and distant one is used, even among colleagues at the same hierarchical rank.

Critique and comments on one's work are allegedly welcome, but their exact formulation has to be well-thought out in order to avoid hurting personal feelings, and they would be seen as rather inappropriate if stemming from people at a lower hierarchical position. Nevertheless, in the French professional context that is inherent to the subsidiary, the corporate culture, although formal, does qualify as an open one. This relative openness is also reflected in the relationships that ISS France maintains with its environment and its outside stakeholders: it generally reveals more information than is required by local regulations and customs, it is open to collaborative agreements with the media and

social groups, it sponsors sport teams, it participates in exhibitions, it publishes a corporate magazine, etc.

Notwithstanding the above, the managerial organization of the subsidiary remains very political in its functioning – somebody's failure will often be considered as a premium opportunity by somebody else – another trait common to many French organizations. A positive consequence of this, and of the high level of decentralization of the responsibilities, is the intensity of internal communication that it requires; managers want to know what is going on in the other parts of the national organization, so that they will become aware of, and be able to seize eventual opportunities. Means used to secure that communication include a subsidiary-wide intranet, an upper-level managerial newsletter, as well as regular meetings between different divisions.

A strong feeling of belonging to the ISS group transcends most parts of the subsidiary and creates a unifying group-spirit. At the source of that French ISS spirit are shared core values that promote the achievement of a sound equilibrium between profitability, good working conditions for employees and service to customers. It has been relatively easy to transfer these corporate values to the independent companies that were bought and integrated into the subsidiary, as they are typical of many French organizations. This mindset, however similar it is to the one that can be found in other subsidiaries, seems to stop at the French border; the divisions are proud to pertain to ISS France but generally do not care much about being part of the ISS' multinational group.

Codes for the corporate culture of ISS France: hierarchical, formal, political, nationally oriented, common way of thinking.

Business Insight's Match with the Existing Knowledge Sharing Processes
In a logical line of thought with what was mentioned in the previous section about the corporate culture of ISS France, communications and knowledge sharing processes are rather self-centred, on a national basis. Bi-annual conferences and seminars are organized for the managers of the group, where the results of the subsidiary and of its different divisions, the strategies, the targets and their attainment are communicated, decorticated and commented. This tradition of meeting up and discussing issues of common interest is very representative of the overall knowledge sharing processes at ISS France, where no real organized system dedicated to this purpose exists. Informal network-

ing activities are preferred, giving the individual organizational member the possibility of establishing his own personal system for sharing knowledge, should she deem it necessary. The national intranet, considered by many as the premium source of information (but not as a tool for interpersonal communication or as a source of evolving information; for both these cases richer media are favoured) complements these face-to-face meetings and conversations.

In such a context, Business Insight offered a wealth of opportunities but it has nevertheless been met with such resistance that it never really got used in the French subsidiary. This resistance, which contrasts sharply with the potential benefits from using Business Insight, has to do with the changes in communication habits that would be required from organizational members; whereas people are currently used to punctually communicating face-to-face, the use of the new system would oblige them to convert to a virtual communication mode that calls for a sustained and continuous dialogue.

There has long been an acceptable (but far from optimal) flow of information between the divisions of the subsidiary, but not between the subsidiary and its international partners within the ISS group. Cross-subsidiary communication does happen, but it is generally limited to certain types of managers and confined to the exchange of technical information, or to the comparison of the results of a handful of pilot-projects (e. g., the results of the projects to study the providing of services to the nuclear industry in France and Sweden). Organizational members are given no incentives to communicate with people from other subsidiaries, and a feeling of self-sufficiency ensures that the idea of doing so only rarely arises. Even the communication manager has practically no contacts with people from other subsidiaries, and only occasional ones with the company's headquarters, almost always initiated by the latter.

The introduction of Business Insight certainly has the potential to make the internal communications more efficient than they are presently, but it is at best doubtful that it is sufficient to initiate the sought-after cross-subsidiary exchange. Consequently, the existing knowledge sharing processes of ISS France would probably benefit from the increased use of Business Insight, but their very limited international character would not be revolutionized.

Codes for Business Insight's match with the existing knowledge sharing processes: no real implementation attempt, useless, redundant.

Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

The managers of ISS France know that the activities of their subsidiary represent a very large share of the overall worldwide activities of the whole group; they are well aware of the power that situation endows them with and they seem to be willing to use it. Consequently, a certain 'my way or the highway' spirit perverts the vision of the subsidiary's management, and the ideal knowledge sharing process, according to them, would strangely resemble the one that is already in place at ISS France.

Due to the lack of communication between ISS France and other subsidiaries, a group-wide knowledge sharing system is seen as yet another way for the headquarters to push standards and universal solutions onto the subsidiaries. Such an attitude definitely goes against the ideal solution proposed by ISS France, in which any proposal would have to be negotiated and developed in collaboration with the individual divisions.

The avowed feeling of national self-sufficiency that permeates the decisions and activities of the subsidiary results into a preference to share knowledge locally. To realize such a situation, the French would require from an ideal knowledge sharing situation the possibility to create sub-groups based on linguistic or geographical divisions, rather than on areas of business. A short and clear list of topics and details necessary to contact the relevant people should be made available within the system, in such a way that somebody who would find an issue of interest in Business Insight would be able to follow up on it choosing the medium he finds most appropriate – in the case of the French people, probably the phone rather than the e-mail.

Another key component of such a situation, still according to the subsidiary's employees, would be a strong central coordinating body. As we will see later (particularly under the analysis of ISS-Italy), the definition of the responsibilities of such a department of knowledge sharing at the corporate level vary greatly depending on the priorities of the subsidiary. ISS France believes that making a precise individual responsible for the company-wide knowledge sharing system is of utmost importance to keep an efficient flow of communication with the headquarters. Without such a coordinating body, nobody will be able to keep track of anything, thereby decreasing the efficiency of the system. Moreover, the designation by top-management of an individual or a de-

partment responsible for knowledge sharing would be a proof that the highest hierarchical ranks of the group are actively involved, providing a stronger incentive for the managers of such a hierarchical subsidiary as the French one to promote the implementation of Business Insight in their own activities.

Codes for the ideal knowledge sharing situation: decentralization, ease of use, convenient retrieval of information, incentives.

Hindrances to the Achievement of an ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

Negative previous experience in communicating with the headquarters is the first problem that came up when the communication manager of ISS France had to think about factors hindering the establishment of an ideal knowledge sharing situation. People in the subsidiary regularly have the impression that they are, at times, put under undue pressure by their superiors from the headquarters, who more often than not, ask for things to be done within a laps of time that appears unrealistic to the French managers.

Whether this impression stems from a real problem or from a difference in communication techniques is unknown, but it exemplifies very nicely another problematic factor mentioned by ISS France: the perceived lack of sensibility, on the headquarters' side, to local requirements and particularities of the subsidiaries. Naturally, the scepticism that characterizes the way in which ISS France considers worldwide standards is directly related to the importance that localization is given, ahead of globalization.

The use of a common language (in the case of Business Insight, English) is also seen as a hindrance that comes in the way of efficient group-wide knowledge sharing, especially for countries like France, where the school system puts little weight on the teaching of foreign languages. Organizational members, it is believed, will be more reluctant to spend time deciphering information in a language that they do not master, and will consequently not use the system optimally. Insufficient linguistic abilities will also have an important impact on the French subsidiaries ability and eagerness to add information to the system; not only will organizational members have to be convinced of the advantages of spending their time to contribute information and make it available to others in the group, but they will have to do so in a language that they often do not know well enough to be at ease with. Overall, ISS France has a positive impression about the idea to imple-

ment the system, but remains dubious that all obstacles can be removed to make it efficient. This negative perception is compounded by the lack of formal visible endorsement of Business Insight by the highest ranking levels of corporate management, which acts as a disincentive on subsidiaries' managers to implement it locally.

Codes for the hindrances to the achievement of an ideal knowledge sharing situation: lack of decentralization, negative experience in communicating with the headquarters, scepticism towards worldwide standards, language barrier, lack of incentives to local implementation such as formal managerial approval.

Conclusion

Integrated in an environment where everything from the school system to the political apparatus promotes hierarchical divisions and formal professional relationships, ISS France is an entity with traits that are far from the traditional Scandinavian model that can be observed at the group's corporate level. Moreover, the considerable relative size of the subsidiary makes it a very influential actor in a group-wide perspective. These characteristics have resulted in the development of a very strong and self-centred corporate culture at the subsidiary level, blinding the divisions of ISS France to the international aspects of their belonging to the ISS family. The nationalistic character of this group feeling reaches so far that it precludes the establishment of efficient and enriching relationships with other parts of the group. This type of consequence is exemplified by the description that is given of the ideal knowledge sharing system that would first and foremost have to allow for smaller sub-groups to form and act independently from the rest of the company, thereby effectively precluding the group to reap maximal benefits from such a system.

As if the self-centrism and the resulting lack of enthusiasm of ISS France towards international knowledge sharing were not enough, there are also the problems related to language. The level of English knowledge of most French organizational members (including the highest managerial levels) is admittedly too low to allow for an optimal use of a system such as Business Insight, and even more so to allow for efficient contributions to the system.

5 | Knowledge Sharing at ISS: Making Sense of It All

in chapter 4, the emphasis was on highlighting the main factors influencing the individual subsidiaries which, in turn, delivered the codes that best describe their respective managerial staff's line of thoughts regarding knowledge sharing and related topics. With these two elements in place, I now proceed to analyze the relations (similarities or contrasts, in standpoints and operating factors) between the different subsidiaries. This will lead, in the conclusion to this chapter, to a summary of the elements pertinent to the description and analysis. I will then utilize these elements as a basis on which to develop a relevant answer to the second research question: What are the problem areas of knowledge sharing within ISS? Before doing so, however, I dedicate a section to discussing the specific validity of the data that was exposed in Chapter 4, and that now forms the basis of the upcoming analysis.

5.1 Specific Validity of the Data

Before proceeding with the actual analysis and interpretation of the obtained data, I find it important to specifically assess the reliability of the data and justify its validity. The specific circumstances that were characteristic of the empirical research and fieldwork unavoidably gave rise to concerns regarding the validity of the data collected during the interviews. In the chapter on procedural considerations, I already exposed and explained the concerns about the general validity of the data, in relation to the chosen methodology and to the environment I had to work in (see section Note on the General Validity of the Empirical Data, page 35). There nevertheless remains the fact that the degree to which these concerns should affect the analysis and interpretation of the data varies from one interview to the next.

As mentioned earlier, this research project is the result of cooperation between me – the author of the present book – and the corporate partner, ISS. Given the vested interest that the company has in the analysis being as complete and representative of the reality as possible, I can logically and reasonably assume that the data gathered during the in-

terviews with the headquarters' staff is reliable. Disclosing incomplete, inaccurate or wrongful information would have biased the very foundations on which this project is based, effectively rendering the present study useless to the company. It is therefore not in the interest of the corporate level of the company to do so.

At ISS France, the communication manager who was interviewed seemed to have some preoccupations about this study; the fact that the appointment with her had been arranged through my contacts at the headquarters and the corporate-wide character of the project clearly resulted in her holding back during the first phase of the discussion. Considering the general content of the data that was harvested during the interview, however, it is difficult to imagine that this initial attitude ended having any significant influence on the quality or reliability of the information that was disclosed. Far from painting rosy pictures of the corporate knowledge sharing situation at the French subsidiary (which would have been a hint that the truth might have been distorted), the interviewee made no attempts to hide the lack of efforts devoted to the topic, nor the relative unimportance with which it is considered by most local organizational members. In the days immediately following this interview, a newly issued corporate statistical report concerning the use of Business Insight by the different national subsidiaries confirmed the accuracy of the situation that had been depicted to us, thus reducing any doubt about the reliability of the data obtained from this source.

The managers of ISS Denmark (and in particular its communication manager), just like those of most big Danish companies, are used to collaborate with researchers on projects such as this one. They therefore develop an ability to deal with the typical investigative questions such as the ones asked throughout the current research, and can give an image of their organization that is not exactly realistic. With this deficit in mind, the case of ISS Denmark is however similar to the French one on at least one point: here, as in France, no attempt was made to make the reality more positive than it is, and it was clearly told that Business Insight provoked no particular enthusiasm in the Danish subsidiary. The implementation efforts are anything but sincere and effective, and the managers of the organization will go to great lengths to avoid incorporating it in the course of their daily routines. Due to the geographical proximity of the headquarters of the group, special efforts were put into convincing me of the existence of a distinct, subsidiary-level corporate

culture. This had already been mentioned in the course of an earlier interview with headquarters personnel and was later reconfirmed, leaving little doubt that it in fact was the case. Taking into account the content of the interview with the Danish subsidiary and the fact that some of it was directly backed-up by a third party, it is appropriate to rely on the information that was put forward to build the data set about that subsidiary.

The more positive situation of knowledge sharing that was exposed to us by the managers of ISS Italy prevents me from applying the same logical reasoning to sustain the validity of the data. Not satisfied with merely welcoming Business Insight and incorporating it in its regular processes, the Italian subsidiary clearly called for more and better group-wide knowledge sharing activities. According to them, there was practically no limit to what they could potentially accomplish with the system and the only problems they could identify was that it had been underway for too long and that it still was relatively primitive. The interview was simultaneously conducted with the totality of the subsidiary's managerial staff enjoying access to Business Insight, making it virtually impossible to get an outside second opinion that would have confirmed or infirmed the data gathered. The fact that I was sent by headquarters gave me credibility in their eyes and they seized the visit as an opportunity to make some comments that they would not have made otherwise. Although the Italian managers could have embellished their operative reality, I am confident that their depiction was true and consequently, that the data is reliable. Everything that relates to the subsidiary, to its history or its mode of functioning indeed indicates that ISS Italy really is an organization that has a strong tradition for searching ideas and borrowing techniques outside its boundaries and hence, it also makes sense for them to do so through the introduction and active use of Business Insight. Given the entrepreneurial corporate culture of this organization, the data would remain valid for analysis even though some points had been exaggerated during the interview.

The reliability of the interview data relating to ISS Austria is the most difficult one to assess. The mere nature of the revelations made by the managers of the French and Danish subsidiaries gives me good reasons to believe them, and they are backed up by information obtained from headquarters. In the case of ISS Italy, the traditions and history of the organization are there to confirm the words of the managers. The Austrian subsidiary, however, cleanly gave the impression that they had

welcomed Business Insight but that they could also have done without it. Neither strong opposition, nor especially positive remarks came from the interview with them, and I am therefore left with statistics alone to measure the degree of correctness of the information. Numbers show that ISS Austria is constantly in the top-tier among the subsidiaries using Business Insight; I consider that as a confirmation that the system is used as was explained during the interview and thus, I find the data to reach a degree of reliability that is high enough to work with.

5.2 Analysis and Interpretation: Coded Areas Across Subsidiaries

With the use of the codified data obtained through the interviews, we can now clearly see the common trends and differences pertaining to the four areas that we described in each subsidiary. From this, we will be able to spot patterns, or lack of patterns, which suggest that some things are more recurrent than others. These emerging trends and patterns will then be projected against the findings from chapter three in order to see how they match up with the arguments and theories that were proposed earlier.

We know from the outset that the Italian and Austrian subsidiaries are currently diligent knowledge sharers, whereas Denmark and France rank much lower on the frequency and intensity with which they share knowledge with other subsidiaries. In the following analysis, I therefore expect to find similar patterns and trends emerging from the Italian and Austrian subsidiaries, suggesting that these traits work in accordance with the attempts of sharing knowledge globally. Conversely, I will be looking for similar traits in the other two subsidiaries, so to identify the traits that possibly hinder effective knowledge sharing. It is very important to note here that because a subsidiary is not a frequent user of Business Insight does not necessarily mean that the company is poor at sharing knowledge internally, within its national structures. This is an essential distinction to make because I will, in the following, solely be looking for factors that relate to knowledge sharing across subsidiaries, through the use of Business Insight, and not for factors relating to internal knowledge sharing. Table 5.1 illustrates the similarities that have been identified across subsidiaries, while table 5.2 evidences the potentially interesting differences that have been observed. The tables must exclusively be read horizontally; the combinations of

TABLE 5.1   Similarities between coded areas

Austria	France	Denmark	Italy
The local corporate culture			
Informal[a]	Hierarchical	Integrity[e]	Entrepreneurial[d]
Non-hierarchical[b]	Formal	Informal[a]	Openness[e]
Relaxed[c]	Political	Relaxed[c]	Informal[a]
Hard-working[d]	Nationally	Non-hierarchical[b]	Initiative
Happy	oriented	Old fashioned	Pride in the name
	Common way	Unified mode	
	of thinking[f]	of thinking[f]	
Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes			
Welcomed[g]	No real	Poorly	Welcomed but long
Useful[h]	implementation	Not taken	overdue[g]
Efficient	attempt[i]	seriously	Useful yet
	Useless[j]	Half-hearted	currently
	Redundant	implementation	underdeveloped[h]
		attempt[i]	
		Not welcomed	
		Useless[j]	
Ideal knowledge sharing situation			
Coordination	Decentralization	Easy overview of	Active partici-
among	Ease of use[m]	topics[m]	pation from HQ
subsidiaries[k]	Convenient	Links to relevant	Worldwide group
Active involvement	retrieval of	subtopics or	coordination from
of all subsidiaries[l]	information[n]	employees[n]	the HQ[k]
User friendly	Incentives[o]	Incentives[o]	International
layout[m]			participation[l]
Personal data-links			
Establishment of			
virtual division			
areas[n]			

Continued on the following page

codes highlighted will be subject to further analysis in the present section.

The analysis of the combinations of codes identified in tables 5.1 and 5.2 will allow for identification of problematic factors relating to knowledge sharing across subsidiaries in ISS. My task will be in explaining these factors and their specific occurrences by relating back to the proposed theories of the theoretical findings and interpreting this data with the empirical findings. The performance of such an analysis will lead directly to the core of the second research question and to its answer.

TABLE 5.1   *Continued from the previous page*

Hindrances to the achievement of an ideal knowledge sharing situation

Not user-friendly[p]	Lack of decentralization[u]	Central control of BI[u]	Low commitment of the HQ[q]
Lack of useful links and virtual areas	Negative experience in communicating with HQ	BI is not the exclusive control of the management	Lack of will from some subsidiaries
Lack of HQ endorsement to divisional managers[q]	Scepticism towards worldwide standards[t]	Difference in headquarters-subsidiary priorities[r]	Confusion of responsibilities
Difference in HQ/subsidiary priorities[r]	Language[s]	Lack of corporate managerial endorsement[q]	Unexpected costs
Language barrier[s]	Lack of incentives to local implementation such as formal managerial approval[q]	Technical restraints[p]	Language[s]
		Inadequate cost-benefit structure[t]	
		Language[s]	

NOTE   Codes that match are identified by the same superscripted letters

The Local Corporate Culture

The subsidiaries in Austria, Italy and Denmark all have corporate cultures identified as informal whereas France's is characterized as being formal. As was established earlier, Schein (1999) proposes that an informal corporate culture, opposed to a strictly formal corporate culture, increases the likelihood of knowledge sharing, as employees are more prone to talk freely to their colleagues and superiors with whom they have daily contact. Although it is difficult to disagree with Schein's viewpoint in theory, I question its applicability to the ISS situation because the level of formality observed within a subsidiary does not appear to hinder nor facilitate knowledge sharing with other units. The Austrian, Italian and Danish subsidiaries possess informal corporate cultures, yet only the Italian and Austrian subsidiaries are regarded as diligent external knowledge sharers. The Danish subsidiary is considered poor at external knowledge sharing despite its informal corporate culture, and conversely, the French subsidiary is also poor at external knowledge sharing despite its formal corporate culture. Hence, the level of formality has had no influence on the extent to which knowledge sharing occurs within these subsidiaries. I am furthermore led to believe that the

TABLE 5.2   Differences between coded areas

Austria	France	Denmark	Italy
The local corporate culture			
Informal[a]	Hierarchical[b]	Integrity	Entrepreneurial[c]
Non-hierarchical[b]	Formal[a]	Informal[a]	Openness
Relaxed	Political	Relaxed	Informal[a]
Hard-working	Nationally	Non-hierarchical[b]	Initiative
Happy	oriented	Old fashioned	Pride in the name
	Common way of	Unified mode of	
	thinking[c]	thinking[c]	
Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes			
Welcomed[d]	No real	Poorly	Welcomed but long
Useful[e]	implementation	Not taken	overdue[d]
Efficient[f]	attempt	seriously	Useful yet
	Useless[e]	Half-hearted	currently
	Redundant[f]	implementation	underdeveloped[e]
		attempt	
		Not welcomed[d]	
		Useless[e]	
Ideal knowledge sharing situation			
Coordination	Decentralization[g]	Easy overview of	Active
among subsidiaries	Ease of use	topics	participation from
Active involvement	Convenient	Links to relevant	HQ[g]
of all subsidiaries	retrieval of	subtopics or	Worldwide group
User friendly	information	employees	coordination from
layout	Incentives	Incentives	the HQ[g]
Personal data-links			International
Establishment of			participation
virtual division			

level of formality is unimportant with regards to external knowledge sharing, as formality was never raised as an issue hindering knowledge sharing in the survey data. This suggests that the formality which a corporate culture is labelled has little or no influence on the company's ability to share knowledge externally and implies (as is also expected) that many other factors within a company's corporate culture influence a company's ability to share knowledge.

The Austrian and Danish subsidiaries are both characterized as being relaxed and non-hierarchical where as the French is characterized as being hierarchical. Marschan (1996) has suggested that the less-hierarchical subsidiaries are generally highly differentiated and

TABLE 5.2   *Continued from the previous page*

Hindrances to the achievement of an ideal knowledge sharing situation

Not user-friendly Lack of useful links and virtual areas Lack of HQ endorsement to divisional managers Difference in HQ/subsidiary priorities Language barrier	Lack of decentralization[h] Negative experience in communicating with HQ Scepticism towards worldwide standards Language Lack of incentives to local implementation such as formal managerial approval	Central control of BI BI is not the exclusive control of the management Difference in headquar-ters-subsidiary priorities Lack of corporate managerial endorsement Technical restraints Inadequate cost-benefit structure Language	Low commitment of the HQ Lack of will from some subsidiaries Confusion of responsibilities[h] Unexpected costs Language

NOTE   Codes that contrast are identified by the same superscripted letters.

functionally interdependent which results in complex flows of infor-mation. She supports this claim by stating that less-hierarchical sub-sidiaries are coordinated and controlled particularly through informal mechanisms, such as interlocking boards of directors and personal rela-tionships. According to her, this results in complex flows of information that impede a less-hierarchical subsidiary's ability to share knowledge externally. This theory certainly appears convincing when projecting it onto the Danish subsidiary, which is non-hierarchical and simultane-ously poor at sharing knowledge externally. However, the theory fades in credibility when taking it further and looking at the Austrian and French subsidiaries. The fact that the Austrian subsidiary is a relatively non-hierarchical organization and the French subsidiary is much more hierarchical in structure would, according to her, suggest that the for-mer experience difficulty sharing knowledge externally while the lat-ter's sharing abilities is improved. Our empirical data, concerning these two subsidiaries, however contradicts this drastically with France be-ing one of the absolute poorest knowledge sharers and Austria sharing knowledge diligently external to their group. Thus, no patterns emerge from the effect that a hierarchical structure has on a company's ability to share knowledge externally and suggests, as was the case above, that

other factors are predominant when influencing a company's ability to share knowledge.

The French subsidiary is very nationally oriented and the employees all share a common way of thinking, a trait also present in the Danish subsidiary where the employees have been described as operating under a unified mode of thinking. This conformity in the thinking process was not present in the Austrian subsidiary and especially not in the Italian subsidiary where the employees were depicted as being entrepreneurial and open to new ideas. Alvesson and Berg (1992) stressed the importance of subsidiaries avoiding a shared way of thinking, as it would inevitably lead to difficulty in taking foreign information into account, a viewpoint also put forward by some survey respondents who have identified the existence of these common ways of thinking as a problem that demands a cultural change that will promote cross-corporate cultural sharing initiatives. Furthermore, it would complicate the understanding of information stemming from that subsidiary as it entails a certain understanding of the sending subsidiary's way of thinking. Therefore, if we allow Alvesson and Berg's theory to naturally evolve, we realize that a unified mode of thinking, or a predetermined way of doing things, does not promote knowledge sharing because one does not feel the necessity to retrieve information, nor share information, because of the preconceived notion that everyone already knows what he/she should be doing and that the established way of doing things is the best way; a mode of thinking spotted at ISS Denmark. The further implications of this is that other subsidiaries will have difficulty understanding information that stems from a subsidiary with this mindset because their predetermined ways have inadvertently become so tacit that they are no longer easily understandable for other subsidiaries operating under a different corporate culture. Such was the case for ISS France where the French employees actions and words within the subsidiary many times seemed puzzling to outsiders such as the headquarters. Conversely, employees with diverging thinking patterns and operating with a mindset that there are other ways of doing things, appear to be traits that enhance the likeliness that employees share knowledge with other subsidiaries; a presumption certainly supported by the data obtained from the Italian employees that are very eager to share knowledge internationally. Furthermore, other subsidiaries will have an easier time sharing knowledge with such a subsidiary because the shared data is not embedded in a tacit understanding of a specific corporate culture.

Epilogue

The subsidiaries of the ISS group that have been interviewed have distinct and sometimes contrasting corporate cultures. Some traits do however repeat themselves in different subsidiaries and thus provide fodder for afterthought as to what characteristics of the different corporate cultures facilitate knowledge sharing. Of the above mentioned traits, it appears as if being nationally orientated and having a common or unified mindset are characteristics of corporate culture that do not support a global knowledge sharing initiative and deter employees from using such a system. Although it would be tempting to take this a step further and bundle the four subsidiaries into categories of similar corporate cultures, it would be incorrect because each subsidiary possesses particular qualities, not shared by others, that make their individual corporate culture unique. Consequently, the attempt to group, for example, the Austrian and Italian subsidiary's corporate culture together and conclude that their corporate cultures are similar and therefore more likely to share knowledge is mooted and no attempts at that will be made. What however can be concluded is that, with the exception of being nationally orientated and the employees sharing a unified mindset, whether a subsidiaries corporate culture is hierarchical or non-hierarchical, formal or informal plays no significant role on these units' ability to share knowledge externally.

Appropriateness of Business Insight

The patterns and mannerisms emerging from how Business Insight fits in with the already existing knowledge sharing processes reveal the intricacies of how Business Insight was received and incorporated into the organization. In accordance with this, the match between the mannerisms and how well Business Insight fits in with the existing knowledge sharing processes will expose which traits and characteristics go well with the introduction of Business Insight.

The Austrian and Italian subsidiaries both welcomed the arrival of the corporate knowledge sharing system, although the Italian subsidiary did consider it to be long overdue. Nevertheless, the fact that the employees within these organizations regarded Business Insight as tool that could improve the quality of their work influenced them in such a manner that they welcomed Business Insight and were interested in the benefits the system could provide. As suggested earlier by Scholes (1999) well intended strategies are of little value to the organization as

a whole unless all relevant employees of the unit stand behind the new idea and welcome the new strategy and are open to the new changes that it encompasses. This welcoming approach clearly facilitates the introduction of any new system and suggests that one of the reasons the Austrian and Italian subsidiaries are diligent users of Business Insight is because of this open and welcoming mindset towards a new system. The Danish and French subsidiaries have, conversely, not welcomed Business Insight; the Danish subsidiary not feeling an internal demand for such a system and the French subsidiary barely knowing such a system existed. Since Denmark and France are the two subsidiaries that do not use Business Insight diligently I am further led to believe that welcoming Business Insight is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the system. Notwithstanding this, such an outcome could equally be argued reversely ala the 'chicken-or-egg' conundrum. As such, it is plausible that the Danish and French subsidiaries are non-welcoming to the knowledge sharing system because they disagree with certain parts of it and therefore do not wish it implemented. Thus, what can be concluded with certainty is only that a non-welcoming attitude, wherever it may stem from, is counterproductive to the successful implementation of a knowledge sharing initiative.

Another common characteristic of the Italian and Austrian subsidiaries, which complements the above point, is that they considered Business Insight as a useful addition to their current knowledge sharing processes. According to Boyd, Larréché, et al. (1996), successful implementation of a given strategy, in this case implementing Business Insight, greatly depends on the apparent usefulness that the new system is perceived with. If the introduced strategy appears faulty and lacking in competencies, it receives a poor reputation from the beginning, which will consequently negatively affect the eagerness to use the system. Contrariwise, if the employees are under the impression that the functional competencies demanded by the strategy are in order and the appropriate mechanisms for coordinating efforts have been established, then the performance and diligence in which the new system is approached will increase. Such was the case for the Italian and the Austrian subsidiary; they both regarded Business Insight as a useful complement opposed to a substitute or a threat, thereby, I suspect, installing a sense of calmness and acceptance towards Business Insight, making the user more keen to experiment and test the abilities of the system. Conversely, the Danish and French subsidiaries were much

more rigid in their acceptance of the new system as they regarded Business Insight as ineffectual and something that could add no new value, an opinion that is also found many times in the survey data. This is clearly reflected in the eagerness with which the latter two subsidiaries use Business Insight and it seems as if they are hesitant to use the system because they fear letting go of their established knowledge sharing processes. This fear is not unjustified as time spent on Business Insight will mean less time being available for their current and, as of yet, preferred knowledge sharing ways. So, in an economic sense, it is a trade off and if the Danish and French subsidiaries regard Business Insight as being inferior to the established ways, then it can be argued that Business Insight is an inferior substitute to their preferred knowledge sharing ways opposed to a complement. Hence, the level of usefulness a system such as Business Insight is perceived to be harbouring greatly influences the eagerness in which the system gets used.

A final area where the emerging patterns of how Business Insight fits in with the already established knowledge sharing processes is the manner in which Business Insight was implemented with. The Danish and French subsidiaries have made no real implementation efforts to integrate Business Insight into their subsidiaries. This can be argued to be a natural consequence of the above two points (the system not being welcomed and it being regarded as an ineffectual substitute rather than a useful complement) but nevertheless the implementation effort is an area that can be individually tackled. Almost all authors on implementation theories make a special point of stressing the importance that a sincere implementation effort has on the outcome of a firm's ability to implement a strategy effectively (e. g. Boyd, Larréché, et al. 1996; Weitz and Wensley 1984; Scholes 1999; Carroll, Dromgoole, et al. 2000). They state that a newly introduced strategy is sure to experience implementation difficulties, if it is done without the combined 'push' of all the employees in a positive direction that facilitates the implementation process. Exactly this was also voiced by many of the answers contained in the survey data, similarly expressing a need for a sincere implementation effort. From the interview data, we see that the Danish and French subsidiaries have treated the implementation efforts in a half-hearted manner, which is not surprising since it is difficult to full-heartily implement a system that one has difficulty seeing bearing fruit down the road. The ultimate consequence of this is that Business Insight is a system used sparsely as the implementation effort by the subsidiaries em-

ployees is anything but genuine. The Austrian and Italian subsidiaries have conversely taken the implementation process of Business Insight as a very serious procedure which is undoubtedly one of the reasons why these subsidiaries are experiencing success with the current knowledge sharing system.

Epilogue

The match between the mannerisms Business Insight was accepted with and how well it fits in with the already existing knowledge sharing processes throughout the four subsidiaries tells us a great deal about the underlying notions the employees have pertaining to the knowledge sharing system. For this analyzed area, there was a clear distinction between the mannerisms that the 'good' (Italian and Austrian) knowledge sharing subsidiaries revealed and the ones the 'bad' (Danish and French) knowledge sharing subsidiaries revealed (between 1–6 average daily hits per user for the former subsidiaries and 0–1 average daily hits per user for the latter subsidiaries).

The ability to welcome the new knowledge sharing system is perceived by us as having a profound impact on how well it will fit in with the existing procedures and eventually into the organization. For Italy and Austria, it was apparent that welcoming the system played an influential role in the successful integration of Business Insight into the existing practices. Conversely, France and Denmark saw no real purpose with Business Insight and consequently felt less compelled to welcome such a system and, as a result, use it sparingly.

The degree to which the subsidiaries welcome Business Insight is very dependent on how useful they feel the system will eventually be. The French and Danish subsidiaries feel that the system offers little to their organizations and might actually compromise their preferred and established knowledge sharing abilities as focus gets taken away from them in order to deal with Business Insight. On the contrary, the Italian and Austrian subsidiaries regard Business Insight as being very useful and consequently approach the new system with great anticipation and openness. Therefore, the extent to which the subsidiaries feel that Business Insight will be fruitful plays a potent role in how well the system fits in with the established knowledge sharing ways.

The welcoming ability and perceived usefulness of the system have strong repercussions on the final characteristic of how Business Insight fits in with the existing knowledge sharing processes: the implementa-

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tion effort. Thus, in order for the implementation efforts to be genuine, the subsidiary must view Business Insight as a positive introduction and welcome it, as was the case with ISS Italy and ISS Austria. This will increase the fundamental eagerness to use the system and expedite implementation as well as provide lubrication for any upcoming glitches that occur as a result of problematic start-up technicalities.

The Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

The third area of research that is covered in the process of gathering the data for the empirical part of our work was termed 'The ideal knowledge sharing situation.' The interviews that were completed with the managerial representatives of the subsidiaries selected for participation were particularly useful in getting this type of information. The direct and indirect questioning on the issue, because it was directed at some organizational members who should be using Business Insight on a regular basis and even promote its increased use among their colleagues and subordinates at the subsidiary level, helped shed light on different points that are considered as being essential components of an ideal knowledge sharing situation and related procedures.

A large share of the factors that were mentioned by the interviewees regarding this area can be considered as features, functionalities or particularities of a knowledge sharing system. Some of these factors were desired by the users but missing from the existing knowledge sharing process put in place by ISS. The features mentioned by each individual manager are representative of his personal experience with this kind of system, and of the specific areas he is particularly sensitive to. No suggestion was made in order to verify that a particular feature was indeed desired by a majority among the managerial staff but some of them do appear in more than one description.

The clarity and straightforwardness of the user interface of a network-based knowledge sharing system like Business Insight was one of these recurring factors from the interview and survey data. It was expressed as 'a user-friendly layout' by the Austrian subsidiary, as a system allowing for an 'increased ease of use' in France, and as an interface presenting an 'easy overview of topics' by the Danish managers. The people of ISS Italy, although they did not mention this factor expressly, did not reject the idea altogether neither; they simply considered it as less than essential, since an ideal, high-quality knowledge sharing system would be so good that a user-friendly layout would only

become a secondary preoccupation. Such a line of thought fits perfectly with the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes the Italian subsidiary. The local managers (whom, in the hierarchy of ISS as a whole, play the role of middle managers) certainly act as the entrepreneur type of middle managers, as described by Janczak (1999). Entrepreneurs welcome any change that will make their research for existing knowledge easier, preferring such characteristics as efficiency to user-friendliness, which they perceive as fringe benefits. It therefore makes sense for the Italian subsidiary managers to put relatively less weight on user-friendliness than the managers of the other subsidiaries. Nevertheless, finding somewhat converging opinions on this point across very different subsidiaries, corporate and national cultures should not come as a surprise.

Hence, it is reasonable to deduce that the user-friendlier the layout of a system is, the more enticing it is to use it regularly, and the opinions expressed by the different national subsidiaries support the general theory conveyed in the literature, that user-friendliness facilitates the introduction and acceptance of a new system (Kautz and Vendelø 2001; Orubeondo 2000; Tan 2000). In further accordance with the subsidiaries statements, Orubeondo (2000) suggests that in order for the system to be truly user-friendly to its target group, the developers of Business Insight will have to keep it in the relatively simple end of the spectrum.

Similarly, there was a high degree of consensus around the idea that the system should be constructed in such a way that allows for fast and convenient retrieval of linked information, be it about persons in the ISS organization or about related topics. This was expressed in diverse but similar ways by the subsidiaries: as a desire to have a direct link between the name of an employee mentioned in a text or an article and the contact information of that person; an efficient search-and-find tool incorporated in the system; or a list of hyperlinks allowing for instant access to related topics, in the margin of the page that is displayed. This was also supported by the survey data, where several respondents have mentioned the importance of increasing the convenience of information retrieval and of making available an efficient search engine. These stated needs and wishes for well-functioning retrieval systems underline the importance of making the information contained in the system available to the users in a form that is clear to them, and at the time that suits them best, a view that, as we mentioned earlier, is also upheld by Gross (2001).

The components of an ideal knowledge sharing system that are de-scribed above have been mentioned by a series of interviewees em-ployed in subsidiaries with very diverse corporate cultures. Therefore, they appear to be accepted unanimously and do not have any signifi-cant potential for creating organizational problems stemming from di-verging values and preferences. Other factors, however, have only been mentioned by people from some of the subsidiaries that have been in-terviewed. ISS Austria and ISS Italy appeared to agree on a series of points that were often directly or indirectly rejected by ISS Denmark and ISS France. True to their long-established practice for seeking new ideas and sharing knowledge on an international basis, the managers of the Italian subsidiary could not imagine a system like Business In-sight working optimally without a much higher degree of international participation and coordination than is the case presently. They clearly call for a central, corporate coordinating body that would not only ad-minister the system and feed it with data, but also ensure the active participation of most or all subsidiaries of the group, for the benefit of all the parts of ISS's worldwide organization. The Austrian managers, although they were not as precise as the Italian ones in their wishes, also sought a better and more effective form of coordination, and an increased level of international participation of the subsidiaries in the system. They however remained vaguer than the Italians on the man-agerial level at which such a coordinating and internationalizing power should be set-up, mentioning the corporate headquarters as 'an option.'

ISS is far from the first multinational group to suffer from the rela-tively high degree of decentralization of its operational management, in the process of trying to improve group-wide knowledge sharing. Cerny (1996) and Stevens (2000) argue that companies operating in very dif-ferent sectors of activities risk being impeded equally much by their relatively decentralized structures in their attempts to introduce new processes of knowledge sharing. Since ISS Italy and ISS Austria are gen-erally better than ISS France and ISS Denmark at sharing knowledge externally, and since they are the two subsidiaries calling for a higher degree of centralization of the system, I tend to agree with the views of Stevens and Cerny. There appear to be facts internal to the ISS group that support the superiority of the centralist model, over the decentral-ized structure of knowledge sharing.

Historically less inclined towards sharing knowledge internation-ally because of their previously existing, nationally-based knowledge

sharing, internal communication, or intranet systems, the French and the Danish subsidiaries were unanimous on a very important point: the corporate management of ISS should give more incentives to the subsidiaries of the group in order to make them engage more actively in knowledge sharing activities across the boundaries of subsidiaries. Types of incentives that were mentioned would take the form of rewards, financial or else, based on a royalties system; each time a piece of knowledge would be accessed in the system, the subsidiary or the division from which it had originated would receive credit. While that kind of suggestion indicates that even subsidiaries that are relatively self-sufficient with regards to knowledge sharing understand the benefits of company-wide participation to the system, it also suggests that they consider their own eventual participation as a net cost for which they feel they should be rightfully compensated. This kind of attitude is supported by the fact that these subsidiaries have already existed and evolved in that autarchic mode for a certain time and therefore, they consider that their contribution to the system would be relatively higher than their use. Therefore, when looking at the situation from these subsidiaries' point of view, the costs / benefits analysis of a knowledge sharing system should be conducted at their own level, rather than on a group-wide basis.

The literary work of Ellis (2001) and Stevens (2000) suggests that incentives schemes may not be the best way of getting organizational members to use the knowledge sharing system on a long-term basis, and that alternative solutions should be preferred to them. I agree with these authors as far as the success of the system should not only depend on the users getting rewarded for using it, but it seems that the development of an incentive scheme could be a valuable part of a promotional package aiming at popularizing the system. In other words, incentives appear useful in convincing the users of the sceptical knowledge sharing subsidiaries, such as ISS Denmark and ISS France, to give the system a fair chance, but the system must in turn be good enough for the users to be willing to stick to it even after the original incentives scheme has been rolled-back.

Epilogue

The analysis of the factors that were mentioned by more than one subsidiary as being integral parts of an ideal knowledge sharing system is an interesting and revealing process in that it allows us to observe a

series of underlying characteristics that are common to the different corporate cultures of the subsidiaries. Certain changes in some of the features of a knowledge sharing system undeniably result in a positive evolution of this system. Making the layout of the interface of the computer-based part of the system more user-friendly, for example, is very unlikely to be rejected by anybody as a change for the better.

Some traits of the system, its processes, and its operation and administration, however, do not yield the same kind of unanimity among the subsidiaries. In the empirical data gathered through the interviews, this is best exemplified by the wishes expressed by the subsidiaries regarding which managerial level to place which type of responsibilities for the functioning of Business Insight. While the people of ISS France clearly stated that their acceptance and use of the system would greatly be increased if it were to be decentralized to a higher extent, the comments of the managers of ISS Italy were going in a completely opposite direction and tend to be better supported by different authors (e. g. Cerny 1996; Stevens 2000). For them, the only efficient administrative and coordinative body for such a system would have to be at the corporate headquarters level, the only echelon that has a strategic overview; diverging goals and plans in using Business Insight are at the source of such diverging opinions. The entrepreneurial ISS Italy aspires at expanding and making more efficient its existing international operations of knowledge sharing, which clearly is favoured by a group-wide system; meanwhile, political and nationally-minded ISS France considers it would be better off if it could simply make Business Insight fit in its normal pattern of knowledge sharing activities, a vision that requires a high level of local adaptation to the precise circumstances of the subsidiary.

The same type of contrast appears when considering the types of knowledge sharing sub-groups (an example of such a sub-group would be a common divisional area as suggested by ISS Austria in the section The Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation for ISS Austria, page 76) that were asked for by the French and the Austrian subsidiaries. ISS France, true to its local strategy of self-sufficiency in matters of knowledge and procedure development, proposed functionalities that would allow for the creation of regional or linguistic sub-groups within the Business Insight framework. The avowed goal, here, is to lay the ground for using the system in the same way as the French national intranet has been used thus far or, at most, to extend it to other subsidiaries or di-

visions of ISS located in French speaking areas, which would bring no new costs of sharing for ISS France. Although authors such as Kletter (2001) present the formation of knowledge sharing communities within a wider knowledge sharing system as an essential step in the achievement of efficient knowledge sharing, it is important to distinguish between two types of communities. While Kletter makes a strong case for groups formed across organizational boundaries, along functional parameters, the type of community required by ISS France is primarily built on linguistic and regional priorities, thereby making it much less valuable in promoting a more efficient knowledge sharing system. ISS Austria, however, covets the formation of sub-groups that would be based on the business area of the members, rather than on their geographical location. Such groups, according to Kletter, would assemble people with common professional interests across the boundaries of subsidiaries, thereby making the sharing process better targeted and more relevant to the individual organizational member.

As is apparent from the analysis that has been conducted in the present section, some factors are universally expected to appear in an ideal knowledge sharing system, independently of the type of corporate culture that characterizes the operations of the individual subsidiary. A user friendly layout of the interface, efficient and simple searching tools integrated in the system, and better links between the different topics were universally recognized as suitable. Differences in opinions about underlying factors affecting the administration and general functioning of the system, however, evidence areas in which the subsidiaries' independent corporate culture and their corresponding goals in sharing knowledge may lead to conflicting interests. This is the case for the system's eventual functionalities allowing for the formation of sub-groups, and for the managerial level from which the system should ideally be given its cohesion and where a collaborative atmosphere should be instigated.

Hindrances to the Achievement of an Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation

The aim of the preceding research theme (The Ideal Knowledge Sharing Situation) was to uncover the features, factors and characteristics that, according to the subsidiaries, made a knowledge sharing system including Business Insight as good as it could be. In this fourth part of the analysis, I seek to identify the obstacles that these same subsidiaries

expect will bar the way to an ideal knowledge sharing situation at ISS. Common for these obstacles is their inherence to the structure of the organization as it is presently. Therefore, several of them made recurrent appearances across the comments of different managers.

Points that were made when the managers were asked about the factors that were essential to the attainment of an ideal knowledge sharing situation naturally appear as counter-arguments in this section. The Austrian and Danish subsidiaries, for example, both mentioned the user-friendliness and the convenience of use as important features of a good knowledge sharing system, an opinion that is supported by Orubeondo (2000) and Kautz and Vendelø (2001). In this section, these same subsidiaries naturally mention the relatively low user-friendliness of Business Insight as one of the existing hindrances to the achievement of the ideal knowledge sharing situation.

Similarly, the two subsidiaries assess that the often diverging priorities of the corporate management and of the managers of the different subsidiaries are likely to cause problems. This indeed risks becoming a source of considerable dissatisfaction, as the divergence between sets of priorities are not only to be found on the corporate / subsidiary axis, but also among the subsidiaries. The views of Hill and Storck (2000) underline the critical importance of involving all relevant parties when setting goals, in order to ensure the existence of common interests and thereby increase commitment and compliance from all parties. Such a coordination of goals does not happen at ISS; an example of diverging priorities between the corporate headquarters and the bigger subsidiaries of the group (such as ISS France or ISS Denmark) is the measurement of financial results. While an increased level of cross-national knowledge sharing would likely lead to a better result for the company as a whole, it is thinkable that relatively large subsidiaries would be left with a net cost from participating in the system, thereby lowering their individual performance. Among the subsidiaries, the ones that favour national communication and are reluctant to collaborate internationally, such as the French subsidiary, clearly do not have the same priorities in sharing knowledge as ISS Italy, for example, the entrepreneurial subsidiary that has always gone out of its way to benefit from outside influences.

The conflicting opinions about the appropriate or the suitable degree of decentralization of the administrative functions of Business Insight are interesting, as they do not yield a nice consensus among the sub-

sidiaries. ISS France, true to the wishes it has expressed in an earlier section, exposes the lack of decentralization of the operation of the system as one of the main obstacles preventing the attainment of an ideal knowledge sharing policy in the multinational organization. Conversely, and in accordance with the arguments put forward by Cerny (1996), ISS Italy decries the high risk for confusion of responsibilities among the diverse levels of corporate and subsidiary management, and maintains it is an important hindrance. The preferred solution of the Italian subsidiary to that potentially explosive situation is an increased degree of coordination that would stem from a strong, central administration of the system that can exclusively be based at the corporate headquarters' level.

Danish representatives shared the French view and regarded the general lack of decentralization of the administration of Business Insight as a central obstacle impeding the establishment of a better knowledge sharing situation in the company. This comes as no surprise, given the previously stated goal that these two subsidiaries have to implement Business Insight only if they are forced or overly rewarded to do so, and to make it fit their already-existing processes. This attitude is however counter-productive to the successful implementation of a knowledge sharing system, as argued by Cerny (1996) and Stevens (2000). This sort of short-sighted view of knowledge sharing, apparent in the Danish and French subsidiaries, concentrates more on the immediate gains provided by incentive schemes than on the real long-term benefits of the strategy. This effectively deteriorates the whole knowledge sharing strategy as employees temporarily act in accordance with the initiative but for the wrong reasons. It is therefore important for eventual incentives to be used exclusively as enticing means in the introductory phase of a knowledge sharing system, and not as permanent rewards that become the employees' only motivations for using the system.

In spite of the subsidiaries being characterized by very different types of corporate cultures, they did agree on some points that were viewed as obstacles. Common for all the subsidiary managers, is the perceived lack of engagement of corporate management in the knowledge sharing project, a factor that has previously been found to be essential to the creation of larger competitive advantages through more efficient knowledge sharing (Zack 1999). Most intended users of Business Insight have been briefly introduced to it by some middle-level managers of their own subsidiary, to whom the corporate headquarters had not

made particular efforts to promote the system. The results are pre-dictable: in the subsidiaries where the corporate culture encouraged sharing and communicating internationally (i. e., Austria and Italy), the middle managers were somewhat enthused by the system and did make a serious effort in initiating their colleagues and subordinates; mean-while, in subsidiaries where the culture lead more towards national self-sufficiency (i. e., Denmark and France), the communication flow was blocked by the middle managers and extreme lows in the level of awareness about Business Insight were reached – at ISS France, practi-cally nobody uses it. The empirical work of Janczak (1999) shows the im-portant role played by middle managers in the dispersion of knowledge in multinational organizations and the impact they have on the success-ful implementation of systems. It is therefore important to emphasize the pivotal role middle managers of a multinational organization play in the process of implementing a new corporate-wide knowledge shar-ing system and their worth should not be undervalued as finding the right mix of middle managers to promote the system greatly influences the overall success.

Throughout all the subsidiaries, there reigns a feeling that the entire Business Insight and knowledge sharing initiative, is not much more than a fad that will eventually subside in importance. The fact that the project was never formally launched, presented and promoted to the individual subsidiaries by headquarters staff was mentioned every-where as a sign that the highest levels of management did not attach importance to it. This phenomenon was especially important in coun-tries where the national cultures have influenced the corporate cultures in such a way that the acts and endorsements of the company's lead-ers take a special signification. Subsidiaries located in traditionally high power distance societies such as Italy and France (Hofstede 1997) were deeply affected and were left without the push-for-implementation that a concrete vouching from high managerial level would have been per-ceived as. The relatively high power distance of the environments these subsidiaries are embedded in helps explain why they have felt the lack of managerial endorsement more profoundly than the others.

All interviewed subsidiaries agreed on language as being one pivotal obstacle to any international knowledge sharing initiative at ISS. ISS Austria and ISS Italy both acknowledged that the use of the English language harbours some problems, but are very optimistic and believe that the advantages of the system will outweigh the language barriers.

The fact that Business Insight functioned in a written form was seen as a potential way of circumventing language problems; writing and reading in English leave more freedom and are less stressing than speaking and listening to an interlocutor on the phone, for instance.

The much bigger French subsidiary, however, considered the language issue as the single biggest problem in the international knowledge sharing system. The English knowledge of the average user of Business Insight in France being very rudimental, no miracle cure has yet been developed and it is unlikely to happen in a foreseeable future. This causes problems because the intended users of the knowledge system cannot understand it without employing a frustratingly long time to decipher it with a dictionary, making the development of a new solution from the ground more appealing. It is also an inconvenience for the feeding of knowledge into the system, since very few people have both the technical and the language skills required to redact an intelligible piece of knowledge that could benefit others throughout ISS.

For ISS Denmark, the language issue lies more with the other subsidiaries than with itself. Given the high level of English of the bigger part of its managerial staff, the Danish organization has no doubt about its capacities to contribute significantly to the system, and to extract whatever benefit it can from it. It nevertheless fears that eventual further communication between the source and the recipient of a piece of information, that would be required to clarify details or to obtain complementary data, will be hindered by language problems.

The survey respondents also denounced the language factor as a significant hindrance to their efficient and regular use of Business Insight. Some of them went as far as suggesting that the system should be run in their local language, completely disregarding the fact that this would likely become an even bigger hindrance to other subsidiaries. Although this is a clear setback to a global knowledge sharing system, it exemplifies how reluctant some employees are at using a system that is not available in their native language. Nevertheless, having a common working language in which all users can operate is an obvious prerequisite for a common, global knowledge sharing system and hence, ISS must eventually address the problems stemming from inadequate English skills in the intended users of the system.

Finally, the hierarchical levels to which Business Insight should be accessible leaves ISS Austria and ISS Denmark entrenched in directly opposed opinions. The former complains that Business Insight is still

too elitist and should be opened to considerably more organizational members than is the case presently, thereby allowing for more inputs into the system and improving the overall knowledge sharing strategy. However, the latter sees it as an inconvenience that the system is not the exclusive terrain of corporate and subsidiary top managerial levels as they feel that too much employee influence will warp the neatness and simplicity that is imperative for the use of the system. The respective standpoints of the two subsidiaries are a logical consequence of their implementation effort. Having integrated the system only to a limited extent in its daily routines, ISS Denmark still perceives it as something disruptive to its regular activities. Meanwhile, ISS Austria has successfully integrated the system into its working methods and is therefore ready to expand it and use it more extensively. Consequently, the readiness to open the system to more hierarchical layers seems to be positively related to the reached level of implementation.

Epilogue

Factors hindering the establishment of an optimal knowledge sharing situation across the multinational operations of ISS are varied. Some of these factors are unanimously agreed upon, which indicates real perceived problematic issues that the organization should not ignore or discard altogether. Among those are problems related to the use of a standard language that is not native to most subsidiaries, and the apparent lack of endorsement of, and commitment to, the whole strategy and system by top-managerial levels. Although these factors are universally viewed as hindrances, their effects vary between subsidiaries, depending on the corporate culture that characterizes the individual national organization. On one hand, we have seen that sharing-enthusiastic ISS Italy and ISS Austria have made efforts to solve the language problem and do not see it as being particularly decisive. On the other hand, self-sufficient ISS France, for example, maintains that the exclusive use of English in Business Insight is so problematic that it does not believe that it can be implemented and used to any significant extent.

Other factors, such as the managerial level to which the responsibility for the administration and operation of the system should be placed, cause more dramatic variations in the opinions expressed. While ISS Italy clearly considers the lack of a strong central directive body as a major hindrance in the achievement of an efficient knowledge sharing set

of procedures, ISS France states the opposite and sees the lack of decentralization as the unsolvable problem. And while ISS Denmark requires Business Insight to be the exclusive instrument of top-managers, ISS Austria sees such a limitation as the boundary that hinders the system in becoming all it could be. Once again, the explanation to such diverging ideas is to be found in the differences in the subsidiaries' intentions and goals with respect to the system.

5.3   Analysis and Interpretation: Subsidiaries Across Coded Areas

In the previous section, I have carried out an analysis of the diverse codes that appear within the same areas, across distinct national subsidiaries. In that context, I was interested in identifying both similarities and differences in the codes pertaining to the subsidiaries. On one hand and as was earlier explained, language, for example, was found to be a code that was relevant to all four studied national subsidiaries, within the codification area of Factors hindering the ideal knowledge sharing situation. On the other hand, formal/informal was one of the noteworthy dichotomies that appeared in the codification area of Corporate culture. I have labelled that analytical process horizontal analysis, as the aim with it was to identify relevant and significant opinions, standpoints and views among the managers of different subsidiaries, across horizontal sections of the table of codes (see tables 5.1 and 5.2).

I now engage on the second part of the analytical work; I will identify particularly interesting series of interrelated codes across the codification areas of the tables, within the individual subsidiaries, and see if similar series repeat themselves in different subsidiaries. Since the analytical process will primarily move vertically in the table of codes, across the codification areas of a single national subsidiary, I call it vertical analysis. The different codes of the national subsidiaries having been exposed and extensively explained in the description of the subsidiaries and in the first part of the analysis, I will omit their definition here. Rather, I concentrate on their interrelationships.

Some of the codes identified for the area Corporate culture of ISS France reveal that the subsidiary's main mode of functioning is much more 'nationally oriented' than open to the rest of the group, and that it favours a 'common way of thinking' over individual innovation. Both these codes are interesting for the analysis, as they are linked to other codes, pertaining to other codification areas of ISS France.

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Since the French subsidiary of the company is resolutely self-centred for the bulk of its operations and its knowledge sharing activities, it can cause no great surprise to find, under the codification area of the Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes, codes indicating that 'no real effort to implement the new system' has been done in France. The same holds true for the 'useless' character that Business Insight is perceived to have by ISS France. Similarly, the nationalistic orientation of most activities of ISS France explains very nicely what the managers of the subsidiary have depicted as one of the main hindrances to the ideal knowledge sharing situation, the 'lack of decentralization' of the corporate knowledge sharing system, Business Insight. ISS France being accustomed to hold the reigns of its own destiny and to have almost absolute control over the tools and processes it is using, the relatively high degree of corporate-level steering of Business Insight causes a cultural clash that sheds light on new problematic issues.

Although ISS Denmark was not seen as being as resolutely self-centred and closed to its environment as ISS France, the code 'unified way of thinking' appears in its Local corporate culture codification area. As was explained in the horizontal analysis, such an organizational mentality can do nothing but promote and favour the search of local (national) solutions to the detriment of cross-subsidiary communication. In that way, it relates closely to what has been found to be characteristic of the French organization, 'common way of thinking' and 'nationally oriented.'

As was the case for ISS France, that cultural characteristic of ISS Denmark is complemented by an avowed 'half-hearted implementation effort' of Business Insight in the codification area of the Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes, as well as by a similar belief that the system is 'useless.' To make the standpoints of the two subsidiaries even more similar, the list of codes of the Danish organization also boasts the 'central control of Business Insight' as one of the main hindrances to the achievement of the ideal knowledge sharing situation.

As is evidenced by figures 5.1–5.3, which represent the continuums formed by the codification areas, there are series of codes that pertain to different areas but remain linked together. The nationalism of ISS France and its promotion of a common way of thinking yields poor results when attempting to implement Business Insight, and even dis-

FIGURE 5.1   Continuum of codes 1

Country	Corporate culture	BIS match with the existing KS processes	Ideal KS situation	Factors hindering the ideal KS situation
Denmark	• Unified mode of thinking	• Halfhearted implementation attempt • Useless		• Central control of BI
France	• Nationally oriented • Common way of thinking	• No real implementation attempt • Useless		• Lack of decentralization

credit the usefulness of the system; and it makes the subsidiary consider the decentralization of the system as one of the central points to be resolved before the ideal knowledge sharing situation can exist. A very similar pattern is found across the codification areas of ISS Denmark, suggesting that the two distinct national subsidiaries can have common cultural traits that lead them to share preoccupations and to perceive some of the same obstacles to trans-border knowledge sharing.

The code 'useless,' present in the area of the Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes for both the French and the Danish subsidiary can also be associated with the code 'incentives,' which appears in the area of the Ideal knowledge sharing situation for both organizations as well. This combination could be coincidental, but it could also indicate the existence of a deeper-rooted problem, characteristic of the bigger national subsidiaries of the group. 'Useless' can in this case be interpreted as a sign that the subsidiaries consider the costs related to the implementation and utilization of Business Insight as being disproportionately high, a reasoning that naturally leads them to require some sort of 'incentives' to use the system. In such a situation, the 'incentives' effectively play the role of a compensatory measure, offsetting the perceived and expected negative financial consequences linked to the use of Business Insight. Considering the issue in this light is, however, a double-edged sword for the company as a whole. On one hand, it leaves hope that the subsidiaries do not really mean that the system is useless, which is a good thing if the corporate ambition is to ultimately implement a standard solution. On the other hand, compensating the rebellious subsidiaries (giving them 'incentives') to win their approval

FIGURE 5.2   Continuum of codes 2

Country	Corporate culture	BIS match with the existing KS processes	Ideal KS situation	Factors hindering the ideal KS situation
Denmark		• Useless	• Incentives	
France		• Useless	• Incentives	

and force the system on them can lead to different forms of abuse. All of a sudden, the company might find out that many more subsidiaries than expected believe that the knowledge sharing system is 'useless,' resulting in a total level of unnecessary compensatory expenditures that can make an economically sound change of system less attractive.

ISS France and ISS Denmark, the two subsidiaries with a negative opinion about group-wide knowledge sharing, present some commonalities in their respective code patterns. This is also the case for the tandem formed by ISS Italy and ISS Austria, which are both doing well in knowledge sharing activities. Within the area of the Corporate culture of the Austrian subsidiary, I identified the code 'hard-working,' a characteristic that was found to be similar to the Italians' 'entrepreneurial' code. The different wording is a reflection of the particularities of the individual subsidiary, but both codes express a common reality; smaller organizations (these two subsidiaries are relatively much smaller than the two other analyzed entities) leave more room to new ways of thinking, which encourages innovating employees to search and look for inspiration anywhere they can.

The predominance of such a spirit in the Austrian and Italian organizations therefore paves the way to two codes that were identified in their respective codification areas of Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes: 'welcome' and 'useful.' While both subsidiaries thereby state their initial and general appreciation of Business Insight, the complementary remarks contained in the Italian codes ('welcome but long overdue' and 'useful yet currently underdeveloped') contribute to underline the aforementioned correlation between the size of an organization and the room it leaves for the innovative thinking of its members. ISS Italy is the smallest of the four subsidiaries and it clearly is the most eager knowledge-sharer and technique-developer.

A hard-working or entrepreneurial spirit thus leads to a more posi-

tive view of the corporate knowledge sharing system, but the series of linked codes do not stop there. The eagerness of these two subsidiaries to develop their respective network for sharing more knowledge more efficiently is also reflected in the Ideal knowledge sharing situation that they describe. In this codification area, their wishes and hopes sometimes go directly against what had been mentioned by the French and Danish subsidiaries. For example, ISS Austria and ISS Italy would positively look upon a higher degree of corporate coordination for the cross-subsidiary knowledge sharing activities, as is illustrated by the codes 'coordination among subsidiaries' and 'worldwide group coordination from the headquarters.' Conversely, ISS Denmark and ISS France would feel that their freedom was violated by such a strategy. But the small subsidiaries do not only want more group-wide coordination of the knowledge sharing activities, they also agree on the need for all national subsidiaries of the company to be involved in the project, for the system to be optimally effective and beneficial. This is revealed by the 'active involvement of all subsidiaries' that is called for by ISS Austria and by the 'international participation' required by ISS Italy, in the codification area of Ideal knowledge sharing situation.

The Austrian and Italian organizations are wishful but remain realistic, in that they know their positions on the topic of cross-subsidiary knowledge sharing collides with the views of other subsidiaries. Their managers consider that a possible solution to the dilemma of choosing which group of subsidiaries to satisfy resides in a higher degree of involvement of the top-managerial level of the company. It is therefore not without reason that both subsidiaries see the apparently low priority given to the knowledge sharing project by corporate management as a substantial problem, and mention it as one of the Hindrances to the achievement of the ideal knowledge sharing situation. The Austrians express that as a 'lack of headquarters endorsement to divisional managers,' while the Italians more boldly label it as a 'low commitment of the headquarters,'

The analysis conducted in this section allows us to evidence different series of coded patterns that appear to repeat themselves in different subsidiaries of the same type – positive or negative towards cross-border knowledge sharing. In the case of ISS Denmark and ISS France, we have seen that nationalistic views of their business lead them to hold a generally negative opinion of Business Insight, which in turn makes them ask for a decentralization of the system. Such a

FIGURE 5.3   Continuum of codes 3

Country	Corporate culture	BIS match with the existing KS processes	Ideal KS situation	Factors hindering the ideal KS situation
Austria	• Hard-working	• Welcomed • Useful	• Coordination among subsidiaries • Active involvement of all subsidiaries	• Lack of HQ endorsement to divisional managers
Italy	• Entrepreneurial	• Welcomed but long overdue • Useful yet currently underdeveloped	• Worldwide group coordination from the HQ • International participation	• Low commitment of the HQ

decentralization to the benefit of subsidiaries that are sceptical about international knowledge sharing would effectively defeat the very purpose of the system, allowing the national organizations to entrench themselves in the same isolated positions they have held thus far. We have also identified the existence of a link between the stated opinion that Business Insight was useless and the requirement that incentives be given by the corporate level to the subsidiaries, to make them adopt the system. These kinds of incentives would however be likely to have perverted effects of which the company must be conscious.

ISS Austria and ISS Italy also show a common pattern of codes that goes through all of their respective codification areas. The corporate cultures of both organizations encourage innovative thinking and strongly favour knowledge sharing. This results in a positive attitude towards the introduction and use of Business Insight, and makes the subsidiaries call for even more group-wide coordination and participation to the system. This, the Austrian and Italian subsidiaries agree, would however require a higher degree of top-managerial involvement than is the case at the moment.

5.4   RQ2: Problems of Knowledge Sharing Within ISS

The preceding has provided insight into emerging trends and patterns that the interviewed subsidiaries have revealed pertaining to the four respective areas. The areas have been analyzed individually, yet simul-

taneously across all four subsidiaries thereby allowing for an easier overview of the reoccurring and the contradicting elements. Thereto, the subsidiaries have been analyzed individually across all four areas so to link and relate the relationships between the four areas within the subsidiaries.

In accordance with the analyzed and interpreted data, we now have a comfortable understanding of the problems ISS as a group suffers under and therefore proceed to answer research question number two: What are the problems of knowledge sharing within ISS?

The problems of KS within ISS can be separated between factors pertaining to the resolve and motivation of the employees, which I term 'Will problems' and factors pertaining to the proficiency and competence the employees possess with regards to being able to share knowledge, termed 'Capability problems.' As explained in the earlier theoretical framework, both must be present for effective knowledge sharing to occur.

'Will' Problems of Knowledge Sharing at ISS

The first 'will' problem is the non-genuine implementation effort of Business Insight by some of the subsidiaries. This poor implementation effort is sparked off by the system being regarded as useless and even threatening to the established knowledge sharing ways and consequently the employees down prioritize the attention that should be devoted to a new and encompassing system such as Business Insight and are unmotivated to use the system.

The Second 'will' problem is the non-user friendly layout of Business Insight. All subsidiaries agreed that Business Insight could be made more useful and serviceable with a few relatively minor adjustments to the system that would make the retrieval of data more convenient and accessible and avoid unnecessary technical restraints. The lack of direct links, virtual rooms, overview topics, etc., render Business Insight rigid, complicated to use and sometimes even useless. This diminishes the will intended users of the system harbour with regards to using Business Insight.

The third 'will' problem is the lack of headquarters endorsement and incitement given to the divisional managers. Up until now, the introduction of Business Insight has mainly been ad-hoc and in a 'do it yourself' manner, which has resulted in some subsidiaries barely knowing the system existed. This lack of incentives to the local managers de-

ters some subsidiaries from giving Business Insight a proper start and provides no motivation to detach the employees from their established knowledge sharing ways. Furthermore, the ISS headquarters inadvertently gives the employees the impression that this knowledge sharing system is nothing special or radical; the employees sensing the headquarters lack of enthusiasm with the system and projecting that onto their eagerness to use the system.

The fourth 'will' problem concerns the cost-benefit structure. Many subsidiaries feel that the return they receive from using Business Insight does not outweigh the expenses they must allocate to use the system. They go on to express that this is not just in the short-term but also in the long term when these expenses, in the form of time and money, should be expected to decrease as a result of the system being easier to use as the employees slide along the learning curve. The distorted perception of the cost/benefit structure of using Business Insight therefore lessens some employees' will to use the system.

'Capability' Problems of Knowledge Sharing at ISS

The first 'capability' problem that ISS suffers under is that some subsidiaries are too nationally orientated and have a common or unified mindset that inadvertently closes off to new ideas. These characteristics do not support a global knowledge sharing initiative and prevents employees from expanding their horizons and taking in new ideas and information from foreign sources.

The second 'capability' problem concerns itself with the language factor. It has been opted to operate Business Insight in English; a logical choice considering that English is the language in which most ISS employees have a working level ability. Nevertheless, it is still a foreign tongue for the clear majority of ISS workers and consequently gives rise to language barriers, misunderstandings and frustration as well as obstructing some ISS employees from using the system altogether as they cannot work in English.

The third 'capability' problem is the extent to which Business Insight should be decentralized. The fact that Business Insight is mainly centrally run is perceived as problematic for many subsidiaries as the difference between the subsidiaries' and the headquarters' stakeholders and priorities lead to an inevitable clash. It is felt that the headquarters does simply not possess the adequate screening abilities to be able to decide what data is relevant and pertinent to include on the Business Insight

TABLE 5.3   ISS's Knowledge Sharing Problems

'Will' Problems	'Capability' Problems
• Non-genuine implementation effort	• Nationally orientated and common or uni-
• Non-user friendly layout	fied mindset that closes out new ideas
• Lack of HQ Endorsement	• Language
• Poor cost-benefit structure	• Decentralization of BI

knowledge sharing system. However, several of the interviewed subsidiaries simultaneously voiced opposing arguments stating that Business Insight should be more centrally run as that would increase coordination among the subsidiaries and thereby make knowledge sharing simpler; a statement certainly supported by our theoretical findings. This would also increase the likelihood that more ISS subsidiaries participate actively in the knowledge sharing process as the subsidiaries are denied the opportunity to act as autonomous and independent subsidiaries. Hence, the issue of decentralization and the inevitable paradox it harbours regarding the organizations ability to share knowledge is a serious problem ISS must overcome.

6 | Recommendations

After meticulous analysis of several ISS subsidiaries and the headquarters, exploitation of numerous theoretical models and theories on corporate culture and knowledge sharing, and successful completion of extensive interviews and knowledge sharing seminars throughout Europe, I now feel confident to progress onto the ultimate goal of this book: namely expressing to the reader the factors that I deem crucial to consider and act upon so ISS may eventually possess an all-encompassing and well-functioning global knowledge sharing system.

Standing at the threshold of being able to tackle the issues of the problem identification, I affirm that a great deal has been learned about the intricacies of global knowledge sharing, and the perplexity and elaborateness that such a comprehensive endeavour entails. It now becomes the combined forces of the answer to Research Question One, which provided a theoretical approach towards optimal knowledge sharing across corporate cultures, and the answer to Research Question Two, which identified the problem areas of knowledge sharing within ISS, that will guide the answering of the question contained within the problem identification: how can ISS optimize their knowledge sharing activities across corporate cultures?

Naturally, the recommendations will be deeply rooted in the 'Will' and 'Capability' problems revealed in the conclusion of the previous chapter since these are crucial elements the ISS group must overcome. In accordance with my previous arguments that the will must be present before getting capable, I, in the following, begin by addressing the problems that are 'Will' related (6.1–6.5) and then progress to the 'capability' related problems (6.6–6.9).

6.1   Conduct Genuine Global Implementation

The poor implementation effort by some of the subsidiaries is a direct result of their respective corporate cultures leading them to regard the system as being useless and threatening to the established knowledge

sharing ways, rather than as a useful new tool. The solution to this problem lies in the ability to stimulate changes in the local corporate culture so that the employees regard the implementation of Business Insight as a process to take seriously and earnestly. The first step towards achieving this is to present the employees with clear and understandable goals of what the knowledge sharing system aspires to achieve. It is important that everyone within the organization understands why and how the implementation occurs and where it will leave him/her once it is over. There must be consistency between the goals and aims of the company and the way these are expressed in operational terms to the organization. Therefore, the objectives that the management would like to achieve should be explained in laymen's terms, without overcomplicating the situation with financial facts or other information that might cloud the recipients' perception of the main idea. It is important to express specifically how, what, where and when the employees' lives will be changed and how these changes will result in an overall healthier situation for everyone in the firm. Furthermore, in order to make the implementation effort even more genuine, implementation should be done in manageable phases that allow the slow-moving human change process to keep up. Since the implementation of a global knowledge sharing system can be a long and complicated process, it is helpful to divide the aims and goals up into smaller 'chunks' that appear more manageable and easier to achieve.

Second, Business Insight should be implemented in coordination with other projects and strategies. By nature, humans are limited in their capacity to attentively focus on multiple tasks within their immediate surroundings simultaneously, especially when the tasks are of foreign origin and unfamiliar to that person. Therefore, in order to avoid employees simply 'tuning-out' one or more of the implementation processes, it is necessary to consider the circumstances under which the employees are asked to perceive the different tasks. It is crucial that the employees be allocated time to test and work with the system during their regular working hours. By asking the employees to work with the new system during work hours, they will perceive it as an integral part of their job, opposed to a situation where the employees would be asked to understand the new system on their own time, which would result in the feeling that the new system is not directly associated to their real 'job-time' obligations. A simple way of integrating Business Insight in the employees' daily activities would be to make its use mandatory, for

example by making the log-on and start-up procedures of the local PC an integral part of the system. Business Insight would thereby become the unavoidable common start-up page of all potential users, which would be likely to increase their use of the system.

Third, the middle managers (for ISS these would typically be the communication managers) must step forward and take on very active implementation roles. It is very important for all the employees within the organization to be able to identify the instigators of the implementation process and the position for which they stand. These middle managers must firmly pronounce their positions and viewpoints, often re-declaring them to the extent of repetition. If the employees are given the opportunity to doubt the position and determination of the middle managers, they are less prone to accept and execute the proposed change ideas. Therefore, the middle managers must have clearly defined implementation roles and, equally important, must be able to communicate the ideas that their roles stand for in a manner that is understandable to the remaining organization. A pivotal task for the middle manager is to selectively choose the areas of employee influence throughout the implementation process. I support the view that maximum employee influence in the implementation process is desirable, as it creates a sense of ownership over the new system at the employee level. However, the middle managers need still to carefully choose the areas of influence they delegate so to not confuse or compromise the lead implementation role that they, as middle managers possess. Stemming from a belief that employees are generally resistant to change, empowering them with a sense of ownership will make them more prone to use and promote the new system internally. Through employee involvement in the change process, the risk of resistance, disbelief and dissatisfaction with the new system will decrease, as the employees will be able to identify themselves with the new knowledge sharing system and strategy.

A final suggestion for how the implementation effort of Business Insight can be taken more seriously throughout various ISS subsidiaries is to create a sense of urgency about the system. Again, by nature, people are creatures of habit, and if they can avoid changing their predetermined ways, they most often will. Therefore, it is up to the management to create a sense of urgency in the minds of the employees so the implementation and use of the knowledge sharing system actually get conducted and not just talked about. If the employees do not

feel that either an internal or external force is demanding urgency, the risk is that the employees will stick to their set ways and, as a result, the desired implementation effort will not be achieved. The creation of a 'burning-platform' helps push employees to carry out the desired changes and comply with optimal implementation assertiveness.

6.2 Improve the User-Friendliness of the System

A common objection to the current knowledge sharing system from most of the interviewed subsidiaries was the lack of a user-friendly interface with which they could conduct their knowledge sharing activities. If the intended users of Business Insight are met with too much frustration and disappointment when attempting to use the system it will inevitably lead to the employees opting for alternative methods of sharing knowledge, most likely their previous and established ways. Consequently the need to improve the ease in which information is retrieved becomes imperative. Obviously, a prerequisite for this is to avoid the technical problems that currently haunt the system and are at the source of much user frustration. It therefore becomes imperative that the headquarters overcome these fundamental technical problems first, before attempting cosmetic improvements. Once these issues are taken care of, I suggest the following three enhancements to the system, which will ultimately improve the user-friendliness of Business Insight.

First and foremost, there must be an easy overview of topics from which users can effortlessly advance their quest for information if one of the topics has captivated their interest. This overview should be renewed frequently and act as an ISS virtual newspaper, updating the employees with the latest news and happenings from the various ISS subsidiaries. These topics must not necessarily be of interest to all ISS subsidiaries, but they must retain some interest to at least some of them. From the topics, the user should have the ability to easily progress onto an elaborate explanation, most likely in the form of an article, by simply clicking on the topic. If the user desires more data on the topic upon completion of the article, relevant contact details to the people the article was about should be readily available.

Second, virtual divisional areas should be created. This is a superb way to increase cross-corporate cultural communication as the local functional divisions of the national subsidiaries are allocated an area where common interests, specific to a distinct type of division that ex-

ists throughout most ISS subsidiaries (for example, marketing), can be shared. The usefulness of this addition is twofold: to increase the level of topic specific data shared between the employees to whom the data is relevant, and to increase the eagerness Business Insight is approached with as a result of the data being relevant and consequently interesting. Furthermore, the employees objecting to the central administration of Business Insight will hereby have the possibility to share knowledge on a somewhat more decentralized level, circumventing some of the perceived problems from having the headquarters intervening in the actual knowledge sharing activities.

Third, Business Insight should also function as a library and search engine, allowing its users to easily look up relevant data but also provide the contact details of the entire ISS staff with access to Business Insight. It should be demanded that all intended users of Business Insight type a personal, one-page description, or mini curriculum vitae, which can easily be retrieved by any other user of the system by typing a few fitting descriptions into the search engine. This addition will allow employees from a locally based subsidiary to easily find the exact person, external to the subsidiary, with whom the user wishes to communicate and thereby save valuable searching time currently squandered away. Furthermore, as one more effective feature gets added to the system, Business Insight's perceived usefulness will increase.

An excellent way for the management of ISS to be on top of the ball as to what the objections to the interface are, and thereby avoid future dissatisfactions with the user-friendliness, is to pay greater attention to feedback. This may seem obvious and perhaps even demeaning; however, I find it important to stress the attention that ISS headquarters should devote to the remarks voiced by various ISS stakeholders that can improve the system's user-friendliness. On top of the central role it plays in preventing user-frustration, feedback is an excellent way to check that the intended users of the system are complying with the original strategy of implementing the knowledge sharing system. Thereto, the management can use the feedback to assess the performance of the different subsidiaries and coordinate whether they need to realign some of their business procedures in order to become more efficient. A further constructive effect of listening and reacting to feedback is the positive impression it gives employees that their opinion really does matter to the higher managerial levels. Therefore, constantly having a finger on the organizational pulse has several benefits for the management of

the company, as user satisfaction significantly increases, while coordination and monitoring are greatly facilitated.

6.3   Increase the Level of Endorsements from the Headquarters

The current lack of headquarters endorsement provides the employees with the impression that Business Insight is not a knowledge sharing tool that they need take too seriously and denies them the proper kick-start any organization needs when attempting to implement a new and encompassing system such as this knowledge sharing system. Consequently, it is clear that the headquarters must take a more pro-active role in the initial phases of introducing Business Insight.

First, I recommend that the headquarters provide more encouragement and support to the local managers in the form of personal visits endorsing the system, invitations to managerial corroboration meetings at the headquarters, newsletters, phone calls, etc. Implementation of a fundamental feature such as this knowledge sharing system requires much adaptation from all parts of the organization and from every individual involved in the activities that are being restructured. Under such circumstances, it is essential for the employees to know, feel and see tangible proofs that the new system is seriously meant and a positive addition. Therefore, true support and personal involvement of the top-management in all phases of introducing the system becomes essential, and shows very strong commitment and provides the employees with the mindset that they must also prepare for some changes.

Second, headquarters should push local managers to find key employees within the local subsidiaries to get involved with the successful integration of the system. Humans like facility and they will go out of their way to find it. This also holds true in the process of successfully introducing Business Insight: if there is an easy way of doing the prescribed work, the headquarters can be sure the employees will figure it out and walk that way. Consequently, it becomes important for ISS to have as many enthusiastic internal promoters of the system at the subsidiary level as possible and make maximum use of them. Employees who can exert a positive influence on their co-workers should be turned into active sponsors of the system and promote its use. Therefore, the headquarters should stress to the local managers the importance of locating the key personal within their subsidiaries that can facilitate the

introductory phases and act as these internal promoters of the system to other intended users within the subsidiary.

Third, the headquarters can increase the level of managerial endorsements by constructing a detailed reward system to promote the initial use of Business Insight. Reward systems can help stimulate employees to focus their efforts on those performances exclusively related to getting the knowledge sharing system up and running. These rewards will act as extra incentives for the employees to give Business Insight an enthusiastic trial and hopefully push them over the strenuous introductory 'speed-bump' that often deters some employees from ever giving a new system an earnest effort. They also act as excellent performance measurement tools that can be utilized by the headquarters to monitor the progress of introducing Business Insight. A possible reward scheme could take the form of a weekly lottery where the online users at a specific yet unknown point in time are allotted a chance at winning a prize, financial or else. Alternatively, the rewards can be targeted at especially good users of the system, be they contributors or users of knowledge. These are just a couple of generally applicable suggestions; other schemes could also be developed, depending on the specific situation of the potential participants. It is important for the organization to ensure that these incentives are used exclusively for limited periods of time, to promote the system during its introductory phases. Once the employees have grown used to the knowledge sharing concept, the incentive schemes should slowly be discontinued, as the true benefits of the system become more apparent and act as the employees' main motivation to use it.

Finally, the headquarters must follow up on the progress made by the subsidiaries in accepting and integrating Business Insight in their local activities. There is no doubt that Business Insight will have an easier time getting accepted into some subsidiaries than in others. Whatever the inherent reasons are that make the introductory phases simpler in some organizations opposed to others is ambiguous and, at this point, irrelevant. What the headquarters must focus on is providing the subsidiaries that are lagging behind in their integration efforts with increased endorsements and support, so they too will be able to enjoy the benefits the system offers. The subsidiaries that are successful with integrating Business Insight should be acknowledged with recognition and remarks applauding their efforts and boosting their self-worth. This positive recognition from their superiors will provide these sub-

sidiaries with a feeling that their efforts have not been in vain and that they are now essentially improved subsidiaries because of their successful involvement with Business Insight.

6.4 Improve the Perceived Cost-Benefit Structure

An inherent problem present in several subsidiaries is that they do simply not regard Business Insight as a system that is worthwhile putting any resources into as they feel the benefits the system can bestow them with are too modest and insignificant. The consequent result is that they detach themselves from the knowledge sharing initiative and remain entrenched in their established knowledge sharing ways. Therefore, it is essential that the headquarters convince the intended users of the benefits the knowledge sharing system possesses.

A necessary precursor for successful knowledge sharing is that employees across the entire organization are acceptant of the idea that knowledge sharing can occur only with the compliance and effort of everyone involved. Therefore, it is of central importance that the headquarters get everyone on the knowledge sharing 'bandwagon' and aim at convincing the employees that they gain higher benefits in their day-to-day work by using the system. In order to achieve this, I recommend that the cost-benefit analysis the headquarters originally conducted that inspired the management to opt for this knowledge sharing system be made available to the remaining organization. It should be made highly visible that effective knowledge sharing within the ISS group will be a premium source of competitive advantage that will increase corporate value and help propel ISS into an upper echelon of well-functioning multinational organizations. Only once the benefits of Business Insight become more visible, will the more reluctant subsidiaries detach themselves from their established knowledge sharing ways and experiment with the new, recommended ways.

A further technique to enhance the perceived cost-benefit structure of Business Insight is, much in accordance with the third part of recommendation 6.3, to attach incentives to the initial use of the system, thereby enhancing the perceived benefit side of the cost-benefit structure. The subsidiaries that are hesitant assuming the costs involved with getting acquainted with the system will be more motivated to try if they see the opportunity to immediately reap certain tangible benefits. As a result, more subsidiaries will give Business Insight an earnest effort which, all other aspects aside, will increase the use of Business In-

sight globally. As was mentioned earlier, the headquarters should discontinue the incentive schemes after the introductory phases, in order to avoid letting them become long-run motivational factors to use the system.

A final technique to improve the perceived cost-benefit structure is to use Business Insight to publicize success stories detailing how some subsidiaries have started offering a new service to their customers. Publishing case studies that exemplify how problems that have actually been encountered can be overcome will decrease the uncertainty factor related to the establishment of a business line that is new to a specific subsidiary. A good case study can sometimes exemplify the do's and don'ts of a new business venture and provide more insight, and often in a more entertaining manner, than a merely theoretical business plan (much in the same manner that this book is a good case example about knowledge sharing for companies other than ISS). Failure stories can likewise be included, alerting employees to the common pitfalls of new commercial endeavours by illustrating real-life horror stories of failed business ventures.

6.5   Increase Information about Business Insight

The fact that so many intended users of Business Insight are not aware of the benefits the system can offer works against the strived for increase in its level of popularity. For that reason, more efforts should be put, from the headquarters' side, into disseminating information about concrete features or functionalities of the system, as well as about the benefits that they can bring to the users. Notifying the relevant users whenever there is a significant feature or content change is also likely to stimulate the overall use of Business Insight. Such publicity about the system, its details and advantages can be transmitted through two media, the first being e-mail. Through the corporate e-mail system, the headquarters can send e-mails to selected groups of users, advertising new content that is of interest to the targeted recipients of the messages. Alternatively, the e-mails can contain extracts from the system, publicizing functionalities that can improve the working processes and display the benefits offered by Business Insight. The second medium that can be used to heighten the level of knowledge relative to the system is the local intranet of each one of the national subsidiaries. By infiltrating the current knowledge sharing ways (which are typically related to the local intranets), the headquarters can place banners and adver-

tisements to catch the attention of potential users who are still unaware of the existence or of the benefits of Business Insight. These advertisements should act as attention-grabbers relaying a small yet useful piece of knowledge about the system, thereby stimulating the appetite of the potential users for deploying Business Insight's more.

6.6 Decrease National Orientation and Free Employees of a Unified Mindset

Before attempting to solve this first 'capability' problem, it is important to recognize and respect how deeply the consequences of the problem manifest themselves. Being too nationally oriented and possessing a mindset that closes off to new and possibly good ideas implies that the employees of such an organization are imbedded in a routine that has great trouble fostering new ideas for improvements. This happens because the employees grow satisfied with the current order of events; not appreciating that some fresh additions could positively influence their efficiency or well-being. Furthermore, such employees are reluctant to accept inspiration from foreign subsidiaries as they regard anyone peripheral to their home-grown routine to be outsiders and therefore less knowledgeable about the local intricacies. The deepest and ultimate materialization of this will be that no communication occurs between the units as separate the knowledge sharing tracks evolve that forestall a common understanding. In the extreme, it implies that the subsidiary is a completely closed off and individual entity.

Rectification of this is extremely difficult as it involves modification in the stiffest and most resolute aspect of change management: namely the human psyche. Employees and their processes are meaningful determinants of the success or failure of a company, and yet, more often than not, the classical mistake is to concentrate too much on the technical requirements of the knowledge sharing system, undervaluing the potential value of the collaborative attitude of the workers. Hence, insufficient resources often end up being allocated to attempting to change exactly that which needs changing the most: the mindset of the employees.

For ISS, I propose two strategies that can help free the organization from this problem. First, the introduction of new and diverse routines and procedures with which the employees are forced to work will shake up the conventionalities and forcefully remove some long-established and perhaps non-productive habits. The management should attempt

to temporarily switch the roles of some employees, assuring them that this is neither a demotion nor promotion, but purely a productive chance for them to take on new tasks and exchange ideas. Depending on the success, the switched roles can be altered back or kept if all parties are acceptant towards that idea. The key element for this first strategy is simply to experiment, accepting from the outset that some of the changes will inevitably not lead to a more productive outcome but others will. The poor changes will always have the possibility to be reversed, while beneficial changes can be kept and possibly even spark up new ideas for further improvements.

The second strategy involves an incremental flow of information about fellow employees, both within the unit and external to the unit. Although the knowledge sharing system, Business Insight, is actually a corporate attempt to meet this need, it is not effective since the employees whom this strategy is aimed at are the employees reluctant to use it. Consequently, other methods must be employed in order to spark the interest that will eventually lead employees to independently seek more information about their respective counterparts through the use of Business Insight. Several events can be held in order to accomplish this. Group-outings where representatives from various subsidiaries meet and converse, corporate seminars where a forum for debate and discussion for improvements are predominant, and company trips where employees across national subsidiaries have the opportunity to talk freely and build common interests outside the scope of regular ISS activities, are all initiatives that will expand the common understanding across subsidiaries and increase the knowledge each has pertaining to the others. Furthermore, this idea can even extend so far as to include international career opportunities and exchange programs where one or more employees work for a limited time frame in foreign ISS subsidiaries. I deem the employees positioned around the middle manager level as the optimal candidates for such exchanges, as they are still flexible and willing to learn while also having the ability to dispense information appropriately. The ultimate goal of this second strategy is to broaden the variety of inputs the employees receive and open up for new and improved ways of conducting business. Naturally, the realization of both these strategies implies supplementary expenses that ISS must take on in the short run; expenses that, however, will be recuperated through greater knowledge sharing benefits in the long run.

6.7   Overcome Language Barriers

Language; often called the forgotten factor because it is easily taken for granted that the users master a language, yet has a disastrous outcome when it is later revealed that they do not. Although English is the working language that most ISS employees are skilled in, it is far from a language that the majority of the ISS employees feel comfortable using compared to their native tongue. Consequently, the fact that Business Insight is in English poses a language barrier problem that ISS must address. To overcome this problem, I recommend three suggestions that, when viewed in their entirety, will take ISS a big part of the way to solving the language problem.

First, the advantages of an expensive and up-to-date knowledge sharing system are wasted if the intended users are not able to put the system to use. Therefore, ISS must offer the employees who do not have a working ability level of English the means to be able to achieve this, so that everyone has the possibility to contribute to the system. In the subsidiaries where English is very poorly spoken, classes should be offered, thereby increasing the working level of English and empowering the employees with the ability to use Business Insight effectively. The classes should be offered free of charge, within working hours and marketed as a one-time unique proposal to improve one's qualifications. This will be viewed as a positive commitment from the managerial side and emphasize to the employees that the new knowledge sharing system is meant to be taken seriously. Also, it is felt that such an opportunity for self-improvement will be positively perceived and hence provide a form of goodwill directed towards giving the knowledge sharing system a more earnest attempt.

Second, with the probable exception of the employees with excellent English language skills, the users should be familiarized with the words and phrases that are popularly used and frequently repeated. Supplying the users with a comfortable understanding of the words and phrases that are often stumbled across while using the system from the outset will greatly facilitate the 'getting-acquainted-with-the-system' phase as users not only understand the necessary vocabulary, but also get their motivation boosted as they see their newly taught vocabulary being put to use.

Third, for national subsidiaries located in linguistic areas that contain a significant number of users of Business Insight who have severe

difficulties in working efficiently in English (such as the French subsidiary), virtual dictionaries can be incorporated into the system. Such a tool would allow the user to simply click on a word he does not understand in order to obtain an instantaneous local-language translation, in a little pop-up window. Furthermore, English dictionaries must be supplied to all intended users, with the exception of those who already work on a daily basis in English. It is not necessary to receive consent from the users that they want a dictionary, as one should automatically be supplied to every non-native English-speaking user. The reception of a dictionary will, once again, be perceived as an indicator that the new knowledge sharing system is to be taken seriously and further help the implementation process.

Instinctively, I am tempted to believe that the language problem will, with time, eventually reduce itself. An increasingly global world and the fact that more new employees speak English today than previously suggest that this problem will at least not increase with time. In fact, with the introduction of the exchange programs and increased interaction between the subsidiaries as was advocated in the first recommendation, English abilities across the various subsidiaries should increase. Thereto, the utilization of the knowledge sharing system, Business Insight, will also increase employees' English abilities; their English aptitude will increase proportionally to their usage of the system. Nevertheless, albeit there might be some truth in this instinctive feeling, the language issue is a cardinal current concern that must be confronted through the aforementioned suggestions.

6.8   Keep Business Insight Centrally Run But Respect Subsidiary Priorities

This particular problem poses an interesting dilemma because the subsidiaries themselves do not entirely agree whether Business Insight should be more or less centrally run. This contradiction is understandable since there are sound arguments for either case thus implying that there is no clear-cut answer. The problem equates itself to the old dilemma of 'can't have your cake and eat it too' as a decentralized structure would avoid the clash in stakeholder differences but compromise the coordination and knowledge sharing abilities of the subsidiaries. Consequently, this recommendation demands a twofold endorsement.

First, I firmly recommend that ISS keep Business Insight as a centrally run knowledge sharing system. For knowledge sharing to occur

optimally, a high degree of coordination among the subsidiaries must be present. This coordination can only come from a headquarters perspective. A strong central commanding body of the knowledge sharing activities throughout the entire ISS group would have a better vision of the whole organization and its requirements, opposed to each subsidiary deciding for themselves what they deem relevant. Furthermore, having Business Insight centrally run will provide a common loop through which all subsidiaries must pass data. This conformity in the knowledge sharing process will greatly increase the ease with which global and effective knowledge sharing can occur as the headquarters receive a holistic view of the entire organization and can, through this, better internationally coordinate the subsidiaries. In order for the headquarters to be adequately equipped to handle the colossal obligations inherent to the coordination of global knowledge sharing, more resources should be allocated to support the central knowledge sharing department than is currently the case. I suggest the establishment of a headquarters team whose sole task involves keeping Business Insight interesting, current and relevant to all users.

However, within this recommendation now lies the area that the management of ISS must be particularly conscientious with and forms the second part of this twofold endorsement. Having Business Insight centrally run implies that the headquarters must possess the ability to correctly judge what data is appropriate for the entire ISS organization to include on the knowledge sharing system and what is not, regardless of the fact that the knowledge may contain no relevance whatsoever to the headquarters. This implies that the headquarters must respect the inherent difference in stakeholders of the subsidiaries and the headquarters and include knowledge onto Business Insight that they would otherwise have deemed extraneous. In order for the headquarters to do this efficiently, they must gain a further understanding of the priorities and interests of the various local subsidiaries, so that their screening abilities do not end up sifting out valuable knowledge.

6.9   Create Business Insight Courses

A powerful, all-encompassing and expensive knowledge sharing system is of absolutely no use to the organization if the employees, who are supposed to use the system, do not possess the ability to exploit the greatness the system boasts. Therefore, it is extremely important that the headquarters focus on raising the employees' knowledge sharing capa-

bilities that are required to operate Business Insight. Accordingly, I recommend a few mandatory classes and seminars in all the subsidiaries to be established. In these classes, the users have the opportunity to learn how to optimally use Business Insight and see the full extent of the benefits the system can offer. An expert on Business Insight should reveal all the intricate beneficial details of the system and how to overcome what the employees might perceive as shortcomings of Business Insight. This will also be an excellent method of introducing the employees to the system and help kick-start their eagerness to use it on their own accord.

6.10   Conclusion

We have learned that there are many pitfalls when attempting to introduce a global knowledge sharing system across diverse corporate cultures. What seems like a straightforward and unwavering process turns out to be a complex and entangled procedure, often not yielding the hoped for effective outcome. For ISS this is certainly the case. The nine recommendations are structured according to the problematic 'will' and 'capability' areas that currently hinder ISS in sharing knowledge optimally across corporate cultures. Carrying out the recommendations will take ISS a great part of the way to optimizing their knowledge sharing activities and overall satisfaction with the system. However, as is almost always the case, upon rectification of these problematic areas other situations will arise that will lessen the overall value of the knowledge sharing initiative. Consequently, the nine recommendations will not supply ISS, or any other company looking to learn from ISS's situation, with the ability to share knowledge across corporate cultures for an infinite time frame. Constant modifications and alterations to all aspects that touch upon the knowledge sharing initiative, which we have learned are very extensive, must be correctly made.

In sum, it is important to remember that a knowledge sharing system and the technological additions that come with it are just tools, which are supposed to help the organization share knowledge more effectively but will bring no change to the company unless it has the approval and cooperation of the entire organization. Regardless of the extent of the new technology and of the promises that the newly incorporated knowledge sharing system boasts, it is necessary to have a strong business focus on change in the organization, process, people and cultures. It is naive to believe that the introduction of a new knowledge

sharing system, no matter how glamorous it might be declared by its producers, will bring improvements if the system is viewed solely as a technical tool and no or little attention is devoted to human capital and the change process.

7 | Conclusion

The main purpose of this book has been to investigate the issues pertaining to knowledge sharing and corporate culture, in order to provide ISS with several recommendations as to how their knowledge sharing activities can improve across corporate cultures. However, these recommendations lend themselves to a wider scope of companies; ISS is by no means unique, in fact I would argue that the situation presented by ISS is typical of most large organizations trying to enhance corporate wide knowledge sharing initiatives and hence the revealed insights are applicable to a much wider audience.

To arrive at plausible recommendations involved an in-depth look at the knowledge sharing activities and corporate cultures of several ISS subsidiaries; two subsidiaries that were considered good external knowledge sharers and two that were considered poor external knowledge sharers. The data from these interviews yielded some interesting results, and what seemed apparent from the outset turned out to be not so straightforward.

I began by introducing the two complex terms of knowledge sharing and corporate culture in a purely theoretical context. The independent analysis of each established the underlying fundamental aspects of the theoretical features, and provided a thorough depiction of the complex constituents related to knowledge sharing and corporate culture. After having obtained a harmonized understanding of both terms and of their implications, I proceeded to Research Question 1: 'How is knowledge sharing optimally done across corporate cultures?' Here we learned that effective global knowledge sharing requires a two-sided strategic approach: one focusing on the nature and conditions under which knowledge is being sent and the other on the environment and conditions under which the knowledge is being received.

The next step was to focus on the empirical data and described the intricate details of the local corporate cultures, Business Insights match with the existing knowledge sharing processes, the ideal knowledge sharing situation, and the hindrances to the achievement of the ideal

knowledge sharing situation at all four subsidiaries. This descriptive section functioned as the bedrock on which the succeeding analysis and interpretation would be firmly planted. Although it provided essential background knowledge to the analytical work, the descriptive section was relatively straightforward. The analysis and interpretation, however, provided many clashes with the theoretical perception of optimal knowledge sharing across corporate cultures, which was surprising and gave much to contemplate further. It turned out that some characteristics of the diligent knowledge sharing subsidiaries contradicted the theoretically optimal knowledge sharing proposal set forth in the answer to Research Question 1, while some characteristics of the less diligent knowledge sharers actually complemented the optimal theoretical solution. The discrepancies and similarities that appeared between the theoretical and empirical data helped further put the whole issue of knowledge sharing across corporate cultures into perspective, and provided a more cognitive interpretation of the topic. Consequently, it was the combination of the results explicated in the answer to Research Question 1, the results from the analysis of the empirical data, and the results from the inevitable clash between these two types of results that provided the knowledge to be able to describe the problematic areas of knowledge sharing within ISS today, the answer to Research Question 2. Some of these problems were directly related to the subsidiaries corporate culture, such as having a common or unified mindset and approaching the knowledge sharing initiative non-genuinely. Other problems relate more to the efforts of the headquarters and suggest that the headquarters should have paid more attention to the user-friendliness of the system, the perceived cost-benefit structure and the level in which they endorse and promote the use of the system.

The study and analysis of both theoretical and empirical issues, combined with the comparison of these, at times diverging, sides enabled me to come up with several recommendations as to how ISS can optimize its knowledge sharing activities across the corporate cultures of its subsidiaries.

From the theoretical and empirical data, and from the in-depth analysis, it was established that a necessary precursor for successful knowledge sharing across corporate cultures is not to solely focus on the system and the benefits it can provide the few diligent users that have taken the time to understand the system, but mainly to focus on the change management and how the knowledge sharing initiative is com-

municated through the mundane and human aspects of the organization. The recommendations have exactly this as their fundamental underlying theme, and it is my firm belief that this is the only manner in which the entire organization becomes involved with the knowledge sharing initiative.

This entails that some subsidiaries of the ISS group make alterations and adjustments to their local corporate cultures in order to set the stage for effective knowledge sharing. To facilitate this, the recommendation is to install a more open and radical mindset; a mindset not focused on a specific national orientation that inadvertently forecloses new ideas and improvements, and to approach the implementation efforts in a sincere manner so the entire organization supports the initiative. Further facilitators of global knowledge sharing should stem from the headquarters. Making the knowledge sharing system more user-friendly, increase level of endorsements, improve the perceived impression of the cost-benefit structure and increasing the awareness of the system and its benefits though courses and local intranets are excellent ways to get the entire ISS corporation onto the knowledge sharing bandwagon and contribute wholeheartedly to the initiative.

The management of ISS has understood and accepted that they suffer from poor global knowledge sharing activities across differing corporate cultures. This realization is incredibly important to make and is a great first step towards improving the situation, a step many multinational companies fail to take. The case and point of this book is thus not only for ISS's benefit. Knowledge sharing across cultures is very difficult and the illumination of the intricacies revealed though the ISS situation provides a fantastic backdrop for companies in similar situations who may not have the luxury of acquiring a research team to illuminate their specific situation. Thus, it is my firm belief that the recommendations set forth herein also apply to companies other than ISS.

7.1   Reflection

The process of writing this book has been an outstanding occasion to learn about the theoretical and empirical aspects of knowledge sharing and corporate culture, but especially about the practicalities of the introduction and implementation of a global knowledge sharing system. Very early in the work, during the research of information stage, I realized that the focus topic, the seemingly simple and straightforward process of sharing knowledge across comparable units belonging to the

same organization, is more complicated than first meets the eye. This became particularly evident as soon as I started conducting the interviews with the various subsidiaries; the theories that should have been applicable in a given situation according to the theoretical findings did not always match-up.

I have also become more conscious of the changes allowed for, and the benefits that can be reaped, by the rapid technological evolution that has been (and still is) characteristic of the recent many years. Knowledge sharing and related servicing activities that were non-existent for companies until a couple of years ago seem today to be the way to follow for companies that want to remain competitive. Although I am impressed by the situation brought about by modern technology, I have had the chance to realize that it is crucial for an organization to make certain that its employees are involved in the changes. A process that would be modified merely because of technological reasons, without involving the employees, would be doomed from the beginning. In other words, I have learned that no matter how good the intentions are, if the employees are not convinced to push in the same direction, the organization will not reach its destination. It is of primordial importance to recognize the impact of change on people. Another trap to avoid when getting enthusiastic about technological advances is the danger of entombing 1970's processes in new millennium technology. One change rarely comes alone, and the need to realize that simultaneous modifications have to be made is imperative to the entire change process and success of the organization.

In sum, I have learned that knowledge sharing across corporate cultures is not the result of any one person's effort or system- it comes from leadership, determination, focus and passion at every level of the organization. Furthermore, integrating a knowledge sharing system into an organization that has diverging corporate cultures is an incredibly complicated task. The elaborateness of the particularities apparent throughout any organization must be thoroughly understood before any hopes can be made that the venture will turn out to be successful.

7.2   Future of Knowledge Sharing

Following new tendencies in managerial theories and new environmental circumstances that allowed for modes of operation that would once have been considered as revolutionary, the typical organizational structure evolved considerably over the recent past. The great and diversified

conglomerates that once were in vogue were slowly dismantled, and the resulting smaller entities were sold off to continue operations independently, often competing against each other. This general phase of reorganization was not even completed when a new one began. New technologies suddenly made industries that had previously never been related appear as complementary, opening the door to new organizational synergies. An excellent example of such a case is the combination of electrical power delivery, telephone services, cable television, and Internet access within a single network, operated by one company. This redefinition of many industries has sparked a series of organizational re-mergers, in which independent companies once again joined their forces to gain a better foothold on the increasingly competitive market.

Having exploited external possibilities to better their situation, multinational organizations now frequently turn to alternative, internal possibilities for optimizing their operations. The growing tendency for companies to adopt knowledge sharing strategies that are supposed to transcend the totality of their business operations is a manifestation of this phenomenon. As organizations grow in size, and as they geographically spread more and more, making full use of the knowledge resources that the company has acquired or developed is now perceived as one of the main methods to make operations more efficient and to achieve better results. This generalized organizational globalization, however, has created new obstacles (such as the ones linked to differences in corporate cultures) to cross-unit communication and to knowledge sharing.

A series of follow-up studies that are outside the temporal scope of this book will be necessary, if we hope to ever really know whether such manifestations are just corporate trends that come and go with consultants, or if they have come to stay. We have concentrated our attention on the interactions between corporate culture and knowledge sharing; there is a need for projects that would focus on the analysis of the links between knowledge sharing and other parameters, such as national cultures, languages or geographical hindrances. Studies of the general knowledge sharing situation of organizations that currently are in the process of implementing such a strategy, spanning over several years and involving the recurring measurement of selected parameters, would allow us to observe their actual evolution and to compare it with their original objectives.

Finally, it would be interesting to determine the intrinsic relevance

of knowledge sharing strategies and the relative return on the investments required by the development and implementation of knowledge sharing systems. A research type that could yield such results would compare the medium-term performance of a series of organizations operating within the same industry, some with a stated knowledge sharing strategy, some without. This research protocol could be applied to different industries, which would underline any difference in the degree of relevance of knowledge sharing processes for different sectors of activities, an interesting continuation of this book.

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Appendix

1. For how long have you had access to ISS Business Insight?

6–12 months	54%
3–6 months	14%
1–3 months	6%
Less than 1 month	0%
I do not have access	26%

2. How often do you access Business Insight?

Never	38%
Very rarely (approximately once every quarter)	4%
Rarely (approximately once a month)	20%
Frequently (approximately once a week)	28%
Daily (every day – or every time I turn on my computer)	10%

2A. *If never or very rarely:* Why don't you use Business Insight more:

There is no information of interest to myself or my organization	3%
The information is in English	4%
I don't have time	16%
I don't have access	59%
The system is never updated	2%
My country has a poor connection to IBI and it takes up too much time to be connected	6%
I do not have a need for the kind of information that is available on the system	4%
The system is confusing and difficult to use and navigate in	6%

2B. *If rarely, frequently or daily:* What are the reasons for using Business Insight:

To follow the share price	6%
To keep me updated on what is happening internationally	12%
To follow the corporate news	13%
To use the Yellow Pages	14%
To follow corporate policies and procedures	9%

Continued from the previous page

To access corporate manuals and toolboxes	14%
To monitor the international projects and communities	7%
To find information about concepts and best business practices	9%
To find general information which I can use in my daily work	11%
To find information to be inspired by	5%
I don't really see the contents, but my PC automatically starts-up the system	0%

2C. What is your overall impression of Business Insight:

Very positive	17%
Positive	53%
Neutral	28%
Negative	2%
Very negative	0%

2D. Which of the following statements illustrates your personal attitude towards IBI:

I think the system is quite good and useful	46%
I think the initiative is good but the system should be improved	53%
I think the system is a mess and I doubt I will ever use it	1%

2E. How do you value each of the following categories in Business Insight –
concerning the quality and availability of the information presented:

Share price	19%	37%	25%	4%	15%
News	17%	56%	14%	6%	7%
Yellow Pages	20%	23%	35%	11%	11%
Links	3%	32%	41%	7%	17%
Concepts and Cases	13%	42%	33%	2%	10%
Manuals and Toolboxes	19%	45%	23%	4%	9%
Projects and Communities	6%	39%	33%	7%	15%
People and Organization	6%	34%	43%	5%	12%
Strategy and Performance	6%	37%	38%	7%	12%
Topic forum	3%	9%	48%	9%	21%
Search function	8%	23%	32%	18%	19%

NOTES   (1) very positive, (2) positive, (3) neutral, (4) negative, (5) don't know.

2F. How do you evaluate Business Insight on the following:

Connectivity	10%	46%	23%	17%	4%
User friendliness	6%	31%	30%	31%	2%
Structure	5%	33%	38%	23%	1%

Continued from the previous page

Design	6%	29%	41%	22%	2%
Contents	5%	56%	32%	6%	1%
Response time	6%	44%	29%	20%	1%
Navigation	2%	28%	38%	30%	2%
Speed	5%	38%	30%	24%	3%
Functionality	6%	27%	40%	22%	5%

NOTES   (1) very positive, (2) positive, (3) neutral, (4) negative, (5) don't know.

2G. How often do you log-on to the system by using your password and user-id?

Always (whenever I am on the system)	12%
When needed (whenever I have to access secured information)	51%
Never – why:	
– I don't have a password and user-id	26%
– I can't remember my password and user-id	6%
– I don't need to access secured information	5%

3. How well has BI been communicated internally within the organization:

Very well	6%
Well	21%
Neutral	17%
Poor	18%
Very poor	7%
I haven't received any communication about BI at all, and I can therefore not answer the question!	31%

Knowledge Sharing in the ISS Group

4. How do you view international knowledge sharing within the ISS group in general?

Very good	7%
Good	14%
Neutral	48%
Poor	20%
Very poor	11%

4A. What do you think is the main obstacle for International Knowledge Sharing within the group:

Culture	8%
Language	13%

Continued from the previous page

Personal interest and priorities	11%
IT and Connectivity issues	8%
Time	15%
Focus on our own financial results and not on exchanging information	9%
Not a local priority (what people do outside my country is of no interest to me)	7%
No rewards for sharing knowledge	3%
No or limited buy-in from management internationally	4%
No or limited buy-in from management locally	13%
No or limited resources centrally	4%
No or limited resources locally	3%
No or limited international agenda (e.g. international customers or projects)	1%