

# CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN THE PROVISION OF FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICES IN SHELTERED HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY

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As the population ages, an increasing number of vulnerable older people are choosing to live in some sort of home, including sheltered housing, extra care sheltered housing and residential care homes. The needs of older people are constantly changing and there is need for long term support. Older people living in sheltered housing with complex needs require access to services with a network of different types of support. Floating support, an initiative by the UK Department of Communities and Local Government through Supporting People Programme, aims to aid people with complex needs and prevent homelessness. Effective sharing of knowledge between supporting housing providers and adult social services can be established through knowledge sharing initiatives. This paper aims to identify the factors that are critical for effective knowledge sharing in providing floating support services for the elderly in sheltered housing. The main contribution of this paper is an extensive review of literature on floating support and critical success factors to knowledge sharing. This paper concludes that trust, motivation, effective communication, shared mindsets, leadership and training are critical for effective knowledge sharing in providing floating support in sheltered housing for the elderly.

Keywords: floating support, knowledge management, sheltered housing.

## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management is not only about transferring tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, it also involves creating repositories of knowledge and best practices, which is to be shared, applied and used to resolve problems and challenges. In the process of improving business and services, knowledge sharing has been used to communicate, exchange and transmit knowledge both internally and externally. Organizations are now realizing that their true value and strength lies in the intellectual capital of their staff. Knowledge sharing is the communication of all types of knowledge, which includes explicit and tacit knowledge, the “know-how” and “know-who” (Hansen 2002). Essentially, knowledge sharing is a process of capturing an individual or organization’s expertise and disseminating it to where it’s needed to produce returns and results for the individual and organization (Krogh *et al.*, 2000 and Lee 2001). It is the exchange of experience, thoughts and events, with a view to gaining more understanding of the phenomenon.

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In construction management, the application of knowledge sharing has a significant effect on productivity, improvement and quality assurance. Love *et al.*, (1998) indicated that a major contributory factor to the industry's poor performance has been found to be its fragmented nature, which in turn has resulted in a lack of coordination and integration between the different disciplines involved in various stages of the project. Construction project in this context is the adaptation and conversion of the home of vulnerable elderly in sheltered housing through the service known as floating support.

Floating support services provide older people living in sheltered housing with support that encourages independence. The support offered includes arranging for aids and adaptations to their own home; advice about other housing options; help with accessing welfare benefits, homecare and handyperson services and links to befriending initiatives and community alarm services. Consequently, in the context of this paper, floating support is the provision of aids and adaptations to the vulnerable elderly individuals whose lives in sheltered housing to enable them live independently. Sharples *et al.* (2002) in their study highlighted difficulties surrounding information and knowledge sharing between the floating support worker and other inter-professional and interagency in providing for example aid and adaptation for the elderly in sheltered housing. Hence, there is a need for discipline knowledge sharing practices that will direct all efforts to improve quality in all stages, from design to handover in order to meet the requirements within the time constraint, budget and to the client specifications. This can be achieved thorough effect knowledge sharing culture.

It is thought that there has been no empirical research on the critical success factors that are necessary for knowledge sharing between the agencies involved in providing floating support services to the elderly in sheltered housing. The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss the critical success factors that are essential for effective sharing of knowledge between the floating support workers and adult social services, for effective delivery of floating support services for the elderly in sheltered housing. The paper begins by examining the field of knowledge sharing and factors that influence knowledge sharing. The concept of floating support is then introduced and finally, drawing on the literature reviewed, a series of the critical factors of knowledge sharing that help effective delivery of floating support in sheltered housing are presented and some conclusions offered.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Knowledge sharing: the definition**

Knowledge management is emerging as an important concept for organizations to effectively preserve and manage valuable knowledge, in order to improve productivity and competitiveness. Nonaka (1995) defines knowledge as a justified belief that increases an entity's capacity for effective action, while Xiong and Deng (2008) views it as the combination of experience; values and expert insight that help evaluate and incorporate new information and experience. Hence, knowledge is the skills, intuitions and experiences that could influence decision. It is believed that the effective use of knowledge in businesses and collaboration amongst employees is the key to organizational success and contributes to the theory of knowledge management. Many authors have attempted to define the term KM in different context. According to Egbu (2001) it is the process whereby "knowledge is captured, stored, stored, shared and transferred, exploited to meet the need of an organization".

Knowledge sharing has been presented in the literature (Ryu *et al.*, 2007 and Probst *et al.* 2000) as effective dissemination of knowledge and as key for improving organizational performance, productivity and competitiveness. Hansen (2002) described knowledge sharing as the receipt of information, know-how and feedback regarding a product or procedure. It is believed that employees' knowledge would not be successfully exploited if knowledge sharing is overlooked. However, Nonaka (1995) argues that efficient knowledge sharing depends on the willingness of individuals to identify the knowledge they possess and to share it when required. Therefore, knowledge sharing in the context of this paper is the exchange of expertise, experiences, information and the verbal communication between the floating support worker and the adult social services for the effective delivery of floating support services. Knowledge sharing between agencies in providing floating support, is believed to be a useful approach to facilitate effective communication between the agencies, thereby creating a common understanding of organization norms (Sharples *et al.* 2002).

## **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

Many authors have attempted to draw up a comprehensive list of critical success factors for successful implementation of knowledge sharing in different study contexts. Bishop *et al.* (2008) in their study identified leadership, rewards, information technology, communication and culture as the important critical factors for effective knowledge sharing in a UK-based construction industry. Similarly, Alawi *et al.* (2007) in their study of organizational culture identified, five(5) critical success factors for effective knowledge sharing practices to be trust, communication between staff, Information system, reward system and organizational structure.

Furthermore, Hung *et al.* (2005) in their study of a pharmaceutical organization, identified leadership of senior management, information technology, reward and motivation, organizational culture and structure and training to be the critical success factors for effective utilization of knowledge sharing in the organization. Other writers have also identified, based on various study contexts, different critical success factors that can aid and lead to effective knowledge sharing between individuals in an organization. While there are some similarities in the studies, they cannot be generalized.

## **FLOATING SUPPORT: WHAT IS IT?**

Different terms have been used to describe floating support services including resettlement, tenancy sustainment, stand alone, support services and housing support (Bevan and Rugg 2006). Floating support came into force following the launch of Supporting People Programme in April 2003. It is a UK central government initiative, through the local housing authorities, which help people to secure and maintain a home. The purpose of floating support service is to sustain a tenancy through the development of independent living skills. Floating support has been defined as a service that provides housing related support to vulnerable adults to enable them to maintain their independence in their own home (Douglas *et al.*, 1998).

In addition, Crellen (2004) purported, that whilst floating support prevents problems that can lead to hospitalization, institutional care or homelessness. It is also intended to help with the transition to independent living for those leaving hospital and respite institutions. However, Lovatt and Whitehead (2006) argue that floating support is capable of providing support tailored to the needs of the individual, but it is difficult to

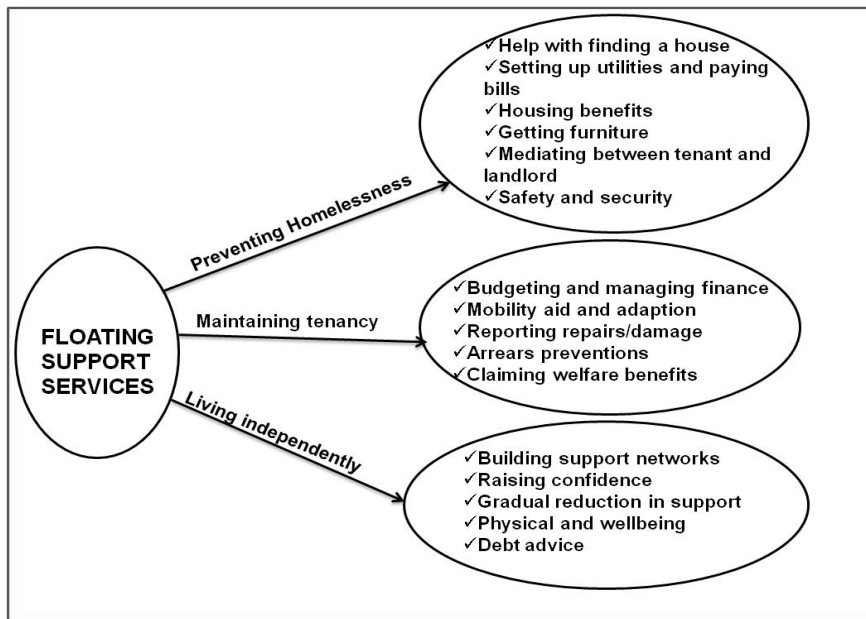


Figure 1: Floating support activities in sheltered housing for the elderly

meet these in a single approach, as individuals have diverse need. The defining feature is that floating support is attached to an individual and not the property and ‘float off’ after a period of time (Quilgars 2000).

In summary, floating support is a flexible way of providing support to residents of sheltered housing via their individual care and support plan. The core floating support services in sheltered housing are shown in figure 1. It aims to support vulnerable old people living in a sheltered housing or on their own to maintain their tenancy and to live independently.

## BENEFITS OF FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICE

One of the benefits of floating support is that it adopts a ‘holistic’ approach to an individual’s needs and can provide access to a vast range of other services (Sharples *et al.* 2002). Whilst floating support respond flexibly to individual need and prevents crises or emergencies, it also helps in reducing housing management problems associated with rent arrears, abandonment and evictions. Jones *et al.*, (2006) state that floating support provides services in ways that are cost effective. It involves minimal resources, contained staff costs and provides support that is balanced to the individual needs and local circumstances. Similarly, Pleace and Quilgars (2003) state that it can help to create sustainable communities through increasing choice in housing provision and preventing neighbourhood disputes from escalating. However, Riseborough and Fletcher (2004) in their study, argue that while floating support can be an effective way of sustaining tenancies and meeting people’s housing-related support needs, a range of factors can influence their success, including sufficient support, location, social networks, individual motivation, collaboration between agency and timing of interventions.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper reports a study which is part of an on-going research on “Critical success factors of knowledge sharing practices in the provision of floating support service in

sheltered housing for the elderly”. It begins by reviewing relevant literature from journal, textbook, government publications, conference papers and research papers to capture an understanding of floating support, knowledge management and knowledge sharing. The aim is to gain a clearer understanding on the key concepts in order to pave the way for the identification and discussions of the critical success factors for knowledge sharing. Existing studies on critical success factors were reviewed and discussed.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Different authors have noted and identified in diverse contexts, the critical success factors that arguably aid the successful implementation of knowledge sharing in organizations. However, in social housing context, the factors listed and discussed below can be seen to be critical to effective implementation of knowledge sharing.

### **Management leadership and support**

Management leadership plays a key role in ensuring the successful implementation of knowledge sharing (Kyriakidou 2004). It is also seen as an essential driver for business activity in an organization. Thus, Kanungo (1998) argues that to develop the much-desired adaptive capabilities within the organization to succeed, leaders should play an active role model to exhibit the desired behaviour for knowledge sharing. Wong (2005) states that leadership roles such as steering the change effort, motivation and maintaining employees’ morale creates a culture that encourages effective knowledge sharing in an organization. As with the provision of floating support, the support and leadership of the senior management could be crucial for the effective sharing of knowledge between agencies.

### **Motivation**

Some studies, for example (Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland, 2004) noted different effects of motivation on knowledge sharing. Much of an organization’s most valuable intellectual asset is embedded in the minds of its employees (Amar 2004), and knowledge sharing can be managed only through enthusiasm that excites the deepest parts of the employees’ minds. Subsequently, if employees are not motivated to share their knowledge, no amount of investment, infrastructure and technological intervention will make it effective. Furthermore, Wong (2005) is of the view that teamwork, creativity, contribution, and innovative solutions are criteria that could be considered in a knowledge sharing implementation. Hence, motivation could be argued as one of the critical success factors to the successful implementation of knowledge sharing between the floating support officer and the supporting agency, to effectively deliver housing management services.

### **Reward and recognition**

Reward and recognition have been identified as key for effective knowledge sharing in organizations (Al-Alawi *et al.* 2007 and Xiong and Deng 2008). Individuals working in an organization expect to be recognized and rewarded for sharing their expertise with others within the organization. Therefore, it would be naive to assume floating support officers will be willing to share their knowledge with other agencies without considering the implication and benefits of their action. Knowledge sharing between floating support officer and other agencies will strengthen, if they are recognized and rewarded for the work they do to help individual living in sheltered housing to maintain their tenancy and independence. Organizations need to evaluate the importance of recognition and reward for effective collaboration and sharing of

best practice. The idea is to introduce processes in which sharing information and communication are encouraged and indeed recognized and rewarded.

### **Trust and relation**

Many authors for example (Zakaria *et al.* 2004 and Al-Alawi *et al.* 2007) have indicated that trust and good relations among individuals in an organization are essential attributes to the successful sharing of knowledge. Likewise Dulaimi (2007) found that mutual trust can facilitate knowledge sharing and can then increase effective collaboration between individuals in an organization. Hansen (2002), also states that pre-existing relationships among individuals in an organization is a factor that can aid easy knowledge sharing amongst individuals. Team members require the existence of trust in order to respond openly and share their knowledge (Politis 2003). Lack of trust between individuals in organization creates suspicion and scepticism, as not knowing the intentions of the other individual will not encourage knowledge sharing.

### **Communication and training between staff**

Some authors, such as Zakaria *et al.* (2004) and Xiong and Deng (2008) have indicated in their studies that effective communications, as well as training between staff are critical for effective knowledge sharing among individuals in an organization. Communication refers to interaction between individuals, including through oral conversations or body language to exchange ideas. In order for knowledge to be shared, the floating support officer needs to communicate with corresponding agencies to effectively deliver a housing management service. Training is usually provided to the employees and through such training they have a better understanding of the concept of knowledge sharing (Moffeff *et al.* 2003). It also provides a common language and perception of how they can define and think about knowledge (Wong 2005). Managing knowledge ensures that they can utilize the full potential and capabilities offered through communication, soft networking, peer learning and team building.

### **Technology and information system**

Technology and information systems play a major role for easy access of information and effectively spreading information from expert to novices (Goh 2002). Whitten *et al.* (2001) also described information systems as an arrangement of people, data and processes that interact to support daily operations, problem solving and decision making in organizations. Leug (2001) points that effective knowledge sharing between employees is dependent upon technology and information availability in the organization. In order to effectively share knowledge with different agencies, floating support workers are able to use information technology systems to facilitate knowledge sharing through knowledge repositories. Access to information technology systems enables expertise to be shared electronically. Artail (2006) states that technology and information can enable rapid search, access and retrieval of information; it supports collaboration and communication among organizational members to create and share knowledge within the organization.

### **Organizational structure**

An organizational structure provides a picture of organizational life. It also provides guidance in determining whom people interact with in conducting organizational tasks (Rapert and Wren 1998). Formal and centralized structures often dampen knowledge sharing successes, while a more flexible and informal structures facilitate it. Similarly, Gold *et al.* (2001) point out that formal organizational structure inhibits interactions

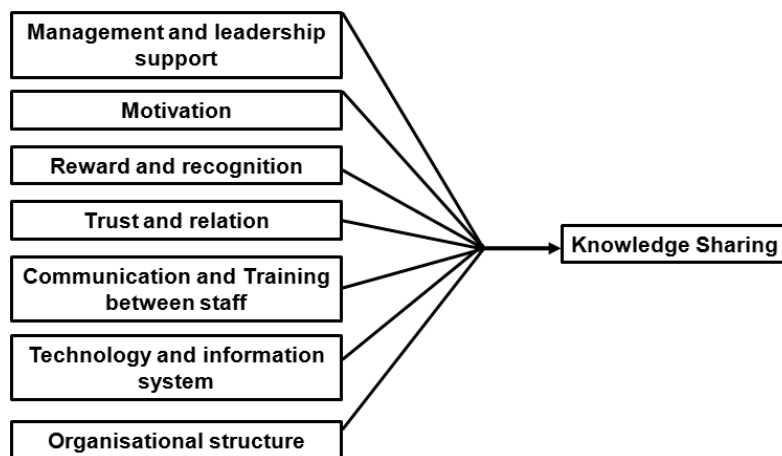


Figure 2: Critical success factors for knowledge sharing in the provision of floating support

among employees, yet those interactions are vital in the effective sharing of knowledge. Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland (2004) argued that knowledge sharing prospers with structures that support ease of information flow with fewer boundaries between divisions. Flexible and informal structures facilitate internal communication within an organization, enhance people's willingness to cultivate a critical attitude in interpretation of information, and encourage individual to share knowledge. Hence, a decentralized organizational structure encourages the collaborations between individuals in the organization, and thereby encourages individuals to share their knowledge.

## CONCLUSIONS

Organizations can benefit from recognizing and understanding the critical success factors that are crucial for effective knowledge sharing practices within an organization. The effective implementation of knowledge sharing among individuals within an organization is influenced by certain factors. Floating support workers combine their knowledge of individual clients' needs and circumstances with knowledge of and liaison with professionals in other services to facilitate an ordered service provision. Many studies have identified the critical success factors that could aid knowledge sharing within an organization. This paper has presented and discussed key critical success factors generated from literature reviews, which can arguably influence effective knowledge sharing in providing floating support for the elderly in sheltered housing. Without these critical factors, knowledge sharing practices within an organization will not be effective. Floating support is flexible in the variety and levels of support that it offers according to clients' differing needs. This flexibility allows and encourages interagency collaboration, acting as a bridge between services and co-ordinating the input among different service providers such as social, health and specialist support, who may not otherwise work together.

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