

Barriers to Knowledge Sharing During the Onboarding Process

Marta Szeluga-Romańska

Gdańsk University of Technology, Poland

msr@zie.pg.gda.pl

Abstract: Onboarding is understood as a process of the gradual integration of newcomers into two key dimensions: the professional role and the social dynamics of the organization. By definition, an onboarding process should be inclusive, aiming to provide the new employee with comprehensive organizational support to facilitate their swift and effective inclusion into both domains. This consists of the sharing of necessary procedural and explicit knowledge, as well as tacit and implicit knowledge. Ensuring an uninterrupted flow of knowledge sharing among all stakeholders—newcomers, experienced employees, and managers—is crucial for achieving successful onboarding, ultimately leading to full integration within the organization. However, various barriers may impede efficient knowledge sharing within the organizational context. The primary objective of this article is twofold: first, to identify and examine the barriers to effective knowledge sharing during onboarding, including the contextual factors influencing their emergence, with attention given to gender and positional perspectives; and second, to outline the most effective solutions to mitigate these barriers. The theoretical framework guiding this investigation is a narrative summary, serving as an initial step towards a more comprehensive systematic review. It is based on literature review specifically selected for its relevance to the onboarding process. The findings from this narrative summary aim to assist organizations in designing onboarding strategies and associated human resource practices that mitigate potential obstacles to knowledge sharing, thereby enhancing the onboarding experience.

Keywords: Onboarding, HRM, Knowledge sharing, Barriers to knowledge sharing

1. What is Onboarding?

Organisational onboarding can be defined as a deliberate, structured, and strategically designed process undertaken by an organization to facilitate the effective and systematic integration of newly hired employees into the multifaceted professional and social environment of the workplace (Szeluga-Romańska, 2024). In the professional dimension, this means meticulous familiarisation of the new employee with their duties, as well as with the workplace, necessary tools, devices and systems. In the social dimension, getting to know the organisation takes much more time as the new employee is thrown into multidimensional, previously formed social life – into interpersonal relations, overt and covert patterns of accepted behaviour, specific language (sometimes jargon or slang), coalitions and oppositions to specific people, groups, authorities and many other complex social phenomena that always appear in the organisation. The dominant function of onboarding process entails the fluent incorporation of employees with diverse competencies, physical or mental requirements, and socio-demographic backgrounds ‘on board’. It is important to recognize that onboarding involves assimilating employees into a complex organizational system composed of both visible and intangible elements, like e.g. several types of organisational knowledge. Klein and Heuser (2008) claim that the onboarding process reveals immediate results that they refer specifically to developing new knowledge and better understanding or absorbing the substantive content of socialization processes. Additionally, according to Becker and Bish (2021), it also influences the employee’s short-term and long-term behaviours and decisions. Each of the time perspectives carries certain specific psychological and social effects for the employee. If the onboarding process negatively impacts employees, it primarily results in a lack of commitment to their assigned tasks and, consequently, an increased likelihood of resignation. Ellis *et al.* (2017) observed that in cases where onboarding is inadequately conducted, up to 17% of newly hired employees leave the organization within the first three months. This outcome is detrimental both for employees who must seek alternative employment and undergo new recruitment, selection, and adaptation processes, and for the organization, which risks losing valuable talents and must allocate both material and non-material resources to recruit a new employee again. Conversely, when onboarding is effectively implemented, it contributes to greater job satisfaction, enhanced organizational commitment, reduced turnover, improved performance levels, increased career effectiveness, and lower stress levels (Bauer, 2012).

2. Knowledge Sharing During Onboarding and why it is Important

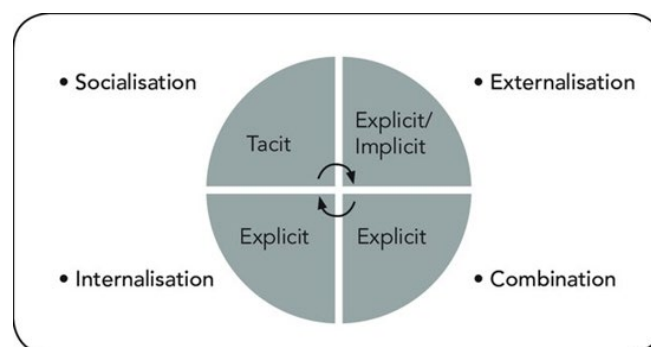
The process of sharing knowledge is based on mutual exchange of knowledge between people and should lead to synergistic co-creation of the new one (van den Hooff and de Ridder, 2004). Onboarding, to be efficient at emerging newly hired into professional and social dimensions of the organisation, requires particularly intensive knowledge sharing (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Haave *et al.*, 2020). Initially, those processes should fluently appear among the closest circle of stakeholders: the newcomer, the team they join and the manager(s) as all they have common aim and resulting profits. In the next steps, knowledge sharing should

happen in every professional activity, the social situations and among all the engaged participants. Jeske and Olson (2022) claim that learning opportunities appear in several ways. They separate the onboarding process into the period of up to 3-months and then between 3 and 6 months of staying in the organization. Firstly, as they stated, there is an opportunity to learn for the employee and the team. It can be job shadowing, peer coaching or clarifying expectations as well as understanding the integration of processes and practices across departments. The second possibility to learn is for the managers and covers the issues like development of goals or giving feedback on progress. Thirdly, the learning opportunities appear for the organizations. Those include perceiving individual's impact and contribution to the organization or the answer to question: "What new knowledge emerged that needs to be integrated and shared across the organisation?" (Jeske and Olson, 2022, p.66).

Ipe (2003) adds more dimensions to the issue of factors influencing knowledge sharing between individuals that interrelated create favourable knowledge sharing environment: the nature of knowledge (considering tacit and explicit knowledge, and value of knowledge), motivation to share (comprising of internal and external factors), opportunities to share (formal and informal), and the culture of the work environment. The nature of knowledge means the division into tacit (Polanyi, 1966) and explicit knowledge, where the first one is perceived as know-how that has to be possessed by individual experience, and the latter can be easily codified, transferred and stored. Considering the ease and possibilities of sharing explicit knowledge, Weiss (1999) proposed to divide it into Rationalized knowledge that is more standardized and general, independent of individuals and thus shared easier, and Embedded knowledge, which is more rooted in the context, more personalised, and therefore much more difficult to be shared. Particular types of knowledge can be highly valued by the individuals and the organizations, they can perceive themselves as the knowledge owners with adequate status or reputation. The knowledge sharing then becomes much more complex. Motivation to share knowledge is influenced by "[i]nternal factors [that] include the perceived power attached to the knowledge and the reciprocity that results from sharing. External factors include relationship with the recipient and rewards for sharing" (Ipe, 2003, pp. 345-346). Formal opportunities to share knowledge are prepared and structured programs or technology-based systems. Most knowledge is shared during informal opportunities which means informal, face-to-face interactions, in the supportive atmosphere of trust, friendship and respect. What is the influence of culture(s) on knowledge sharing? "[T]he culture of the organization dictates to a fairly large extent how and what knowledge is valued, what kinds of relationships and rewards it encourages in relation to knowledge sharing, and the formal and informal opportunities that individuals have to share knowledge" (Ipe, 2003, pp. 352-353).

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996) proposed a model that clearly explains the creation and transfer of knowledge in organisations, which happens similarly during onboarding. It is expressed as a continuous, dynamic cycle consisting of four stages called SECI (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, Internalisation) (Table 1). As Faith and Seem (2018) explained in detail the process of Socialisation refers to the sharing of knowledge through direct, face-to-face interaction. Externalisation occurs when tacit knowledge—mentioned as the personal, experiential knowledge that individuals carry in their minds and which is often difficult to articulate—is transformed into explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge, in contrast, is codified, documented, and can be easily communicated and transferred to others. The Combination phase involves the integration and systematisation of various bodies of explicit knowledge, while Internalisation represents the process through which explicit knowledge is absorbed and converted into tacit knowledge by individuals through learning and practice.

Table 1: SECI model (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, Internalisation)



Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1996 adapted by Faith and Seem, 2018.

Bauer (2010) states that there are four building blocks of successful onboarding process which are called the Four C's: Compliance, Clarification, Culture and Connection. Each phase of the Four C's provides new kinds of knowledge – the first two are mostly connected to the professional dimension of the job position, while the other two focus on the social dimension. *Compliance* supports the new employee with basic regulations, legal or policy-related rules; *Clarification* adds job-related expectations; *Culture* provides both formal and informal norms; *Connection* introduces into interpersonal relationships and information networks to join and create. It seems that between the phases of Clarification and Culture is placed the beginning of the process of transferring implicit knowledge. The degree to which each organization integrates these four foundational components determines the overall structure of its onboarding strategy, leading to the classification of most firms into one of three distinct levels.

3. Method: A Narrative Summary

The objective of the study was to analyse the previous studies and identify barriers to knowledge sharing during the onboarding process, and the ways to overcome them. To review the proper existing literature, a narrative summary review was applied (Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Khangura *et al.*, 2012) in the form of a comprehensive web-based search. This research method is aimed at providing evidence-based knowledge in very limited time-scale and may be an initial step towards deepen systematic review. The themes that were searched: "knowledge sharing and onboarding", "barriers to knowledge sharing and onboarding" in Google Scholar electronic database. The publications covered the last 20 years and the search and analysis were done between 1. and 28. February 2025.

To fill the methodological procedures the steps proposed by Cumpston *et al.* (2024) were as followed: (1) Identification, (2) Screening, (3) Eligibility assessment, (4) Inclusion.

The initial screening Identified over 28 000 records but as lately revealed, most referred to onboarding process only, its structure, phases and practices, which was not the dominant searching expectation. Only the articles that either linked onboarding and knowledge sharing strategies, or explaining the barriers to knowledge sharing during onboarding were chosen (about 250 articles were left at this stage). To make such a choice, deepened Screening and the gradual process of their selection was needed. The next step, Eligibility assessment, helped in identification of doubled or irrelevant articles, and led to the final result of 18 most relevant articles. The last phase showed that 18 chosen articles Included into analysis were based on the inclusion criteria that covered the onboarding and knowledge sharing facilitators, and onboarding and barriers to knowledge sharing issues; excluded were the articles that focused only on the onboarding process.

4. Results and Discussion

The efficient onboarding means gaining at the end of the process the new employee who is fully prepared to their professional role and emerged in the organisational culture. The analysis of chosen articles proved that several examples of barriers to knowledge sharing in organisations depend highly on the profession researched and appear in the organisational specific context (e.g. Balali *et al.*, 2018; Brouwer *et al.*, 2024; Lima *et al.*, 2021; Solli-Sæther and Karlsen, 2014). That echoes the approach of Ipe (2003) who claims that the dominant barrier to knowledge transfer is the organisational culture and all its variants, like subcultures. As being strongly placed on social relations, it dictates visible and invisible norms, appreciated values, or communication schemes when, how and among whom knowledge is shared (or not).

Regardless of the specific influence of culture, there seem to be quite universal and eligible approaches that may clarify and systemize multiple areas of knowledge transfer hindrances. Bauer (2010) claims that during onboarding the newcomer learns different kinds of organizational knowledge gradually, according to the 4 C's concept (of Compliance, Clarification, Culture and Connection). Overlapping with those phases are groups of barriers identified by Balali *et al.* (2018) – *personal barriers* that are strongly connected to individual's features of character (both newcomers and organisational mentors); *interpersonal barriers* – appearing among newcomers, mentors and the community of employees; *process barriers* that are imposed by internal procedures, practices or by the organisation; *technical barriers* - caused by any piece of technology or other used tools. They clearly refer to the professional and the social dimension of any onboarding process.

Pitkänen (2020) proposes a bit different lens, however, they may also be applied universally. She defined generally three levels where the knowledge sharing problems during onboarding occur: *organisational level*, *team and manager level*, *newcomer level*. Depending on the specific organizational context, at each level there can appear barriers of any kind – referred to the human relations, communication flow, or access to resources

(e.g. Klein, Molloy and Brinsfield, 2012). Jeske and Olson (2022) add that “[i]t is important to review how onboarding can prevent potential attrition of new hires – by assessing which signals are being sent through the organisers, the interactions, and the representatives that show up (or do not). In summary then, a focus on the short-term needs of the employer and costs vs. the long-term interests of employees will risk undermining the success of onboarding, reducing the benefits, and potentially mutually rewarding learning opportunities for both new hires and the organisation” (pp. 71-72).

The understanding of several universal groups of barriers to knowledge transfer may support search for their solutions. That states the crucial question: how to overcome the barriers? Obviously, each profession may have both the barriers and their solutions very specified and strongly linked to their organizational and professional context. But there seem to be solutions possible to be used or being easily adapted to most organizations. The first proposal (1) could be focus on the importance of refined *onboarding experience* of the newcomer and the second proposal (2), linked to the aforementioned, conscious, systemic *uncertainty reduction*.

Proposal 1 is strongly based on Jeske and Olson’s (2022) perspective of the onboarding experience of the new employee. To create it as supportive and successful, there should be strict cooperation and effort within organisation, team, manager and the newcomer. That literally means high proactivity of all the stakeholders. There are elements of the onboarding process that can and should be structured and formalised. They arrange explicit organizational knowledge into newcomer-friendly way that makes it easier to absorb and start using it, minimising potential declines. But there are also elements that should be more individualised. That means intensive bi-directional flow of information, with particular focus on feedback. Jones (1986) calls them the *socialization tactics: institutionalized socialization and individualized socialization*. “The institutionalized tactics which consist of collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics provide newcomers with information that reduces the uncertainty inherent in early work experiences and reflects a structured and

formalized socialization process” (Saks and Gruman, 2017, p. 17). Individualized socialization tactics are rather informal, lack in structure and are random. Both socialization tactics create the newcomer’s experience enhancing to stay longer in the organization. That perspective links to Proposal 2 providing organizational actions that lead to reducing uncertainty of the newcomer. Saks and Gruman (2017) propose a conceptual model outlining a novel pathway to newcomer socialization, wherein socialization resources, personal resources, and job demands collectively influence newcomers’ work engagement and subsequent socialization outcomes. In the final phase of the onboarding process, the newly hired employee should possess a clear understanding of their value proposition. This aligns with the frameworks proposed by Bauer et al. (2007) and Van Maanen and Schein (1979), which emphasize the reduction of uncertainty through proactive information-seeking behaviors by newcomers from various organizational stakeholders. Similarly, Brouwer et al. (2024) highlight the significance of access to clear contractual information, essential resources, and effective communication as critical components contributing to successful onboarding. In those actions also mentoring may help.

Any process of onboarding is expected to provide organizational support in both: its professional and the social dimensions. At its end, the newcomer should not only understand and be able to play their job role, but feel that *belongs* to the team and organization. It follows also the concept of Klein, Molloy and Brinsfield (2012) that accentuate a continuum of psychological bonds¹ the employees proceed in the organizations. The type of bond change along with the employee’s psychological involvement growth. The initial one is *acquiescence* that is characterized by low task significance, minimal effort to be put in the tasks and indifferent attitude. The second bond on the continuum is *instrumental*, when the calculated acceptance of the bond exists. Both bonds are based on the attitude “have to”. The next appearing bond is *commitment* with the employee’s volition, dedication and responsibility for the tasks. And the last step in the continuum of engagement is *identification* when the employee merges oneself with the target, puts high concern and effort into the task and becomes involved. The latter two forms of commitment are associated with a ‘want to’ attitude. This prompts an important question: what are the potential outcomes of effective and engaging onboarding processes? Specifically, can such practices foster a sense of identification of the newcomers with both their assigned tasks and the organization as a whole? Undoubtedly, this stage is of critical importance to any organization and should be followed by thoughtful preparation of each onboarding process.

¹They reconceptualize employee’s commitment as a distinct form of bond, characterized by intentional dedication and a sense of responsibility toward a specific target – in the literature there are also distinguished bonds that do not follow the target.

5. Limitations and Further Research

he search and analysis are limited to just 18 articles but they state a first, important step towards more elaborate systematic review. The topic seems to be fundamental if any organization expects the newcomer to become an efficient and engaged part of their team. Further research could be more profiled to different types of organizations: business, public and non-profit and conducted in the quantitative form of a survey.

Also, good practices of knowledge transfer are crucial not just during onboarding period but may have also relevant long-term results, particularly if the organization is attempting to build a KLC culture (the synergy of knowledge, learning, and collaboration). The KLC approach is crucial in organizations based on knowledge. The investigations of Kucharska and Bedford (2020) and Kucharska (2021a-b) proved that to gain organizational intelligence development tacit knowledge sharing is essential, which happens when trust appears in KLC culture. "Moreover, the mistakes acceptance component of learning culture supporting trial-error-learnings is tremendous for knowledge-sharing processes, organizational intelligence (change adaptability), and innovativeness" (Kucharska and Bedford, 2024, p. 27). During onboarding process there is usually higher mistakes acceptance for the obvious reason of its character as an initial, introductory period, which also assumes the trial-error learning. Although it is generally well understood that it is impossible to learn without mistakes, the acceptance of mistakes decreases after onboarding process. Ellis et al. (2014) claim that the organization is able to learn from mistakes if there appears communal reflexivity – the actions collegially created in particular context. KLC approach well supports trial-error learning in organizations (Kucharska and Bedford, 2024; Kucharska and Szeluga-Romańska, 2025).

6. In Conclusion

While knowledge sharing during onboarding is undoubtedly beneficial for organizations, it is often hindered by various challenges that manifest across social, technical, and organizational dimensions. These barriers, shaped also by both tangible and intangible cultural norms, can be difficult to overcome. However, deliberate efforts to design the onboarding experience and implement practices aimed at reducing uncertainty may foster an organizational culture conducive to more open and effective knowledge exchange. Such a culture not only enhances knowledge sharing but also fosters newcomers' commitment and strengthens their identification with the organization as a whole.

Ethics declaration: There was no need to receive any permissions in writing this paper. No ethical clearance was needed.

AI declaration: I have not used an AI tool in writing the paper.

References

- Balali, S., Steinmacher, I., Annamalai, U. et al. (2018), Newcomers' Barriers. . . Is That All? An Analysis of Mentors' and Newcomers' Barriers in OSS Projects. *Computer Supported Coop Work* 27, pp. 679–714. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-018-9310-8>.
- Bauer, T.N., Bodner, T., Erdogan, B., Truxillo, D.M. and Tucker, J.S. (2007), "Newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization: a meta-analytic review of antecedents, outcomes, and methods", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92 No. 3, pp. 707-721.
- Bauer, T. N. (2010), *Onboarding new employees: Maximizing success*. SHRM foundation's effective practice guideline series. USA: SHRM Foundation.
- Becker, K., Bish, A. (2021), A framework for understanding the role of unlearning in onboarding, *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, 00730, ISSN 1053-4822, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100730>.
- Brouwer, H. J., Griffiths, S., Jacob, A., Ricks, T. A., Schulz, P., Lavell, S., ... Jacob, E. (2024), What are the facilitators and barriers experienced by sessional academics during the process of onboarding: a scoping review. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 46(6), pp. 585–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2024.2340987>.
- Campbell, M., Katikireddi, S. V., Sowden, A., McKenzie, J. E., and Thomson, H. (2018), Improving Conduct and Reporting of Narrative Synthesis of Quantitative Data (ICONS-Quant): protocol for a mixed methods study to develop a reporting guideline. *BMJ open*, 8(2), e020064.
- Cumpston M., Lasserson T., Flemyng E., Page M.J. (2024), Chapter III: Reporting the review [last updated August 2023]. In: Higgins JPT, Thomas J, Chandler J, Cumpston M, Li T, Page MJ, Welch VA (editors). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* version 6.5. Cochrane.
- Ellis, S., Crette, B., Anseel, F., and Lievens, F. (2014), Systematic reflection: Implications for learning from failures and successes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23, pp. 67–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413504106>.
- Ellis, A. M., Nifadkar, S. S., Bauer, T. N., Erdogan, B. (2017), Newcomer adjustment: Examining the role of managers' perception of newcomer proactive behaviour during organizational socialization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102, pp. 993–1001.

- Faith, C. K., and Seeam, A. K. (2018), Knowledge sharing in academia: A case study using a SECI model approach. *Journal of Education*, 9(1), pp. 53-70.
- Haave, H., Vold, T., and Kaloudis, A. (2020), The importance of tacit and explicit knowledge transfer in an onboarding programme. In *ECKM 2020 21st European Conference on Knowledge Management* (p. 300). Academic Conferences International Limited.
- IPE, M. (2003), Knowledge Sharing in Organizations: A Conceptual Framework. *Human Resource Development Review*, 2(4), pp. 337-359.
- Jeske, D. and Olson, D. (2022), "Onboarding new hires: recognising mutual learning opportunities", *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 63-76. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWAM-04-2021-0036>.
- Jones, G.R. (1986), "Socialization tactics, self-efficacy, and newcomers' adjustments to organizations", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 262-279.
- Khangura, S., Konnyu, K., Cushman, R. et al. (2012), "Evidence summaries: the evolution of a rapid review approach", *Syst Rev* 1, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2046-4053-1-10>.
- Klein, H. J., Heuser, A. E. (2008), The learning of socialization content: A framework for researching orientating practices. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 27, pp. 279–336.
- Klein, H. J., Molloy, J. C., & Brinsfield, C. T. (2012). Reconceptualizing workplace commitment to redress a stretched construct: Revisiting assumptions and removing confounds. *Academy of management review*, 37(1), pp. 130-151.
- Kucharska, W. (2021a), Leadership, culture, intellectual capital and knowledge processes for organizational innovativeness across industries: the case of Poland. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 22(7), pp. 121-141. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIC-022021-0047>.
- Kucharska, W. (2021b), Do mistakes acceptance foster innovation? Polish and US cross-country study of tacit knowledge sharing in IT. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 25(11), pp. 105-128. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-12-2020-0922>.
- Kucharska, W., and Bedford, D.A.D. (2020), Love your mistakes! – They help you adapt to change. How do knowledge, collaboration and learning cultures foster organizational intelligence? *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 33(7), pp. 1329–1354. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-02-2020-0052>.
- Kucharska, W., Bedford, D. (2024), The KLC Cultures' Synergy Power, Trust, and Tacit Knowledge for Organizational Intelligence. *Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management*, 22(2), pp. 18-35.
- Kucharska, W., and Szeluga-Romanska, M. (2025), How can the double bias of mistakes block organizational intelligence? Gender and position analysis. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.
- Lima, R. R., Ekwoge, O., Bonifácio, B., Cunha, R., Barbosa, H., and Rocha, A. C. O. (2021), Overcoming Knowledge-Sharing Barriers that Affect Software Quality: An Experience Report. In *Proceedings of the XX Brazilian Symposium on Software Quality*, pp. 1-9.
- Pitkänen, A. (2020). Knowledge Management during Onboarding Process in a mid-sized SaaS Company.
- Polanyi, M. (1966), *The tacit dimension*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul.
- Solli-Sæther, H., and Karlsen, J. T. (2014), Enablers and barriers of knowledge sharing for offshore outsource ISD project: A case study. *International Journal of Information Technology Project Management (IJITPM)*, 5(2), 44-59.
- Szeluga-Romańska, M. (2024), Inclusive onboarding process and the specific organizational culture—a theoretical outline of the problem. *Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie/Politechnika Śląska, (200 Nowoczesne praktyki zarządzania= Modern Management Practices)*, pp. 495-503.
- Van den Hooff, B. and de Ridder, J.A. (2004), "Knowledge sharing in context: the influence of organizational commitment, communication climate and CMC use on knowledge sharing", *Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol. 8 No. 6, pp. 117-130.
- Van Maanen, J. and Schein, E.H. (1979), "Toward a theory of organizational socialization", in Staw, B.M. (Ed.), *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 1, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, pp. 209-264.
- Weiss, L. (1999), Collection and connection: The anatomy of knowledge sharing in professional service. *Organization Development Journal*, 17(4), pp. 61-72.