

Knowledge Sharing & Learning Communities



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“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself” - Henry Ford



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Practical
recommendations

01 INTRODUCTION

Zuyd's structure

Zuyd University (Zuyd) is an institute for higher professional education with locations in Maastricht, Heerlen, and Sittard. Zuyd has structured its education on three pillars, namely training and education for professionals, research for companies and institutions, and education for students. Zuyd University's mission is "Professionals develop themselves with Zuyd". Because they believe that professionals are responsible for their development, they use the words 'developing with', which refers to an interaction between the school and the professionals. They live by the following three principles: a passion for the development of students, integrating research into education, and embedding education in practice. Zuyd has about 1700 employees and pays attention to the personal development of its staff. The employees, both teachers and support staff, are spread out across those different locations. Additionally, each employee works for a certain domain within Zuyd.

Zuyd's challenge

Zuyd aims for a collaborative culture in which knowledge is shared, cooperation is every-day business and learning goes hand in hand with these. Within higher education, limited sharing of knowledge among employees is a common topic. Our clients have observed that among employees **within** the domains there is limited collaboration, in contrast to the rich knowledge sharing within the academies. Also, the

knowledge sharing and collaboration **outside** of the employees' domain and location is something that is also desired to be enhanced by our clients. By focusing on knowledge sharing and collaboration between different domains and locations, Zuyd hopes to bring its learning community to a next level. Building on the client's observations and desired to further develop knowledge sharing at Zuyd, we draw the following research question:

How can Zuyd University promote knowledge sharing between different departments and locations, and what structures are needed to enable the knowledge sharing?

Learning community: *It is a group of people who share common academic goals and attitudes and meet semi-regularly to collaborate and share knowledge with each other to create sustainable processes*



01 INTRODUCTION

Starting point of this project

Employees within Zuyd are, to our knowledge, willing to share their knowledge and collaborate. However, our clients have discovered that the organisation currently does not have the proper structures to enable employees to share their knowledge and practices beyond their own domain. The platform that is in place now, ZuydNet, is not extensively used by employees. In practice, the absence of a supportive structure leads to unawareness about the work in other domains, their research and projects. This unawareness, in turn, seems to lead to multiple domains doing similar or even double work. This adds up to unnecessary workload of employees, which is even without that high. By combining and sharing the knowledge across different domains and locations, Zuyd might achieve greater efficiency and a greater knowledge-sharing community. Thus, a structure to promote and enable knowledge sharing across the entire organisation is needed. The challenge of sharing knowledge beyond domains, crystallised during the outbreak of Covid-19. The sudden change to online education,

online collaboration, and online research made clear that even without the pandemic there was something missing in the tool-kit of Zuyds knowledge community. Zuyd was moving toward a more diverse way of learning, namely blended learning, and thereby the differences and similarities between domains and locations became more visible. During this process, it became clear that employees were doing parallel work which led to frustration among employees. The clients hypothesised that a more enhanced knowledge-sharing structure within Zuyd could prevent parallel work in the future and enhance the learning community.

Therefore, looking at the current system of knowledge sharing at Zuyd University, the main objective of this project is to advise Zuyd on how to develop a supportive structure to enhance the learning community and knowledge sharing across different domains and locations. Achieving this objective will prevent parallel work among the staff, reduce their workload, and increase the feeling of a learning community within Zuyd.



02 HOW ARE WE TACKLING THIS?

To gain a full insight of knowledge sharing within Zuyd and to provide recommendations, we used a threefold approach: **literature review**, **employee interview** and **expert interview**.

For our literature review, we made use of academic literature. Based on our research question, we first made a list of key words and concepts (see appendix 1). Starting from there we then started searching for relevant sources. We used Google Scholar and UM library for finding academic literature. Additionally, we used a snowball technique. This technique allows finding relevant literature by looking at the references of previously selected articles. After searching the literature, we then evaluated and selected the sources which were the most relevant to our research objectives. For the evaluation of the sources, we looked at the key theories, methods, results, conclusions, strengths and weaknesses of the papers as well as at their credibility. We looked at over 40 papers and selected the most relevant ones to Zuyd

context. For the outline and structure of our literature section, we used a thematic approach based on the following themes: knowledge silos, knowledge sharing, and learning communities.

For primary data collection, we conducted employee interviews. To do so, we first developed an interview guide after reviewing the literature relevant to our research topic.

The interview guide was built on our research aim and the research questions. Our questions in the guide were open ended, semi-structured, and focused on the themes of knowledge sharing, knowledge silos and learning communities. To reach the potentially relevant interviewees, our contact person at Zuyd and two of our team members who were already alumni at the University proposed a list of the interviewees. In addition, we used a snowball sampling technique.



02 HOW ARE WE TACKLING THIS?

Overall, we contacted 25 Zuyd employees via email. As a result, ten employees gave a positive response to take part in the interview. We sent a reminder to the other employees; however, no further interviews were scheduled. Of the ten interviewees, six of them were teachers/lecturers, three from the back office and one was an educational innovator.

The interviewees were working at different locations of Zuyd. On average, each interview lasts for 30 minutes. Each interview was conducted by two team members - one was asking the interview questions and the other was taking notes. All the interviews for this study were conducted between 04-05-2022 and 18-05-2022. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded based on the main themes of our study for the purpose of analysis (see appendix 2 for interview guide and appendix 3 for coding scheme). For the coding, we combined inductive and deductive approaches in order to reach the depth of the data.

In addition to employee interviews, we conducted five expert interviews with the academic staff of Maastricht University between 04 and 18 May 2022. Of five interviews, two of them were conducted in person and three online. The purpose of the expert interviews was to understand how and why knowledge sharing is done in an academic setting among the same and/or different domains, and also to gain a professional view on how appropriate our problem is framed. Moreover, we asked the interviewees to provide recommendations on how to tackle the issues pertaining to the structure and improving knowledge sharing at Zuyd.



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

Knowledge silos

In order to enhance the information sharing between domains and locations at Zuyd, it is important that we investigate the barriers.

Knowledge silos

are units within an organisation that are experts in what they do but do not pass their valuable information to others within the organization (Kuusisto, 2017).

They are, often unintentionally, created when large organisations break down into self-contained business units and this can cause barriers to knowledge transfer (Fowler & Pryke, 2003). Knowledge silos are a common occurrence within higher education and therefore multiple researchers have studied this phenomenon have conducted a study about moving beyond the silos to create professional learning networks within higher education (Trust et al., 2017).

They argue that creating professional learning networks support higher educators in improving their practice and break down the silos. Breaking down these silos can benefit faculty and staff members to expand and enrich their professional learning network and provide them with new perspectives, ideas, and opportunities. A number of higher educators who participated in the study indicated that silos restricted personal growth and being part of a professional learning community

improves their learning, teaching, student learning, and personal growth (Trust et al., 2017).

Another study done by showed that the knowledge silos barriers often come from senior staff losing power within their department by extending and sharing knowledge with others (Bundred, 2006). Therefore, the author recommends implementing a bottom-up solution to break through the structure. The authors also indicated that these isolations come from organisational boundaries, cultural tensions, lack of trust between professions, and a lack of awareness of the best practices. In addition, when there is an enhanced open culture more knowledge is shared and encouraged. Therefore, cultural tension is an essential factor within knowledge silos and knowledge sharing. An important factor to influence this culture are high-quality and inspiring leaders who promote the sharing of knowledge (Bundred, 2006).



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

On a different level, research indicated that a helpful method to break down the knowledge silos is the use of technical tools (Kuusisto, 2017). Technical tools can enhance direct communication and contribute to the fast and efficient sharing of knowledge.

Building on the previous section, we know that knowledge silos are a common challenge in higher education institutions. Recognizing this and looking into different factors affecting knowledge silos, literature discusses many different concepts to try to overcome this challenge. For example, keywords in relation to knowledge silos in the literature are *learning communities*, *communities of practice*, *knowledge management*, *knowledge transfer*, *workplace learning*, *learning climate* and much more.

Based on the challenges at Zuyd and based on several conversations with the clients, we decided to focus this literature review on two main aspects: knowledge sharing and learning communities. While other concepts are equally interesting to investigate, these two seemed to be the best fit for the challenges at Zuyd.

In the next sections, we will describe important findings of the literature more in detail as well as explain the concepts. We start with the goals to enhance knowledge sharing and discuss what literature tells us about this concept. Afterwards, we will elaborate on learning communities, which are needed to increase the knowledge sharing.



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

Knowledge Sharing

For many organisations knowledge is one of the most important strategic resources. As for Zuyd, the knowledge of the employees is vital for the execution of their core business, which is teaching and research. This role of knowledge within Zuyd also makes it vital that the knowledge is shared in a proper way.

Important to mention is that the sharing, exchange, and transfer of knowledge is a multidimensional and multi-layered concept (Ipe, 2003; Zheng, 2017). While **knowledge sharing** describes individual behaviour, **knowledge transfer** is often referred to as the movement of knowledge between domains, locations, and organisations (Zheng, 2017). However, after taking a closer look at the existing literature on knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer, it can be concluded that both wordings are used interchangeably. For this reason, we will use the word knowledge sharing as an overarching concept that includes both the individual level as well as the movement of

knowledge between domains, locations, and organisations. It is important to acknowledge that sharing of knowledge is affected on several levels. The **organisational level, team level, and individual level** can all be positively or negatively impacted by the amount and the quality of knowledge sharing (Zheng, 2017). One of the benefits enabling all types of knowledge sharing is the enhancement of productivity within the institutions (Andolšek, 2011). After taking a closer look at the literature on knowledge sharing in similar settings as Zuyd, several things should be highlighted.

Firstly, the type of knowledge sharing is important. For example, **explicit** knowledge which can, for instance, be in the forms of a database or a handbook can be easily shared with anyone compared to tacit knowledge which is non-verbalized (Nonaka, & Takeuchi, 1995, Polyani, 1962). Regarding their importance, tacit knowledge is considered to be more important and useful than explicit knowledge (Reychav & Weisberg, 2010). However, tacit knowledge is more difficult to be shared (Fullwood et al., 2013). Notably, if tacit knowledge is properly managed within institutions or universities, then it will be more beneficial (Kidwell et al., 2000).

Additionally, the behaviours of leaders and managers play a considerable role for knowledge sharing. Managers' roles are crucial if they develop interaction opportunities, provide sufficient time, and offer reward systems for knowledge sharing (Sandhu et al., 2011).



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

Undoubtedly, when the managers or executives of an organization are not supportive, its staff will discern that the culture of knowledge sharing in their organization is not widespread (Wang & Noe, 2010). Similarly, the leadership of an organization plays an important role in knowledge sharing if they promote knowledge sharing behaviour among its staff. This is possible through offering knowledge sharing opportunities and pragmatic learning to their personnel (Bircham-Connolly et al., 2005). Furthermore, Tan (2016) found that knowledge sharing in an organization is enabled when/if rewards are offered, trust is available, interaction and openness in communication among employees, high quality of knowledge management, and a culture of knowledge sharing exists. Muqadas et al. (2017) observed that hoarding of knowledge sharing for the intention of powering achievement, job promotion, etc., has a negative impact on a university to achieve its objectives. They emphasized that creating an encouraging culture as well as establishing a strong connection between rewards offering and knowledge sharing in a university has positive consequences on the knowledge sharing process.

The behaviour of leaders within the company is related to the importance of a knowledge sharing culture (Muqadas et al., 2017).

A strong learning culture promotes knowledge sharing throughout the company. A great first step towards this learning culture is creating so-called **Learning Communities**.

The concept of Learning Communities will be further elaborated in the next section of this report.

Besides the types of knowledge and the role of management and leadership, organisational structures also influence the knowledge sharing in an organization (Walczak, 2005). In this regard, Tippins (2003) suggested that often the organizational structures within academic settings could be a barrier to knowledge sharing. One of the reasons for these barriers is the existence of distinct values, opinions, and beliefs by different domains and study disciplines (Fullwood et al., 2013).



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

After reviewing the literature on knowledge sharing in the academic setting and comparing this to the Zuyd and the research question, the main challenges for Zuyd lay within knowledge sharing between domains and locations. Especially because of the barriers due to the organisational structure of Zuyd, and other universities, it remains to be challenging to share knowledge across the entire organisation.

Luckily, literature gives several suggestions and best practices about how to cope with this challenge as a university or in general. The suggestions from literature are as follows:

One of the possible solutions for knowledge sharing, especially in higher education institutions is through **communities of practice**.

This can happen when individuals or members within a community show collective eagerness to knowledge sharing (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

In addition, an individual's effective **communication** skills (verbally and non-verbally) are also pointed to as among the most effective solutions for tacit and explicit knowledge sharing (Meyer, 2002).

Moreover, Riege (2005) found several barriers for knowledge sharing, such as lack of communication skills and social networking.

He suggested that, among others, communication skills and **social networking** play a crucial role in making knowledge sharing successful in an organisation.

There are some studies that have found a relationship between the social network of staff of an organisation and their capability to establish and maintain a strong network and easily share knowledge among themselves (Baron & Markman, 2000).

Another possible solution according to Tippins (2003) includes several steps such as identifying the knowledge gap in a university, involving a multi-level approach. Furthermore, collecting data is necessary, and the management of the university should support its staff in the cited tasks, organise the knowledge, reconcile and then share the knowledge.

This process is framed as a **catalogue or mapping** of knowledge (Tippins, 2003).

After discussing the possible ways to tackle the challenges for knowledge sharing, it is also important to discuss the online aspect of knowledge sharing. Especially since covid-19, there has been a bigger focus on blended learning and working from home for Zuyd. For this reason, when looking at possible solutions, the online aspect should also be considered. Literature on knowledge sharing online says:

03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

Utilisation of IT such as intranets, database management, databases, internet, e-mail can be used as tools to solve knowledge sharing issues, especially in industrialised or developed countries as they have the culture to use these tools (Muqadas et al., 2017). These sources can facilitate knowledge sharing in online settings when they are accessible and easy to use for the users. In addition to easy use and accessibility, their transmission or communication speed is also essential in solving knowledge sharing in an online learning environment (Pham et al., 2021).

Learning Communities

As mentioned above, building a strong learning community is essential to provide a supportive learning environment, where knowledge can be shared. In the context of Zuyd, creating and fostering such learning communities is vital. Employees at Zuyd might not be in direct contact with each other as they work at different locations. By fostering a learning community employees are able to work more efficiently by seeing what is being worked on, by which employees at different locations and domains regarding a similar topic. Then, they can profit from other employees' knowledge rather than creating a new knowledge foundation, thereby reducing double work. A nice addition to this reduction of double work is fostering learning communities which can impact employees' positivity on both an individual and team level in terms of facilitating regular knowledge exchange and learning from others. But what exactly is meant by a learning community? The interest of researchers in learning communities is not a

recent one. Already in the early 90s researchers shaped the concept of community of practice, which is often used interchangeably in the literature. However, while a community of practice is defined by the aim of sharing practices with a group of people interested in sharing the way they do things and why they are doing it, a **learning community** is defined as: “a *learning atmosphere, a context providing a supportive system from which sustainable learning processes are gained through a dialogue and collaborative construction of knowledge by acquiring, generating, analysing, and structuring information*” (Carlen, & Jobring, 2005).

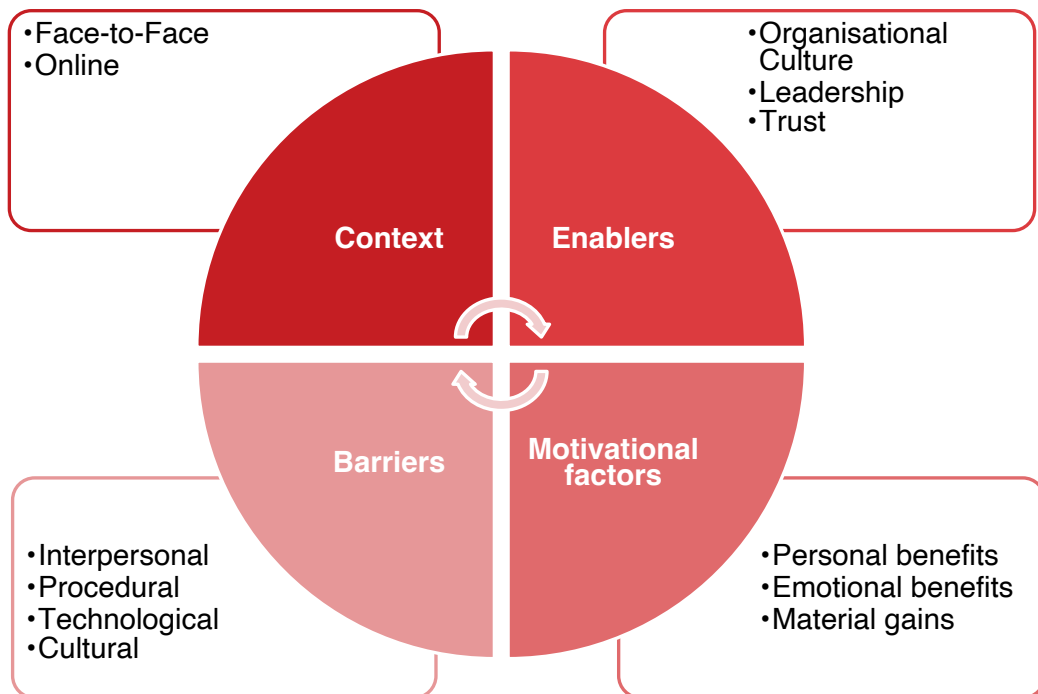
So, what is the difference between learning communities and **communities of practice**? They belong to the broad concept of professional communities, however, focus on different nuances of being part of a community. While, learning communities are focused on the learning aspect of the interaction, the communities of practice are focused on the sharing of experience and best practices. Not necessarily the learning from it. Both concepts are worth investigating, and since we used literature from both research streams, we will call the concept a **professional community**.



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

Professional communities are often discussed in the context of learning organisations, workplace learning, and learning climate. The connection is based on the learning aspect of each concept. It is out of this project’s scope to give an extensive insight into the learning organisation literature, however, for a quick and still comprehensive read about learning organisations see Garvin et al., (2008). Professional communities build an atmosphere where knowledge gets created, shared, and transferred. It is one of the foundations of knowledge sharing and influences the institution’s performance. Professional communities can take different forms, such as based in a face-to-face environment but also virtually. Independent of the form of the professional community, there are different

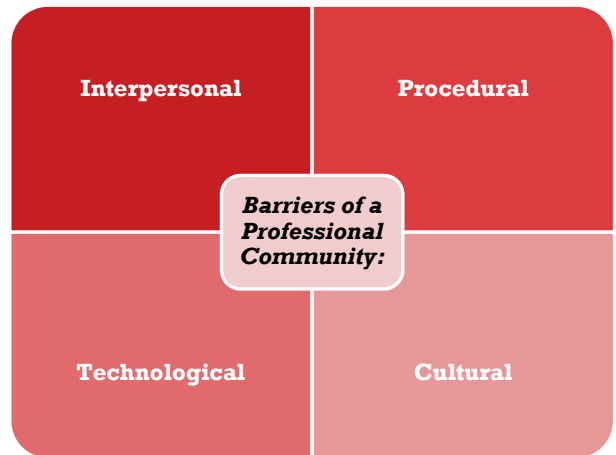
factors influencing its effectiveness, development and usage. To establish a good learning community, three enablers are important to consider. The **organisational culture and leadership**, the **trust** within the organisation, and the **supporting tools** of the organisation (Ardichvili, 2008). While each of these components is important, a learning community is also built on **motivational factors**, such as **personal benefits**, related to status or career advancement, **emotional benefits**, such as the feeling of being useful and boosting self-esteem, and **material gains**, such as compensation of community participation, community-related considerations and normative considerations (Ardichvili, 2008).



03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

So, while enablers of professional communities are important, it is also necessary to consider the other factors of employees to actually participate in the learning community. But what does this mean in practice? How does the literature suggest tackling this? There are many different ways of facilitating a learning community, one example regarding **virtual communities** is: “[...], the challenge in enabling virtual communities of practise (VCoPs) is not so much that of creating them by administrative decree, but that of removing barriers for individuals’ participation, supporting and enriching the development of each individual’s uniqueness within the context of the community, and linking that uniqueness with the community purpose.” (Ardichvili, 2008).

So, next to creating a trustful environment, supportive leadership, and tools, it is also necessary to remove the barriers to knowledge sharing. In the literature of professional communities, four main barriers are discussed: **interpersonal, procedural, technological, and cultural**. The interpersonal barriers might be fear of criticism or similar, while procedural barriers might be a lack of knowledge of how to best share the knowledge. Technological barriers are concerned with the lack of acceptance of technology or a lack of technological tools. Last but not least, culture can be a barrier to a good learning community, especially when there is a strong in-group orientation, if the organisation has a great power distance between supervisor and employees, or if people are not used to sharing their knowledge (Ardichvili, 2008).



Concluding, based on literature multiple factors influence a good learning community. Next to motivating factors, a learning community can be influenced by specific barriers and enablers. Therefore, to build a learning community these factors need to be considered.

Acknowledging Zuyd wishes to increase knowledge sharing, especially beyond domains and locations, virtual professional communities seem to be vital for it. As Zuyd operates at different locations it is important for them to implement a virtual professional community to acquire knowledge sharing and transfer with all the members of Zuyd independent of their location. The goal of a virtual professional community is to create an online supportive environment, where members can share their ideas, opinions, experiences and resources in order to collaborate and achieve learning targets and acquire new knowledge and abilities (Gan & Zhu, 2007).

03 INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE

Another study goes further by examining the virtual professional community, which describes various software environments that can be used to share and transfer knowledge (Ford et al., 2008). Virtual professional community can have different aspects based on its purpose, it can be in the form of blogs, video conferences, board discussions, etc. Establishing an online environment can be very beneficial for Zuyd as employees are working in different locations. Virtual professional community can allow employees to share and transfer information in an efficient and fast way without the need to travel and organise meetings which can be very time-consuming.

As a result, creating and fostering professional community are essential to avoid knowledge silos and focus on knowledge sharing. As Zuyd is spread over different locations, virtual professional community are one of the best alternatives. Employees can share information easily without the need to meet each time. Nonetheless, some factors might jeopardise the well-functioning of such professional community. Barriers such as culture, trust and technology acceptance need to be points of attention when creating virtual professional community.

Virtual professional communities can support knowledge sharing

Literature Conclusion

Throughout the literature analysis, we have seen that knowledge sharing is a common challenge for many universities or schools. Because of the clustered knowledge, along with several additional barriers, it can be a big challenge to share knowledge throughout the entire university. This chapter discussed that the enabling of a learning community is already a big step in the direction of knowledge sharing. We have seen that professional communities are based upon three pillars; culture and leadership, trust, and supporting tools. By analysing both literature on professional community as well as knowledge sharing it is proposed that a learning community can work as a strong foundation to enable knowledge sharing. Additionally, the literature on knowledge sharing discussed the barriers to knowledge sharing which were in line with the literature on knowledge silos. The recommendations for improving knowledge sharing as well as the three pillars for the professional community are important input for the rest of the research.



04 INSIGHTS FROM INSIGHT THE COMPANY

Within the current chapter, the various results from the interviews with employees will be discussed. The chapter is divided according to the coding scheme and the most important findings. First, the main findings on knowledge sharing within the company are discussed. Secondly, the reasons for (not) sharing knowledge are analysed. Thirdly, the switch is made towards the findings on professional communities. The chapter ends off with discussing the main recommendations made by the employees that were interviewed.

Knowledge sharing

Sharing knowledge is the core business of Zuyd since they are a university that have to transfer knowledge to their students but also among themselves. Even though knowledge sharing with students is a core business, knowledge sharing between different domains and domains is perceived to be limited. Especially within the teacher role, most teachers tend to only share their knowledge with their direct colleagues from the same domain. Several employees with a teacher role mention not seeing the reason for sharing their knowledge outside of their own department as a main reason.

Knowledge sharing between domains is not only limited within the teacher roles, but also beyond that. We spoke with several employees who have other roles that do not include teaching. There seems to be more knowledge sharing among those employees since most of their job is less focused on one domain.

Drawing from the interviews, the employees that aren't specifically bound to a set location or domain tend to share their knowledge significantly more with different locations and domains. Furthermore, people with a passion for learning and sharing tend to share their knowledge more. Intrinsic motivation to learn and keep on learning seems to play an important role for knowledge sharing between different domains. One example from an intrinsically motivated interviewee to share knowledge: "what I am doing all day long, is I am combining knowledge, looking out for certain people that have knowledge or expertise, trying to mix and match that in anyway."

Knowledge sharing

- Mostly only within domains
- Only very intrinsically motivated people share outside of faculties
- People who are not bound to a certain domain tend to share more
- Zuyd does not take an active role in promoting this

Reasons for (not) sharing

One of the most mentioned reasons for not sharing knowledge is the lack of time (more than 50% of employees interviewed explicitly mentioned a lack of time as a reason for not sharing). Especially for teachers, it seems like there is only little time left outside of teaching responsibilities and preparing for classes. "In projects, I notice that more and more people want to share knowledge, but do not have the time to do so."

An additional barrier that follows from this is that teachers often are unable to attend meetings where knowledge is shared because of scheduling and the lack of time. Finding the time to really focus on knowledge sharing between domains seems extra challenging for teachers since this is not a part of their day-to-day job activity. Teachers mostly create and give subjects for students themselves or with their direct colleagues. Outside of teaching and creating subjects, teachers have their hands full with preparation and grading. Some of the teachers do engage in knowledge sharing meetings, but these are mostly focused on sharing knowledge within their own domain.

Reasons for (not) sharing

- No specific reason why
 - Motivation
- Not knowing how (tools)
- Passion about sharing

Most interviewees did have the motivation to share their knowledge. Only two interviewees stated to not see the immediate value of knowledge sharing, which is why they are not motivated to do so. Multiple interviewees mentioned that knowledge sharing, and continuous development should be a key characteristic of people working within the school setting. One interviewee even mentioned that; "working with unmotivated people is the worst thing you can have, i would kick them out ultimately". Thus, motivation does not seem to be the biggest barrier when it comes to knowledge sharing.

As an opposite to not being motivated, we actually interviewed multiple people that were very passionate about sharing their knowledge with other domains and locations. Intrinsic motivation and curiosity seemed to be the main driver of their knowledge sharing. They showed their passion about knowledge sharing through various ways. One of the interviewees for instance writes blogs where knowledge is shared that could help various other employees as well. This interviewee was very passionate about sharing the knowledge throughout all the domains and locations of Zuyd. The main drivers of their knowledge sharing activities were their beliefs on the importance of knowledge sharing. Another interviewee mentioned that they have a big curiosity towards other domains and tries to engage these other domains in their classes but also simply by going to those other domains to see what they are doing. Again, these knowledge sharing activities were mainly driven by their own motivation and beliefs.

The main barrier for the limited knowledge sharing seems to be not having the right tools or know-how for knowledge sharing. On the one hand, people who do share their knowledge a lot see that their efforts aren't valued as much as they would have wanted. Knowledge sharing activities that are driven by the employees often don't get the recognition that they deserve. Furthermore, the existing intranet was often mentioned as a tool that is very one-sided. Employees could post their knowledge on this intranet, but there is no possibility to interact with these posts in any way.

On the other side, the people who don't share their knowledge now simply don't have the right tools or knowledge about how to do so. As already mentioned, the motivations aspect does not seem to be the biggest issue here. The limited knowledge sharing seems to be mostly coming from the limited tools available or the lack of knowledge about how to share. Additionally, some of the interviewees did not see the value of knowledge sharing between different domains at this point. This does not mean that they are not motivated, but it is mostly about not seeing the value of it. This might come forward from a certain protection of knowledge that was often described during the interviews, such as: "people think they have to reinvent the wheel; other resources are often not good enough"

Professional communities

After explaining our definition of a professional community, almost none of the interviewees recognised this within their day-to-day job activities. However, some of the interviewees mentioned engaging in a learning community in some of their projects. Some projects within Zuyd are between different domains which means they do

engage in knowledge sharing outside of their own domain. It seemed that especially the interviewees that weren't linked to a specific domain engaged in those professional communities. Drawing from this, the structure of several jobs within Zuyd seems to be a barrier to engaging in a professional community. When collaborating with different domains isn't part of the daily routine, it seems to be extra difficult to engage in professional community between different domains, one interviewee mentioned: "At this moment Zuyd is not a learning community yet since lots of information is still not shared with each other."

Among most of the teachers, after explaining our definition, no learning community was mentioned. Especially teachers only engage with their direct colleagues from their own domain because that is how their job is structured. Remarkably, multiple interviews did have a sense of a learning community within their own department. Thus, it is especially the professional community inter domains and locations that are limited at this point.

Professional Communities

- Almost no professional community outside of own domain
- But feeling part of a learning community within the team or domain

Recommendations from employees

All interviewees were asked for suggestions in multiple ways. We asked for things that they would need from Zuyd to *enable* their knowledge sharing. Furthermore, we asked for what they would need from Zuyd to *engage* in a professional community.

Two interviewees said that they are fine with the way it is now. Those two interviewees did not see the necessity of knowledge sharing between domains at this point. However, one of these interviewees mentioned that it might also be because they are not aware of the necessity and the possibilities at this point. They mention that informal events could possibly change their view and enable them to start sharing their knowledge more. They specifically mentioned that they wanted Zuyd to take the lead and inform and organise things.

For the interviewees that already were very passionate about knowledge sharing, several suggestions came to light. The interviewees with a passion for knowledge sharing often already engaged in knowledge sharing activities or/and were active in several professional communities. These interviewees brought up several recommendations that could help themselves with knowledge sharing but could also benefit Zuyd as a whole.

1. An interesting suggestion that was mentioned by multiple interviewees was having an **inspiring person** within each team. This inspiring person could create a so-called oil-stain and enable other employees' learning and knowledge sharing as well. Many of the interviewees who were already passionate about knowledge-sharing already tried to be this inspiring person themselves. However, they did mention that having more of those inspiring people throughout Zuyd could be a great enabler of knowledge sharing. "There should be an inspiring person in every team".
2. Additionally, it was mentioned by multiple interviewees that **collaborating works**. They mentioned an example of some minors that were created by several different domains. By working together on a common goal, professional community and knowledge sharing could be enhanced as well. This is in line with the findings from the other interviewees that already did engage in a lot of collaboration with different domains. It seems like, especially within the teacher environment, collaboration between different domains could be enhanced.
3. During the interviewees, we found out that in June Zuyd is organising a big **event** to celebrate their anniversary. During this event several different domains and faculties are presenting some of their projects. We asked several interviewees how they view this event in regards to knowledge sharing. All of the interviewees were excited about attending this event. "For the first time, we have an education event again, and then the sharing of knowledge does happen." Some of the interviewees mentioned that it should become a more regular thing to have those kinds of events. It was also mentioned that the scale of the event might be too big. Events on a smaller scale were suggested to have more impact and engagement.

05 INSIGHTS FROM EXPERTS IN THE FIELD

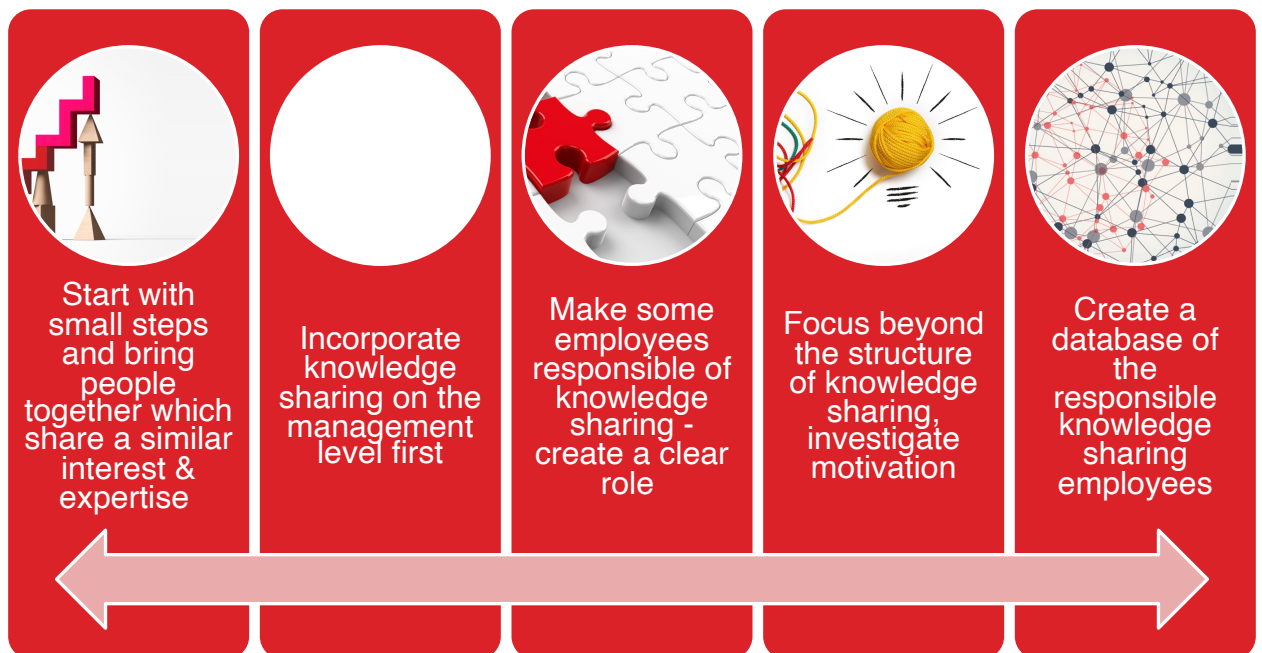
To gain a better picture of knowledge sharing and professional community in an academic setting, we conducted expert interviews. In total five experts were questioned about their own experiences of knowledge sharing and professional community in higher education, about their expertise about these topics and their recommendations. The interview revealed that the challenge of knowledge sharing is not unique.

The experts were familiar with the terms of knowledge silos and shared their own experiences with these. They further talked about different approaches to tackle these challenges, such as a top-down approach

and focusing on leaders, or a bottom-up approach by focusing on the culture of the organisation. The experts highlighted that a structure for knowledge sharing is important however, that this is only one part of the solution.

The people behind these structures, the people carrying the knowledge, are the most crucial part. In other words, employees and their motivation and their opportunities to share are important. While some experts focused on bringing people together to share their knowledge, others focused on trust and community feeling. For the in-depth interviews see the next page.

In a nutshell – Recommendations by Experts



Interview with Dr. Therese Grohnert



Therese Grohnert is an assistant professor at the school of business and economics. She is involved in the learning academy of the faculty, an academy that offers workshops, mentoring and coaching to support the continuous professional development of teachers. Therese has done research in the area of decision making as well as professional learning and much more.

Interview

During the expert interview with Therese, we discovered that Zuyd is not alone in pursuing a better knowledge sharing structure. Therese described the challenges that Zuyd faces with words such as knowledge management, and knowledge silos (or islands), but also explained that the challenges of knowledge management can not solely be solved by enriching its structure; it must also be tackled on a deeper level - culture. While the structure is an important part of enabling and increasing knowledge sharing it is not the holy grail of knowledge sharing. Therese mentioned a few helpful perspectives on how to approach knowledge sharing and proposed looking into communities of practice as well as leadership. While this perspective is much more social and cultural, Therese had the experience, to be much more helpful to increase the knowledge sharing in the institution at hand. On one hand, knowledge sharing structures, such as the intranet of an institution, can give room for employees to share their experiences, best practices and knowledge. On the other hand, it might be that it only attracts the people that are already sharing their knowledge in other ways. From Therese's experience, it needs more than a structure to enable knowledge sharing. It needs a purpose.

Identifying gatekeepers; who knows most on a certain topic? Bring them together and give them a shared project.

Create courses within the program that are coordinated by several domains. Start small, develop a course together and then move forward.

Academics need to discover themselves that the intervention might save them time, telling them will not work.

Interview with Dr. Simon Beusaert



Simon Beuseart is an associate professor in workplace learning at the School of Business and Economics at Maastricht University. His expertise lies in the field of workplace learning, Teaching and teacher education, Employability, and Informal learning. Together with Therese, he is also involved in the learning academy at the school of business and economics at Maastricht University, which is involved in teacher development and training.

Interview

Like Therese, Simon was also approaching the challenge of knowledge sharing in higher education through a social/cultural lens. More specifically, Simon proposed to investigate the challenges by having a closer look at the workplace learning literature. While knowledge is normally shared on a formal level at the workplace, there are also other levels. Formal knowledge sharing includes sharing knowledge that is necessary to share at the workplace, whereas informal knowledge sharing might happen between meetings or at the coffee stand. To create an institution that has a great knowledge sharing culture it is necessary to have a great foundation of knowledge sharing, meaning to share knowledge regularly through meetings, etc. In addition to having informal knowledge exchange, which creates a knowledge-sharing culture. This can be expanded by other knowledge-sharing structures, such as an online platform. However, if the basis and a culture of knowledge sharing are not present, then the knowledge sharing platforms might be used by employees.

Suggestions/Insight from Simon:

Start with the management level.
Management and leaders play a crucial role in shaping the right basis.
Managers are the role model for the rest of the organisation.



Interview with Dr. Catarina Marques dos Santos



Catarina Marques dos Santos is an assistant professor at the Department of Organisation, Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the School of Business and Economics at Maastricht University. Her expertise lies in the fields of organisational behaviour, team dynamics, cognition, learning and leadership. Catarina conducted some research at the individual level on safety training transfer.

Interview

Like the other experts, during the interview, Catarina provided valuable perspectives on knowledge sharing. One of the first perspectives she shared is the fact that people only share knowledge with people they already know. One of the reasons discussed could be linked to psychological safety. As people don't know each other, they might not feel safe sharing their ideas, opinions and knowledge. They might see knowledge more as a threat than an opportunity. Moreover, Catarina mentioned similar things as Simon Beausaert. She talked about knowledge sharing in both a formal and informal context. Regarding the informal context, Catarina talked about the essential part of creating bonds during informal moments. She also said that those

moments can be organised by the organisation such as barbecues. During the interview, we also touched upon the topic of virtual knowledge sharing. For this topic, she has put emphasis on the fact that the structure needs to be very easy to use and people might not have the time and/or the willingness to learn how to use the online platform. She also mentioned that this process will take some time for similar reasons as people are not willing to share, generally speaking. People need to see the value-adding aspect of using and spending time on (virtual) knowledge sharing because if they do not see any value, putting the time and effort into building such structure will be in vain.

Suggestions/Insight from Catarina:

Have someone in charge of focusing on knowledge sharing. Time is a big issue in fostering knowledge sharing. Therefore, having one member that is responsible for ensuring effective knowledge sharing effectively. Those members can be found on a team and domain level.

Interview with Prof. Dr. Piet Van de Bossche



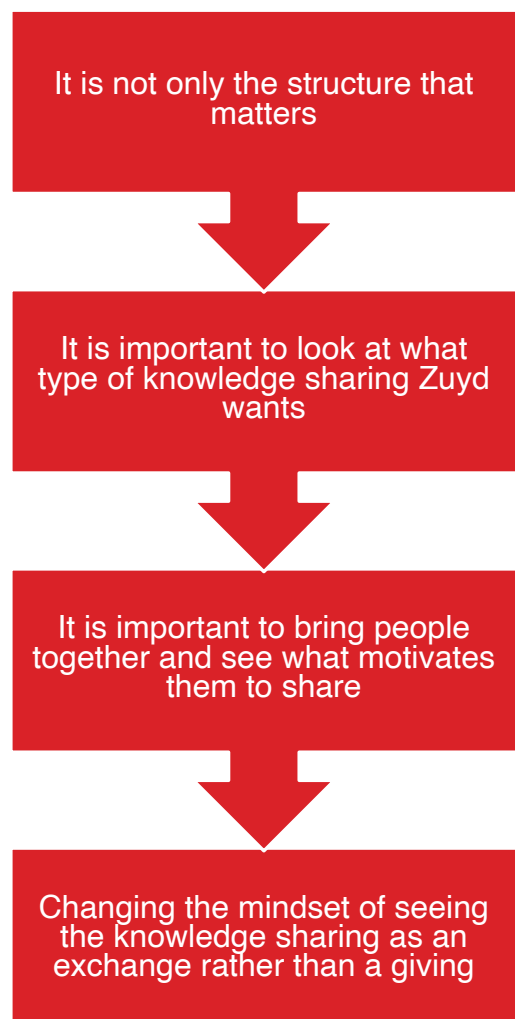
Piet Van den Bossche is a professor in Learning in Organisations at the University of Antwerp and a full professor at the School of Business and Economics at Maastricht University. His expertise lies in the fields of learning and cognition in teams and collaborative environments, both in educational and organisational contexts. His research focuses on both the individual and the team level and is respectively taken as units of analysis.

Interview

When describing the situation of Zuyd and what was analysed, Piet first stated that knowledge silos are a recurrent problem in educational contexts. It is the way higher education institutions are structured that brings out those knowledge silos. To break down those knowledge silos, Piet suggested a few avenues of research and investigation. First of all, he talked about creating a sense of togetherness, where all teachers can get together at some point and create a network of teachers. He mentioned that it is easier, in the first instance, to do this within the same discipline of practice but across all the different locations. He stated that bringing people together around practice is interesting because they are interested in a certain topic. Thus, they are more likely to share.

Moreover, during the interview, the topic of motivation and how to overcome fear to share was discussed. In order to have a good sharing environment, it is important to look at and investigate questions such as “What motivates people who are already sharing?”, “Why should people share?”.

Suggestions/Insight from Piet:



Interview with Dr. Bas Giesbers

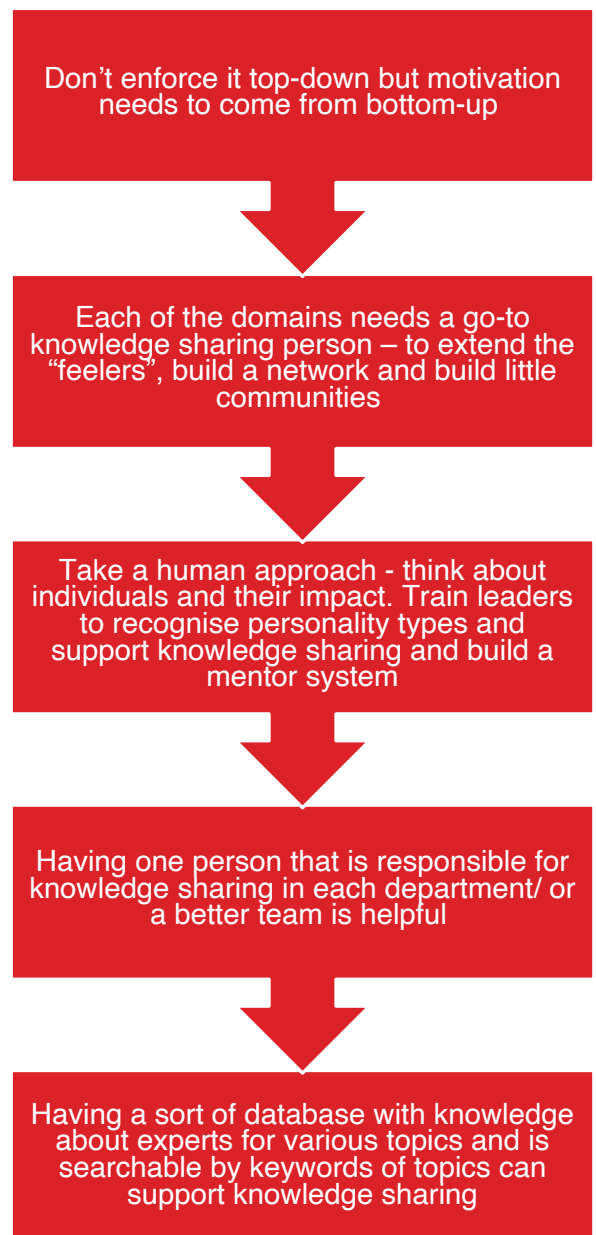


Bas Giesbers is an assistant professor and educational consultant at the School of Business and Economics at Maastricht University. His expertise lies in Blended and Online Learning, (Team-based) Instructional Design, Teacher professionalisation, and Educational Research.

Suggestions/Insight from Bas:

Interview

As the other experts mentioned before, Bas recognised the challenge of knowledge sharing in higher education. His experience showed that especially in the onboarding process of employees’ knowledge silos are criticised because the new employees do not have the tacit knowledge of the organisation. During the interview, Bas emphasised that clear communications, agreements and expectation management in collaboration is a key aspect. Further, to enhance collaboration and overcome knowledge silos, especially for inter-department collaborations, Bas recommended having quick communication lines, such as an online platform like Microsoft teams, or similar. However, Bas also mentioned that it is very hard to avoid knowledge silos from happening in the setting of academia. He described the interaction of professional communities as a water-like medium that moves like a smooth wave at one point and then suddenly dissolved again, therefore Bas suggested that it is important to try different methods of knowledge sharing and communication within professional communities. He emphasised that people need to trust their colleagues before sharing their best practices and that employees are more likely to share when there is a person driving the exchange; A person that feels responsible for it.



06 RECOMMENDATIONS



Taking together the literature, the employee's views, and the advice from the experts we developed a **three-pillared approach to frame our recommendations**. While literature focuses on broad enablers, motivational factors and barriers to knowledge sharing, our recommendations are positioned between the challenges of knowledge sharing at ZU specifically and what literature suggests to be successful in overcoming knowledge silos. In the following section, we will explain our four main recommendations:

1. **Creating a database,**
2. **Establishing the role of an Inspirator,**
3. **Enabling cooperation,**
4. **Re-thinking knowledge-sharing events**

Each of these recommendations is situated as either a **Structural** recommendation, founded in an addition to the present structure of ZU, or an **Engagement** recommendation, based on the interactive nature of the recommendation, or a **Motivational** recommendation, which targets knowledge sharing on the individual level. This three-pillar approach allowed ZU not only to enable knowledge sharing from an organizational support structure perspective. It also tackles the challenges of knowledge sharing on an engagement and individual level. Thus, supporting the integration of a knowledge sharing habit at every level of the organization. A mantra that will guide the recommendation is **build, inspire and share**.

CREATING A DATABASE

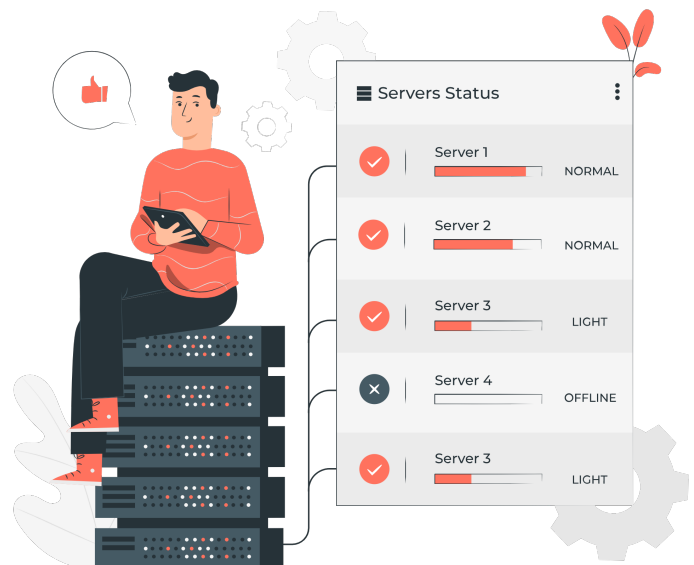
Our first recommendation is to establish a database in which each employee from Zuyd can be found.

The database is a simple interface where each employee has its own profile describing who he is and what he is doing. This database needs to be simple, easy to use and not time consuming. The goal is to help employees from Zuyd to find the right person they need. The objective of this database is that with simple keywords, an employee can find several people corresponding to the keywords. For instance, if an employee is looking for people involved in “Knowledge sharing”, by typing “knowledge sharing” into the database, the employee will be able to see who is related to knowledge sharing and know who to get in touch with. This recommendation is backed-up by academic literature and experts in the field. Literature provides us with several suggestions to boost the knowledge sharing within an organisation.

This recommendation is based on two proposals, which indicate that social networking should be supported among employees and mapping knowledge should be integrated. This means that data is collected and the knowledge is shared with relevant parties. In addition, expert, Bas Gisbers, indicates that quick communication lines through the use of online tools should be integrated to enhance knowledge sharing. Besides, this expert recommended having a database with various topics to encourage knowledge sharing and learning.

Why is it helpful?

The interviews from the employees showed that most employees are willing to share their knowledge. They don't always know what colleagues from other locations are working or have worked on. The database could enable employees working a specific project to see if other employees have worked or are working on a similar project and thus collaborate and exchange on it. By implementing such a database, it will be easy for any employee to have an overview of who is specialised on which topic by simply putting keywords. Moreover, making the database easy to use and not time consuming to complete will push many employees to use it to gain time and expertise on their project.



CREATING A DATABASE

How can we implement it?

As mentioned, the database needs to be easy to complete, not time consuming and easy to use on a day-to-day basis.



Step 1:

We would advise using what is already in place at Zuyd and see what is possible to do with the intranet. The objective, if possible, is not to use a new platform for employees to use. Thus, using the intranet and building the database on it and linked to it seems like the best option. It would be advised to cooperate with the ICT department and make this a project to boost the knowledge sharing within Zuyd. After speaking to employees within the ICT department during the interviews they indicated to be very supportive to increase the knowledge sharing.



Step 2:

The second step is the completion of the profile. This step is crucial for the database success. Employees need to take the time to complete a predefined template that will enable Zuyd to complete each profile under a same and unique format. This template could be designed by the Education and Research department where essential aspects could be in it such as, current work, past work, expertise... During this step, each team leader needs to take an active role in ensuring that each member of his team has completed their profile template.



Step 3:

As time passes, we recommend once or twice per year that the team leader looks at his team members' profile and update them, if necessary, in order to have a database up to date.



Step 4:

The last step of this first recommendation is ensuring that the inspirator (see next recommendation) and the manager make sure that people are effectively using the database in the most efficient way to gain time in their own project.

CREATING A DATABASE

What does the client need to consider?

For this first recommendation, it is important for the client to consider how and where the database will be implemented. It is important that employees do not see the database as an extra activity but rather something that is implemented in something they already are using and know. Based on the employee interviews, employees will be happy to have an overview of what is being done elsewhere in the organisation and see where they can get the knowledge they are looking for. Another point of consideration is the long-term viability of this database. Zuyd needs to make sure that the database is up to date, risking that employees won't use it anymore if it is not. Finally, a last point of consideration is the use of the database. If employees do not know how to use it, they will see it more as a tool which requires a lot of time investment and will not use it.



THE ROLE OF THE INSPIRATOR

Our second recommendation is to establish the role of an Inspirator at Zuyd.

An Inspirator is an employee that has the responsibility of sharing knowledge with other colleagues inside but also outside the domain and location. It is meant to be an established role that Zuyd supports with resources. In other words, the Inspirator is a supportive position within the University with the purpose of assisting knowledge sharing university-wide. Literature, employees, as well as the experts, mentioned that a person that feels responsible for knowledge sharing can help the process of sharing. While the start of this role might be informal, we highly advise to make it a recognised role within Zuyd. If it is a recognised position by Zuyd, employees will not only acknowledge the position but accept its value in the long term. Thus, an Inspirator is a person that not only feels a responsibility to share knowledge but is commissioned to facilitate knowledge sharing, which supports the building of a professional community where knowledge sharing happens on a regular basis.



Why is it helpful?

Next to the academic support, which showed us that having inspiring people within the organisation enhances knowledge sharing, our employee interviews also showed that there is a wish for having such a person in charge to support knowledge sharing at Zuyd. One of the employees stated, “There should be an inspiring person in every team”. We think that implementing the Inspirator role at Zuyd will support the building of a knowledge network where not only the inspirator feels responsible for sharing their knowledge but also where this responsibility spills over to other employees. The Inspirator role is meant to be the start of a snowball effect, to elevate knowledge sharing between domains from a special occasion to a habitual interaction.



THE ROLE OF AN INSPIRATOR

How can we implement it?

The saying: “Rome was not built in one day”, seems to describe best the approach of how to implement this recommendation. While it is important to not lose sight of the end goal, it is important to take small steps to implement the inspirator role.

Step 1:

We advise starting with the informal role of an inspirator, and appointing people that already feel responsible for inter-domain knowledge sharing at Zuyd. These people will be a huge part of the success of this implementation. Because they already feel responsible for knowledge sharing. Thus, it is no extra work for them and they already have a network of employees interested in knowledge sharing beyond the domains. Implementing the name Inspirator at Zuyd will then be spread around the university. Thus, utilising these “hubs” of knowledge is the first step toward increasing knowledge sharing at Zuyd. More specifically, Zuyd can start with implementing this recommendation by sending Emails or publishing a post on ZuydNet, to call for employees that are already involved with or passionate about knowledge sharing. With that Zuyd gains a great overview of employees that are already interested in this role and can get these employees involved in the next steps. Integrating leaders who motivate others to get onboard and share knowledge is also recommended by academic literature. In addition, literature tells us that these Inspirators can contribute to trustful environments, which increases knowledge sharing.

Step 2:

As a second step, we advise to further developing the role of the Inspirator on a structural level. This step includes an in-depth analysis of what Zuyd wants to achieve with the Inspirator role and which tasks they will take over. In this step higher management and HR need to be included to create the acknowledgment of the role at a structural level. Zuyd can implement this step by creating a focus group, built on the employee’s response to the call in the first step, and creating a concrete plan of what the inspirator role at Zuyd will look at. This will need to include: hours spend, tasks and responsibilities, place within Zuyd, founding, and sustainability of the role. This step is also supported by literature, which indicates that analysing and structuring the information as essential parts of a learning community. This encourages the learning atmosphere and increases knowledge sharing.

THE ROLE OF AN INSPIRATOR



Step 3:

After creating the Inspirator role on a structural level, the role needs to be introduced to all managers of the domains since literature and the experts indicate that managers have an essential role in the knowledge sharing process of their employees. Further, in each department, or in each academy, or team, depending on the necessity and interest of employees, Inspirators can be appointed.



Step 4:

The implementation phase of the Inspirator role at Zuyd should be closely monitored in the first six months to avoid an insufficient action by domains. Therefore, we suggest scheduling meetings with the inspirators of different domains each month. These meetings serve as an introduction to the role, help to form a network between inspirators and support the knowledge sharing habit of the appointed inspirators.



Step 5:

The last step of this recommendation is concerned with the long-term perspective of the Inspirator.

What does the client need to consider?

Last but not least, we want to give some points for consideration for the inspirator role. We advise going small steps by implementing this recommendation, however, even so, some employees and managers might show some degree of resistance towards it. These might be based on concerns such as high time investment, monetary investments, or workload. However, based on literature, the employees at Zuyd, and the expert interviews, the inspirator role is an important building block to facilitate knowledge sharing.

Another consideration is that the first steps might be perceived as slow and insignificant. It might seem like an impossible goal to increase knowledge sharing between domains. However, a helpful framework is here to see knowledge sharing not as a goal but as a process. It will grow slowly over time. With the Inspirator you want to achieve a sense of habit around knowledge sharing, a go-to person that knows how and when to contact people, but this will take time. A last thing to consider is the long-term success of this implementation. If Zuyd wants to increase knowledge sharing, it also might need to consider how to monetary support this vision in the long term.

THE ROLE OF AN INSPIRATOR

Motivational

The inspirator is a person that feels responsible for knowledge sharing, but also acts as a role model for knowledge sharing. Literature highlights the role of managers and leaders in the process of knowledge sharing as well as a bottom-up approach. Similarly, the experts highlighted the importance of supporting knowledge sharing from a management level but to also focus on the employee's motivation and culture. Thus, to achieve a high level of impact of the inspirator recommendation, the inspirator should be part of the management level as well as the employee level.

Employee Inspirator. While having an employee inspirator we acknowledge the importance of motivating employees to share knowledge, having a management inspirator helps to tighten the role from a structural level. Employee inspirator can be anyone at ZU that is inspired to share knowledge and willing to do so.

The management inspirator is a person that role models the behaviour of knowledge sharing.



ENABLING COOPERATION

Our fourth recommendation is all about increasing the engagement amongst employees of Zuyd.

Therefore, attention should be paid to the cooperation between employees. This means that teamwork has to become an essential part of the structure and the employees should work together in order to improve the quality of their work, inspire each other and reduce workload. By implementing the inspirator and the database, employees get the opportunity to cooperate with each other. However, in order to do so, cooperation should be encouraged within the structure as well to benefit a culture where engagement is supported. For this recommendation, the goal is to motivate employees to regularly meet with each other in order to create collaboration.

Why is it helpful?

Looking back at the literature it tells us that when trust, interaction, and openness in communication is fostered, knowledge sharing is enhanced. In addition, social networking plays a crucial role within knowledge sharing. When interviewing the employees it became clear that sharing knowledge across teams is not done much because of a lack of time. However, sharing knowledge can also save time. Employees can inspire each other or exchange work. One of the teachers stated “Teachers do not see that innovation and knowledge sharing can save time in the long run!”. Employees do not always have to reinvent the wheel and it is therefore

important to cooperate to help each other out. Notably, cooperation is a key aspect for knowledge sharing. For example, Bas, an expert from Maastricht University, indicated that people need to trust their colleagues and share their best practices in order to enhance knowledge sharing. This should come from the bottom-up and employees should be provided with quick communication lines. Hence, encouraging cooperation between employees within ZU will benefit the engagement and stimulate the employee’s work quality and reduce the workload.



ENABLING COOPERATION

How can we implement it?

The above two recommendations already contribute to the cooperation between employees. These recommendations provide opportunities to share knowledge. However, to make sure that employees keep exchanging knowledge and stay motivated it is recommended to Zuyd to let employees invest time in working together. Therefore, the following four steps could be taken.



Step 1:

We would advise to involve the Inspirators and motivate the employees in the team to share their knowledge within and across the team. When employees receive regular reminders, they are triggered to work together and become curious on what the outcome will be. During the interviews it became clear that 'time' is a huge barrier for most of the employees. At this moment they do not see the benefits of sharing knowledge because they feel they do not have space to do so. Therefore, it is essential to share best practices of how knowledge sharing contributes to the engagement and reduced workload. These experiences should be shared during regular meetings and need to be supported by the inspirators.



Step 2:

To make sure cooperation is happening it is recommended to Zuyd to provide employees with the opportunity of working together on projects, workshops, events or shared courses. An important step to take is creating a shared goal on an organizational level. Therefore, Zuyd could create a programme where each team shares their goal and should cooperate with other teams to reach this. This could be in the form of a course, workshop, project and so on.



Step 3:

In order for this programme to become reality, Zuyd must share this idea via the intranet. In order to generate interest, several Inspirators will share their motivation through a video message. Teams can apply for the programme and Zuyd will make a schedule in which each team has a couple of weeks to work on their goal with other chosen teams. The activities will not start together in order to provide each team with motivation, guidance and personal appreciation.

ENABLING COOPERATION

Step 4:

Lastly, when the teams agree on working together on a common goal Zuyd will follow their journey and share these best practices via the intranet in order to motivate others and show appreciation to the team. When employees feel valued, they will show more commitment and others will adopt this behaviour. By sharing the positive and negative experiences, the learning process is improved, and employees will see the value of cooperation and engagement. This can lead to a cultural change in the longer run.

What does the client need to consider:

There are also things that Zuyd should consider when implementing this proposal. Zuyd employees have indicated several times that they do not share knowledge due to a lack of time. Proposing this cooperation programme may therefore feel even more pressure. Therefore, it is important to indicate that this is a voluntary project. It will therefore happen that people who consider knowledge sharing as an important subject and who probably already do this are interested in this programme. However, this is part of the process, and we will need the knowledge sharers to make others see the value of cooperation and knowledge sharing. Therefore, our tip will be "Trust the process".



KNOWLEDGE-SHARING EVENTS

This last recommendation focuses on bringing a mix formal and informal events.

This recommendation suggests a slight change to what is already being done at ZU. During interviews, employees mentioned that they do not know people from outside their location and thus it is hard to share with people you don't know. This observation is also discussed by literature saying that it is easier to share with people you have created a bond with. Further, some employees mentioned that during big events they have the tendency to remain with people they already know and rarely go towards new people. Therefore, this recommendation focuses on creating smaller events where people can talk with each other, meet new people from other locations, etc. During one interview, an employee mentioned that they would appreciate a mix of big and small events to really focus on the community aspect and getting to know others. Those events can be formal or informal. An example of an informal event could be to meet up all employees from the finance department of each location with a barbecue. An example of a more formal event could be a seminar with the same group of people. Events could also be a mix of formal and informal such as a seminar and then a barbecue.

Another example of events could be ***“Knowledge days”***. Knowledge days would be a day or part of a day where people within a specific field exchange on their best practices. This is the perfect occasion for someone who is interested in a specific field in which he might not be an expert to get valuable insights.

Why is it helpful?

Looking at the literature, people feel safer and psychological safety is higher with people that you know. This is also linked with what Catarina Marques dos Santos, an assistant professor at Maastricht University pointed out, that people only share knowledge with people they already know. She emphasised that when people don't know each other, they might not feel safe sharing their ideas, opinions and knowledge. Therefore, focusing on smaller events where employees will be able to connect easier with new people will foster in the long run knowledge sharing. Further, employees mentioned that they did not know people from other locations which makes it harder to exchange knowledge. To bring people together and build trust among them to share knowledge, organising events can play an important role. In this regard, one of the teachers from Zyud University explained that there should be events, but the purpose and need of the event must be clear, and there should be a follow-up. As with one day event the problem is not going to be solved, there should be more proper events.



KNOWLEDGE-SHARING EVENTS

How can we implement it?



First step:

The first step consists of gathering a list of all the members of a specific department and see with them their expertise and if they would be willing to create a small workshop that would last between one and two hours on their specific expertise. This aspect should be encouraged by the team's inspirator.



Second step:

The second step is to select who will attend the workshop. On one side, the idea is to generate knowledge flow and also for members from different domains and locations to meet each other. Firstly, we would suggest mixing people from different locations and then mixing them between domains.



Third step:

This step consists of creating a list of all the different topics that could be 'taught' during those workshops and let the people decide their top 3. Afterwards, one organising member needs to sort out the overall top choices and start organizing the knowledge event.



Fourth step:

Find a suitable location where the different workshops can be hosted. Ideally all workshops should be help on the same location in order to allow for some informal time. Further, the workshops should be focused on collaboration. For example, the workshops should allow for moments of exchange of good practices and discussion.



Fifth step:

Plan an informal activity after the workshops. Members attending these events should be able to deepen their new dyadic relationships and deepen their connection with other members from ZU.

KNOWLEDGE-SHARING EVENTS

What does the client need to consider?

ZU employees have indicated that time is a big constraint in fostering knowledge sharing. Thus, ZU should consider this and maybe focus on half days or evenings with one workshop and an informal activity. Another thing to consider might be a low response rate from ZU members. This is why the role of the inspirator is important. The inspirator needs to show that these events are value adding both on a knowledge and relationship level.



07 CONCLUSION

As a university of applied sciences, educating students is the core business of Zuyd. Knowledge sharing towards their students is one of the main goals that Zuyd carries out on a daily basis. Within the current project, we shifted away from knowledge sharing towards students and investigated the knowledge sharing that happens between different domains and locations amongst employees. The main aim of this project was to advise Zuyd on a clear structure that would enable knowledge sharing and professional community between the different domains and locations.

In order to explore how knowledge sharing could look like within Zuyd we structured the research in three ways. Firstly, a literature analysis was conducted to gain an academic understanding of the challenge at hand, as well as some valuable input for the recommendations in the end. The findings from the literature analysis were used as a foundation for the next steps. Secondly, after conducting the literature analysis, several employees were interviewed. The interviewees came from various different domains and locations. The interviews gave us a better understanding of the challenges of knowledge sharing within Zuyd from an internal perspective. Additionally, the interviewees provided us some valuable suggestions on how to tackle this challenge based on their experiences within Zuyd.

Thirdly, several experts were interviewed to frame the challenge that Zuyd faces into existing literature in different research streams and their experiences within knowledge sharing in higher education. Furthermore, the experts were able to provide several recommendations based upon their own research and experiences.

The results from the literature analysis, the employees, and the experts were all used as a foundation for the recommendations. We developed a three-pillared approach to frame our recommendations. Based on both the expert interviews and the analysed literature, we focused on structure, engagement and motivation as the three core pillars. In the end, we recommend four interventions that will enable professional communities and knowledge sharing.

Within the structure pillar, the first recommendation is to **create a database**. The objective of this database is that with simple keywords, an employee can find several people corresponding to the keywords. By implementing such a database, it will be easy for any employee to have an overview of who is specialised on which topic by simply putting keywords.

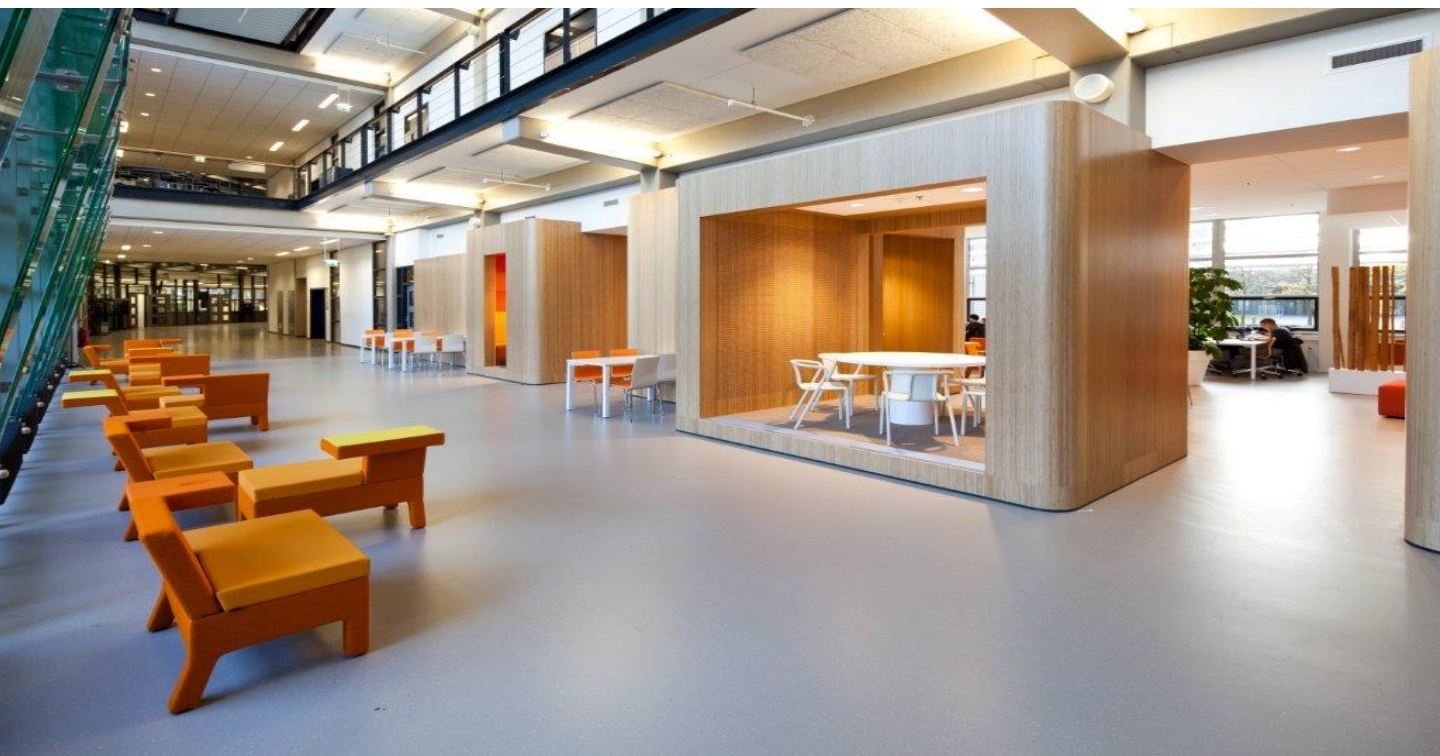


Secondly, within the structure pillar, we recommend to establish a **role for inspirators** within Zuyd. An Inspirator is an employee that has the responsibility of sharing knowledge with other colleagues inside but also outside the domain and location. The role of an inspirator also enables the motivational pillar since it focuses on a bottom-up approach.

Thirdly, within the engagement pillar, we recommend an increased focus on **cooperation**. The goal is to motivate employees to regularly meet with each other in order to create collaboration. Both literature and experts mentioned that through collaboration, knowledge sharing is enabled.

Lastly, also within the engagement pillar, we recommend Zuyd to **organise events** that enable knowledge sharing. This recommendation focuses on creating smaller events where people can really talk with each other and meet colleagues from different domains and locations. These sort of events are focused on knowledge sharing in both a formal and informal way.

Altogether, we are convinced that by implementing these four recommendations, Zuyd will be able to create professional communities that enable knowledge sharing between all the different domains and locations. By following the three pillar structure, that focuses on structure, engagement and motivation, we believe that Zuyd can achieve great things and create a successful knowledge sharing environment.



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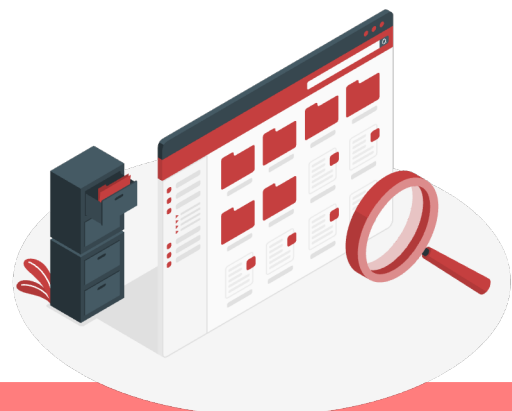
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09 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Keywords List - Literature



Appendix 2: Interview guide

What is our goal?

- Insights into the problem
- Understanding the problem
- How is it really?
- Again, why did they initiate the problem?
- See if employees recognise the problem

Why?

- Allows us to have a broader and fuller perspective of the problem
- Base our recommendations on the employees

How?

- Interviews
- 30 min
- Different locations, domains, royals

Interview structure:

- Explain the purpose of the project and the interview

“We are ... and ... and we are students of the master programme L&D in organisations at UM. We are doing a consultancy project for Zuyd University as one of our final projects during this masters. Within this project, we focus on knowledge sharing and learning communities within Zuyd. In order to gain a bigger understanding of knowledge sharing and learning communities within Zuyd we would be happy to interview you as an employee of Zuyd University.”

- Present ourselves
- Address the terms of confidentiality
- That it will be treated anonymously
- Explain the format of the interview
- That it is more or less 30 minutes
- That it will be recorded
- Ask explicit consent for the recording
- Allow the interviewee to clarify any doubts about the interview
- Ask them to mention if they feel like they are experiencing any technical issues
- Start the interview
- Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Appendix 2: Interview guide

1. Please introduce yourself

- Possible follow-up questions/ Knowledge about the person:
 - Which department?
 - Which location?
 - Role of the employee?
- Relationship with other departments
- Supervisor? Manager? Leader?
 - If so, how do you share knowledge with domains?

2. How is knowledge sharing done at Zuyd?

- Possible follow up question:
- How do you see the knowledge sharing at Zuyd?
- Do you feel like you are sharing your knowledge) If yes/no □ How so ?

3. How do you share the knowledge within the domain?

- Structures, events, etc?
- Why do you share knowledge within your domain?

4. How do you share knowledge across domains?

- Structures, events, etc?
- Why do you share knowledge across your domain?
- When do you share knowledge across domains?

5. What is a learning community for you?

- If unclear explain the concept of learning community : *“It is a group of people who share common academic goals and attitudes and meet semi-regularly to collaborate and share knowledge with each other to create sustainable processes.”*
- To what extent do you feel like a part of the community of practice/ learning community?
 - Why?
 - how?

6. What is the initiative you would undertake to boost sharing of knowledge across departments of Zuyd?

Appendix 3: Snippet of Coding scheme

Categories	Code	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
Learning Communities	Yes, learning communities			"We do see the attention for this subject rising and more things are being tried out."	learning community for exam board
	No, learning communities	"no, I don't think so" (related to if zuyd has a learning community)	There is no community, we work on it and we want to create it. "Zuyd is still not part of that learning community, but Zuyd is working to become part of it"	At this moment Zuyd is not a learning community yet since lots of information is still not shared with each other.	
	Network	x	Have different networks, like students instructions and support, network assessment, network for community coordinators. One have to be part of the network to come and participate, but the issue is that every one should participate not only the members of the network	She shares a lot and therefore people know where to find her and who she is	
	All Zuyd	not within all zuyd because of history, there were different schools; different cities; different topics; "I am not sure if in University you can organise this kind of learning communities"			
	Only department	yes, because of my project			For exam board For teaching
Knowledge Sharing	Yes, knowledge sharing	yes, with other departments about own topics, but no really a formal structure (no value in a formal structure);	Yes sharing knowledge within and outside the domain	"For the first time, we have an education event again, and then the sharing of knowledge does happen."	Yes for exam board
	No, knowledge sharing			"Knowledge is shared verbally within teachers' teams, but not much. There is not much written sharing either."	No for teaching (HARD NO)
	knowledge sharing within domain	not so easy, "each department own ideas", "own way of working"; yes, sharing knowledge within the department, at the moment discussing how to best share knowledge; "I just start networking"	Yes. "We do share knowledge within the team on regular basis"	Yes, knowledge sharing within the own academies	Once in 4 weeks meeting with exam board to share experiences, as a teacher once every trimester a meeting with the teachers for that semester
	knowledge sharing outside domain	Zudy network (teams meetings or in person) to share best practises (only on my topic); booklet for events of other academies based on the region; 20 years zuyd event (on all topics, special event); workshop developed for intercultural competencies for teachers (part of professional development)	Yes. "Organize meeting twice a week. And then spread the knowledge across other domains by sharing links or workshops"	No, not outside the academies. "But what is thought up in this academy is not shared, while it is very valuable to learn from."	4 times a year meeting with all exam boards from different faculties, once a year informal dinner with chairmen from the exam boards
Reasons for sharing/not sharing	productive	"when you have more personal contact it's easier to get things done"			
	Time to share	yes sharing to avoid double work, language cafe organized by Sandra (for students)	"Other thing is that there is always lack of time as talked with different program managers and lecturers"	In projects, she notices that more and more people want to share knowledge, but do not have the time to do so.	
	Moments of sharing				
	No value in sharing				x doesn't see knowledge sharing as a problem, doesn't see why she should share, it is fine the way it is now
	No tools		"Everyone has the goal but do not have the knowledge on how to reach this goal"		states that she doesn't know the tools for sharing and is not informed about this
	Being protective of the work				
	Not being valued for sharing		Everyone is not aware about our role in Zuyd	X	
	Leadership			She herself shares a lot of knowledge through blogs. For this, she received appreciation from her prior supervisor. At the moment, she no longer receives this appreciation, so she misses it.	states that leadership could motivate her to share more knowledge
	problems of sharing	academies have their own way of working, hard to implement something new as an outsider			
	Financial reasons				
Structure	Structure of department	each own curriculum	There is not a proper structure among the teacher professional, but there is structure among domains.		
	Structure of the team			It works well within the safe environment of the team	
	Structure of university	20 academies	"There is the need to have a good structure. There is a structure and she thinks the structure does not work properly"		

Use the following [link](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KaC7Uq0eYz3oA11FNkdWsB_woz0FgM_ymktSfs4s7d8/edit#gid=0) to get a better look at the coding scheme:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KaC7Uq0eYz3oA11FNkdWsB_woz0FgM_ymktSfs4s7d8/edit#gid=0

Appendix 4: Model of Recommendations

