Online Knowledge Sharing by Chinese and American Users in a Multinational Corporation: What Differences Does Culture Make?

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Agenda

- Research Background
- Research Questions
- Research Setting
- Conceptual Framework
- Methods
- Key Findings
- Discussion

Research Background

Research Questions

1. What is the employees' knowledge sharing behavior in a selected global knowledge sharing system?

   a) How frequently do they use the system?

   b) What do they share through the system?

2. What factors influence employees' knowledge sharing behavior in the selected global knowledge sharing system?
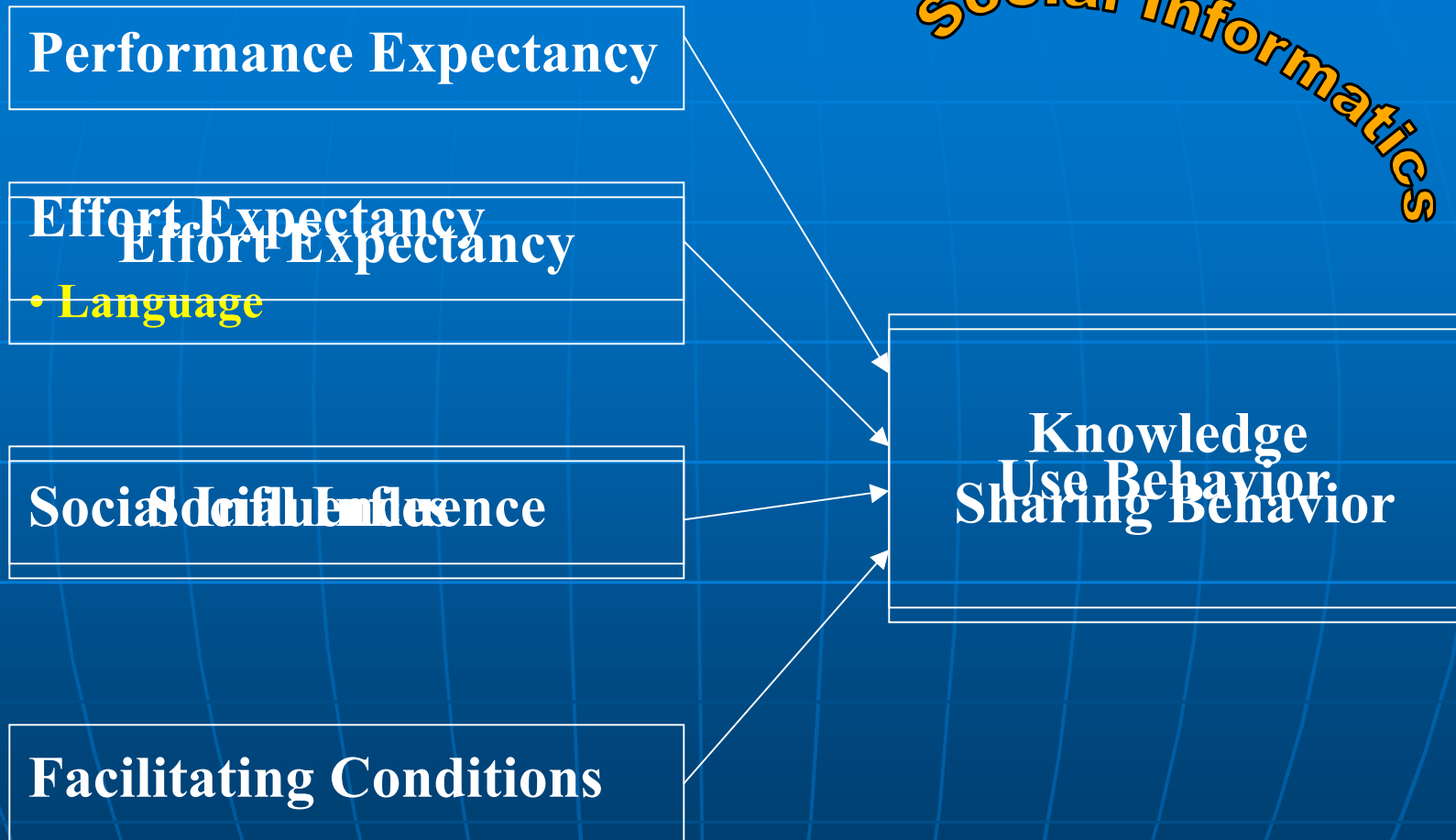
Research Setting

- A US-based multinational *Fortune* 100 Corporation (Alpha)
  - ≈ 90,000 employees worldwide
  - Operations in more than 100 countries, including China

- Internet-based knowledge sharing system called the Knowledge Network (KN)
  - Thousands of virtual communities of practice

Research Questions in Context

1. What are Chinese and American users' knowledge sharing behaviors in the Knowledge Network (KN)?

2. What factors influence their knowledge sharing behavior in the KN?

Conceptual Framework Development

Social Informatics

Performance Expectancy

Effort Expectancy

Effort Expectancy
- **Language**

Social Influence

Social Influence

Knowledge
Use Behavior
Sharing Behavior

Use Behavior

Facilitating Conditions

Knowledge Sharing Behavior and Influencing Factors

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology

Conceptual Framework

Performance Expectancy

• Solve problems more quickly

• Enhance performance

Effort Expectancy

• Easiness to learn how to use

• Easiness to use
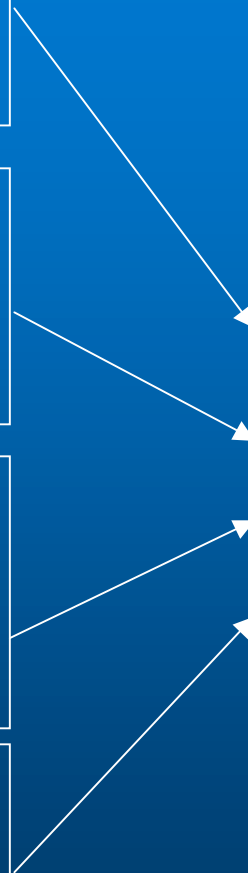
• Language

Social Influences

• Influence from senior managers, supervisor and co-workers

• Concern about personal image

Facilitating Conditions

• Knowledge

• Resources and support

• Compatibility with job

Knowledge Sharing Behavior

• Consuming knowledge

• Contributing Knowledge

Research Methods
Stage 1: Content and Activity Analysis

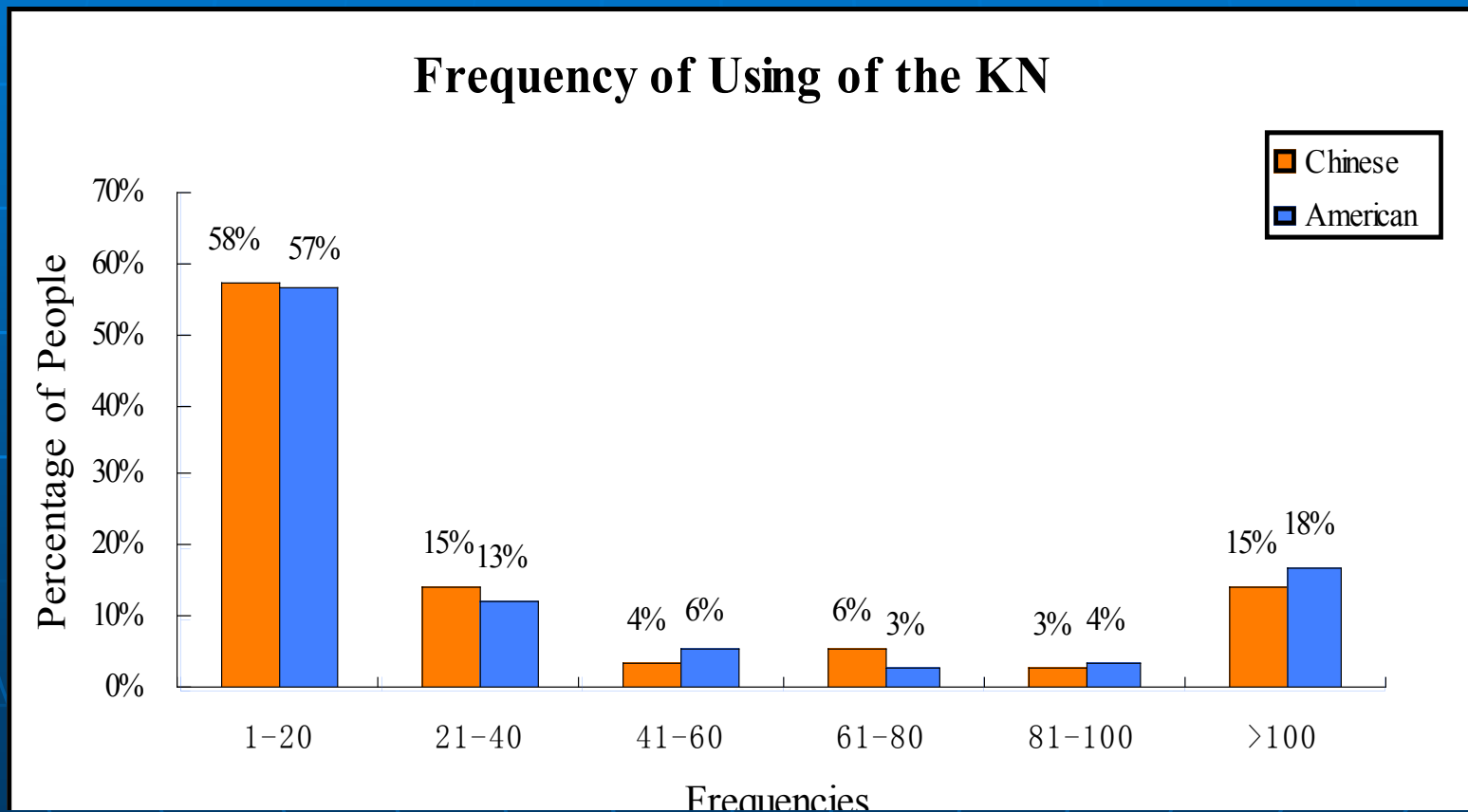| Sample	▪ 205 Chinese KN users ▪ 205 American KN users
Data collection	▪ KN log ▪ Postings
Data analysis	▪ Quantitative ▪ Qualitative

Research Methods
Stage 2: In-depth Interviews

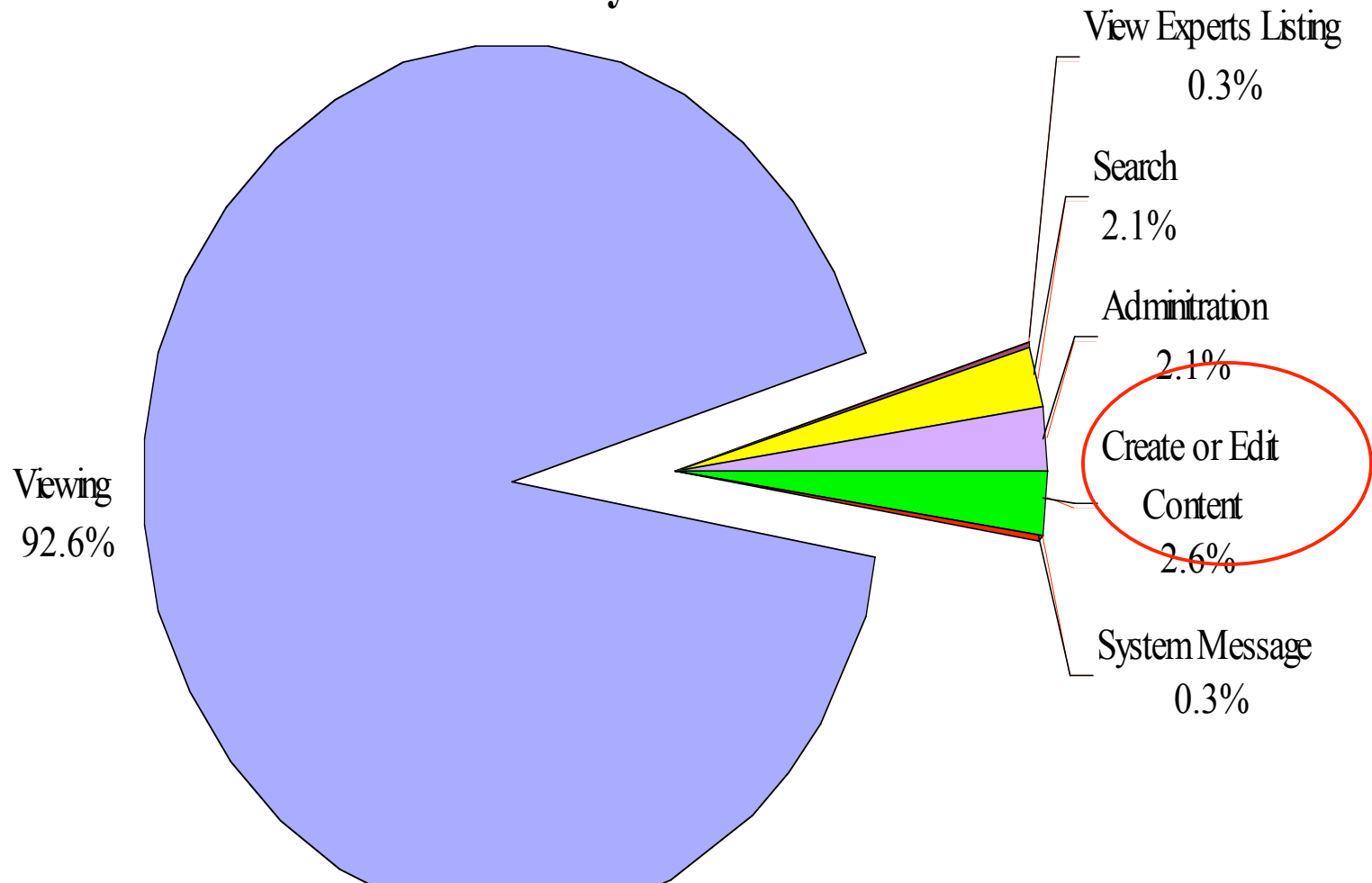| Sample	- 20 Chinese KN users - 21 American KN users
Data collection	- Semi-structured interviews
Data analysis	- Qualitative data analysis

Key Finding for Research Question One

What are Chinese and American users' knowledge sharing behaviors in the N?

a) How frequently do they use the KN?
b) What do they share through the KN?

a) How frequently do they use the KN?

Actions by American Users

View Experts Listing
0.3%

Search
2.1%

Admintration
2.1%

Create or Edit
Content
2.6%

System Message
0.3%

Viewing
92.6%

Actions by Chinese Users

Viewing 94.7%

View Experts Listing 0.5%

Search 2.5%

Admintration 1.1%

Create or Edit Content 0.8%

Change User Preference
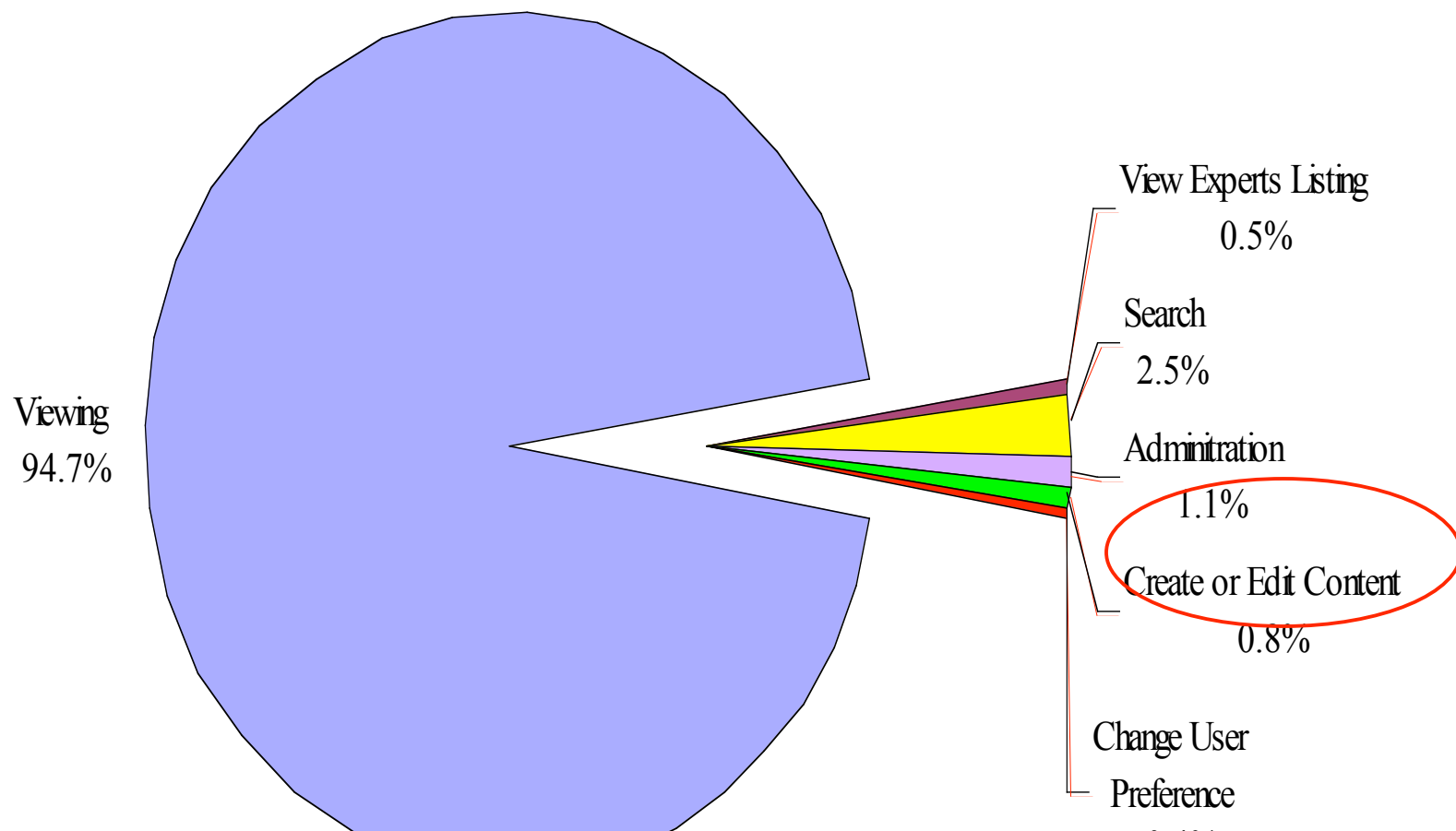
- **Consuming Knowledge**
  - Chinese and American users were not very different (US_{Median}=16>$Chinese_{Median}$=14)
  - Top 20% heavy users contributed 80% of the total activities
  - More than 80% of the users were just consumers
- **Contributing Knowledge**
  - American users were more active US_{Mean}=2.14 > $Chinese_{Mean}$=0.43

b) What do they share through the KN?

- **Best practices**
  - "Has anybody run a project like…"
  - "What do other facilities do about…"

- **Solutions**
  - "hey, look, I got this problem. Has anybody else seen this problem before? If you've seen it, what did you do to correct it? "

- **Opinions**
  - "Can the users in this group provide your suggestions on…"

Key Finding for Research Question Two

Performance Expectancy

• Solve problems more quickly
• Enhance performance

Effort Expectancy

• Easiness to learn how to use
• Easiness to use
• Language
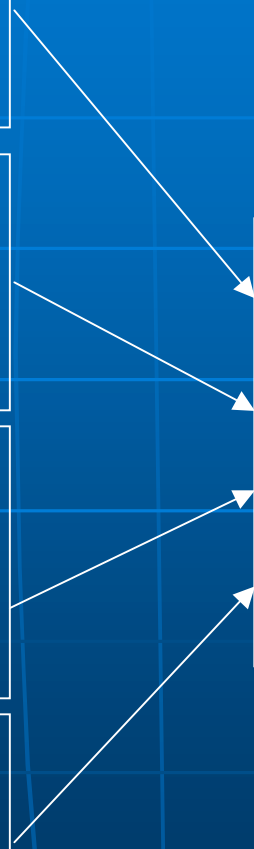
Social Influences

• Influence from senior managers,
  supervisor and co-workers
• Concern about personal image

Facilitating Conditions

• Knowledge
• Resources and support
• Compatibility with job

Knowledge Sharing Behavior

• Consuming knowledge

• Contributing Knowledge

Performance Expectancy

- **Solve problems more quickly**
  - Post a question and get an answer
  - Search and find an answer posted already
- **Enhance performance**
  - Receive good information which helped them stay on top of developments
- **Why/why not use KN**
- **Why/why not use specific features**
  - Depends on whether this feature could help do a better job

Perception: No direct link between the KN and one's performance

Performance Expectancy —Differences

- **Why Chinese don't use the KN to build networks**
  - Face-to-face interaction for network building
- **Why Chinese tend not to ask questions**
  - Different values and working contexts
- **Why Chinese tend not to answer questions or share materials voluntarily**
  - Different values
  - Lack of confidence in their knowledge (modesty?)

Effort Expectancy

- Easy to learn how to use the KN
- Easy to use the KN in daily job

Effort Expectancy —Differences

- Language: a one-way barrier for Chinese users
  - Not a big barrier for consuming
  - A potential barrier for contributing
- Computer skills: prevent some senior American users from sharing
  - Generation differences

Social Influences

- Senior managers: not much promotion
- Supervisors: not care much
- Co-workers: recommendation
- Concern about personal image: no influence

Social Influences—Differences

- **Low prevalence, low awareness of KN in China**

- **Fear of loosing face**
  - Stupid or simple questions
  - Feel embarrassed if nobody answer questions

- **Importance of personal connection for answering questions**
  - Not comfortable to ask strangers

- **Chinese cultural values that prevent sharing**
  - "It is not wise to do something extra when you do not need to."
  - "Chinese culture does not value speaking a lot in public."
  - Willing to reply or share after being requested. Worry that sharing without being asked is a bother to others

Facilitating Conditions

- Knowledge: training
- Resources and support: infrastructure
- <u>Compatibility with job: job characteristics</u>

Summaries

- Perceived disconnect between KN usage and daily job performance

- Language is primarily a one-way barrier to knowledge sharing for Chinese users

- Cultural conservatism and perceived differences in practices hinders Chinese users' willingness to share

- Compatibility with job makes a big difference

Discussion

- Not many cultural differences
  - Organizational vs national culture
  - National cultural change
- Study cultural factors and system factors together in a systematic way

Thanks for Your Attention !

Comments & Questions ?