

Chapter 7

Team and Individual Interactions With Reciprocity in Individual Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effects of expected reciprocity on knowledge sharing, as moderated by team and individual variables. Data ($n = 84$) were collected in an experimental study from undergraduate business student participants. The effects of expected reciprocity on knowledge sharing depend on the levels of individual competence, positive team attitudes, functional diversity, and demographic diversity. Implications include that the effectiveness of reciprocity in knowledge sharing depends on several factors relating to the team and individual. Encouraging reciprocity may have positive effects, but these can be overridden by poor team attitudes, low ability perceptions, and team diversity. Future research suggestions are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge sharing facilitates organizational and group performance and can be used strategically to attain competitive advantage (Erickson & Rothberg, 2011; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Wan, Haggerty, & Wang, 2015; Yang, 2007). Motivating individual sharing, therefore, is a topic of significant interest.

Reciprocity is a significant motivator that receives consistent attention in knowledge sharing research (Chen & Hung, 2010; Cho, Li, & Su, 2007; Di Gangi, Wasko, & Tang, 2012; Wu, Hom, Tetrick, Shore et al., 2006). However, despite its widespread application to organizational theories and demonstrated importance to knowledge sharing, it is surprising that the construct remains underdeveloped (Wu et al., 2006).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5427-1.ch007

An important part of construct development is identification of interactions that act as contingencies (Johns, 2017). In knowledge sharing research, expected reciprocity has been found to interact with a variety of variables to predict outcomes, but more research is needed to form conclusions about the wide variety of possible moderators (e.g., Haeussler, Jiant, Thursby, & Thursby, 2014; Zhao, Detlor, & Connelly, 2016). In addition, most studies are cross-sectional surveys, with only a handful of experiments (e.g., Hung, Durcikova, Lai, & Lin, 2011). Given the importance of knowledge sharing for team performance (e.g., Killingsworth, Xue, & Liu, 2016), therefore, an experimental study of in-person teams was used to better understand the effects of reciprocity.

First, the reciprocity construct in knowledge sharing research is presented, and variables are proposed to interact with reciprocity in affecting knowledge sharing. Experimental methods and measures are presented, and hypotheses are tested. Results and applications to organizations, management education, and researchers are given. Finally, strengths and limitations of the study are provided.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Knowledge sharing is defined as occurring “when an individual is willing to assist as well as to learn from others in the development of new competencies” (Yang, 2007, p. 83). Reciprocity is implied in the definition as necessary – a give-and-take of knowledge. Researchers typically rely on social exchange theory (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005), social capital theory (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), and theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) in framing the effects of reciprocity on knowledge sharing. From these theoretical bases, the expectation of reciprocity increases motivation to share knowledge. In recent years, reciprocity has received increasing attention in the literature, with the use of sophisticated modeling techniques and attention to moderators.

The relationship between reciprocity and knowledge sharing is most often studied solely as a direct effect on outcomes, typically including attitudes toward sharing, satisfaction with sharing, intention to share, and actual sharing behaviors. Most studies found a positive relationship between reciprocity and knowledge sharing outcomes (e.g., Lin, Lee, & Wang, 2009; Tamjidyamcholo, Baba, Tamjid, & Gholipour, 2013), while a few found nonsignificant (e.g., Chen & Hung, 2010; Hung et al., 2011) or negative results (e.g., Chen & Hung, 2010; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Knowledge sharing reciprocity studies are primarily cross-sectional surveys of either within-organizational groups (e.g., Akhavan & Hosseini, 2016) or online communities (e.g., Tamjidyamcholo et al., 2013). Few are experimental studies (e.g., DiGangi et al., 2012; Hung et al., 2011) or simulations (e.g., Caimo & Lomi, 2015).

Few researchers investigated reciprocity as part of a moderating relationship, although the number of studies have steadily increased in recent years. However, there is still not a strong body of evidence to draw general conclusions about moderating influences because of the wide variety of potential interactions that are yet to be tested. Findings of these studies suggest that many relationships between reciprocity and knowledge sharing may have contingencies that are not identified, including the person, environment, or the type of knowledge shared.

The variables studied as interacting with reciprocity can be classified as characteristics of the individual (Chang, Hsu, Shaiu, & Tsai, 2015; Haeussler, 2011; Haeussler et al., 2014; Hung, Lai, & Chao, 2015; Lai & Chen, 2014; Zhang, Chen, & Vogel, 2009; Zhao, Detlor, & Connelly, 2016), of the sharing environment (Caimo & Lomi, 2015; DiGangi et al., 2012; Jeon, Kim, & Koh, 2011; Kang, Kim, &

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