

Chapter 73

Knowledge Sharing, Social Relationships, and Contextual Performance: The Moderating Influence of Information Technology Competence

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ABSTRACT

A firm's core competitiveness results primarily from its ability to innovate. Knowledge sharing plays an important role in promoting sustained innovation. This research examines two factors that enable employee knowledge sharing. Using responses from a questionnaire that was distributed to professionals in a research and development (R&D) department of a Chinese commercial elevator firm, the investigation examines whether social relationships and contextual performance influence knowledge sharing through the moderating effect of employee IT competence. Study findings reveal that social relationships—which include both the degree of centrality of the employee's social network and frequency of interpersonal interaction—and employee contextual performance have a significant positive impact on knowledge sharing. This association, however, is found to be positively moderated by employee IT competence. The findings provide managerial and future research insights pertaining to promoting knowledge sharing by enhancing employee social relationships, rewarding contextual performance, and providing regular IT training for employees.

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INTRODUCTION

A firm's core competitiveness results primarily from its ability to innovate (Higgins, 1995; Kandampully, 2002). Employee knowledge sharing plays an essential role in promoting sustained innovation (Spencer, 2003; Lin, 2007). Hence, it is important to encourage and foster knowledge sharing in the workplace. As such, much research has examined various enablers of and barriers to knowledge sharing in organizations, including organizational structure, technology, culture, management systems, synergy, personal closeness to colleagues, and strategy (e.g., Lilleoere & Hansen, 2011; Phang & Foong, 2006).

Importance of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is a key aspect of human relationships (Chang and Liou, 2002) and a selective interpersonal process (Coming, 2004). Knowledge givers not only choose with whom to share their knowledge, but they decide what knowledge to share based on who the recipients are. Interpersonal interactions are a necessary condition for knowledge sharing. Such interactions are based on a certain degree of interpersonal closeness (Connelly & Kelloway, 2004; Makela et al., 2007). In fact, Lilleoere et al. (2011) show that personal closeness to colleagues is a key enabler for knowledge sharing in organizations. Hence, personal relationships can have a profound connection to knowledge sharing. In the present research, we capture social relationships among employees using social network analysis (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

Characteristics of Knowledge Sharing

Individuals tend to hoard knowledge (Bock & Kim, 2002; Bock et al., 2005). Accordingly, knowledge sharing is principally a voluntary

act; virtually no one can make a person share knowledge. Knowledge sharing can be perceived as voluntary actions of individuals who are motivated by the returns—such as exchanges of favors, concessions, assistance, and courtesies—that they are expected to bring (Lee, 2001). Furthermore, knowledge transfer can demonstrate employees' image of competence and identity (Konstantinou & Fincham, 2010).

Tagliaventi and Mattarelli (2006) view employee knowledge sharing as part of organizational citizenship. Hence, knowledge sharing can be considered a behavior that is *beyond* an employee's normal job requirements. Those individuals with high levels of job dedication and organizational commitment are those who are more likely to share their knowledge in order to help others. Such individuals are said to display elevated *contextual performance*. Therefore, in this research we include the impact of contextual performance on employee knowledge sharing.

In a fast-changing environment it has become increasingly difficult to monitor and manage knowledge (Kalman et al., 2002). This situation has a spill-over effect on knowledge sharing. Information Technology (IT), however, can facilitate knowledge sharing by shrinking temporal and spatial barriers between knowledge workers, thereby creating easier access to information and knowledge (Hendriks, 1999). IT supports knowledge management by either organizing information systematically—codification—or enhancing personalization (Hansen, 1999; Hansen et al. 1999). Huysman (2006) finds that IT is directly related to knowledge sharing motivation and behavior, and Phang et al. (2006) discern that information and communication technology plays a critical role in facilitating and supporting the process of knowledge sharing in organizations. The current study revisits the role of employee's IT competence by focusing on its *moderating effect* on employee social relationships and contextual performance vis-à-vis knowledge sharing behavior.

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