

# Spreading the Light of Knowledge: Nexus of Job Satisfaction, Psychological Safety and Trust

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## ABSTRACT

Given the strategic importance of knowledge in current competitive business environment, it becomes imperative to unfold the possible avenues to motivate the employees to share knowledge with fellow-members in the organization. The article investigates, mechanism of influence of job satisfaction on knowledge sharing behavior of Indian IT- professionals from the lens of social-exchange theory and Job demands-Resources (JD-R) model. A longitudinal study of 106 respondents from Indian IT firms indicates that job satisfaction directly and indirectly encourages the individual to share their knowledge. Specifically, the authors found trust in management and psychological safety mediated this relationship. Implications of their findings for practice and limitations of the study and directions for future research have also been discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, Job Satisfaction, Knowledge Sharing, Psychological Safety, Social-Exchange Theory, Trust in Management

## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has always been one of the key success factors when it comes to gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage (e.g., Jiang, Bao, Xie and Gao, 2016; Mueller, 2014; Spender & Grant, 1996), especially in a high-knowledge intensive workplace like IT firms. The competitive advantage of knowledge can be realized through its creation and dissemination across the organization (Alvesson, 1995). This is made possible by sharing that knowledge among organizational members. Having said that, the next question is, how does one motivate employees to share their knowledge with fellow members of the organization? There is no straight answer here. Thus, exploring the factors that trigger knowledge-sharing behavior among employees has become an important area of research (Zhang et al., 2012). IT-firms are project-based organizations where employees work on different projects as a team. A project team consists of members from different departments, domains, and sometimes from different geographical locations (Hsu, Yang, & Huang, 2011). Success of the project team depends upon the synergy derived from complementary skills of project members (Davis, 2009), which can be achieved through effective knowledge sharing (Mueller, 2014). These firms operate in highly volatile business markets, which require dynamic capabilities on the part of these firms in order for them to sustain.

IT professionals possess tacit knowledge, which is personal and immersed in an individual's thought, behavior, and perception. This makes it difficult to share (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Also, tacit knowledge cannot be codified in writing (Blackler, 1995). Therefore, an IT professional's knowledge-sharing process is different from the other traditional workers (e.g., Cabrera & Cabrera,

2002; Assimakopoulos & Yan, 2006; Liu & Liu, 2008). Liu and Phillips (2011) studied the antecedents of knowledge sharing, leading to team innovativeness using a sample of R&D teams. This learning is facilitated if team members share their past experiences and effectively work with fellow team members. Willingness to share knowledge is influenced by psychological as well as organizational factors (Cabrera et al., 2006).

Knowledge sharing is about exchanging one's own experiences and insight with fellow members of the organization to create value-added benefits (Ryu, Ho & Han, 2003). Organizations strive to create knowledge bases to unbundle the several benefits associated with it. Employees, especially in knowledge-intensive firms, are encouraged to share thoughts, ideas and new learning to help the company sustain in a dynamic and competitive environment. Existing research suggests employee do a cost-benefits analysis before sharing their knowledge at the workplace (Connolly, Thorn, & Heminger, 1992; Jennex, & Olfman 2005: 2006, Jennex, 2008a) i.e. the cost associated with sharing knowledge and rewards when sharing such a resource with others.

Cabrera et al. (2006) explored the factors affecting one's involvement in knowledge sharing and found that psychological, organizational and system-related variables effect the individual's involvement in knowledge-sharing within the organizations. A change in attitude and high levels of motivation are prerequisites that help people to demonstrate knowledge-sharing behavior. As Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) suggested, job satisfaction positively influences the attitudes, motivations and behavior of the employees. It can be construed that the employees who are satisfied with their work and organization are willing to engage in knowledge sharing behavior at their workplace. Our study unravels black box on how job satisfaction leads to knowledge sharing behavior through psychological variables of safety and trust in management.

Few studies have examined the role of psychological safety (Zhang, Fang, Wei, & Chen, 2010) and trust (e.g., Annadatha, 2012; Chiregi & Navimipour, 2016; Wickramasinghe and Widyaratne, 2012; Wang, Tseng, & Yen, 2012) on knowledge sharing. Employees high on psychological safety prefer to express their views fearlessly (Zhang et al., 2010). We expect that employees who feel psychologically safe share their knowledge with fellow-members. Similarly, employees' trust in management allows them to share their knowledge with others in expectation of appropriate rewards and benefits from the management (Kim & Mauborgne, 1993). We expect that employees who trust their management are more motivated to share knowledge with fellow organizational members.

## Context of the Study

India has become the largest outsourcing destination for information technology (IT) firms across the globe and accounts for nearly 67 percent of the US\$ 124-130 billion market (Media report, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) statistics). The Indian IT industry employs a workforce of around 10 million and has been valued at US\$ 143 billion. Indian IT firms have gained a competitive position in the global market and the industry is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 8.3 percent. Foreign investments in this sector have been growing by leaps and bound, for instance, as per NASSCOM report. India is expected to become home to over 11, 500 tech startups by 2020 and revenue generated from public cloud services has been growing at a rate of 33 percent year-on-year (Gartner INC report).

India has been witnessing a technology boom and the Indian IT sector is expected to grow at a healthy rate. IT firms in the country have proven their capabilities by delivering profitable onshore and offshore services to global clients. Such a dynamic and fast-growing sector requires technically sound and innovative products and services, which is possible through knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is important to create a base for the exchange of knowledge and ideas in Indian IT firms. This is possible through the contribution of IT-professionals towards that creation of knowledge.

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