

## Chapter 2

# Knowledge Sharing in a Digital, Remote, and Disrupted World: The Role of Trust

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### ABSTRACT

*Trust is a critical element when building knowledge management practices within an organization. For individuals and teams to share knowledge and collaborate, they must form a relationship that is based on trust. The role of trust within knowledge-sharing, and therefore collaboration and cooperation, will be discussed. In a multinational, distributed, remote work environment, colleagues will interact with content created by their peers before they interact with them, and therefore, digital repositories and content become an extension of the trust relationship between colleagues and even the organization itself. The trust required to facilitate knowledge-sharing will need to be extended to these digital environments so that the organization can maintain its competitive advantage and the benefits of effective knowledge management practices.*

### INTRODUCTION

Organizations implement knowledge management activities to drive organizational efficiency, innovation, and performance (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). For these activities to be successful, it will require that individuals and teams are able to share knowledge. Activities such as creating and sharing knowledge and using others' knowledge will require communication, cooperation, and collaboration. Without a healthy dose of trust, such interdependent tasks are doomed to fail. An internal lack of trust within an organization can also bleed externally and damage relationships with customers, stakeholders, and the public, resulting in disastrous results for an organization (Hurley, 2019; Wzorek, 2021). One of the critical ways organizations can build trust with employees is to share knowledge regularly (Zak, 2007). Trust and knowledge sharing have a symbiotic relationship for organizational performance, and both are heavily influenced by the organization's culture (Conley & Zheng, 2009; Ling, 2011). Organizations that

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7422-5.ch002

have built a high-trust culture see positive results such as greater productivity, collaboration, innovation, and higher employee retention (Zak, 2007; De Cremer, 2020). Leadership plays an influential role in building trust within teams and reinforcing positive knowledge-sharing behaviors; furthermore, teams that share knowledge benefit from better team performance (Lee et al., 2010). To remain successful in a period of significant disruption, organizations will need to strengthen both their trust-building and knowledge-sharing capabilities.

As organizations worldwide adapt to new ways of working brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, many will need to find new ways to share knowledge as workers move from in-office to remote and distributed. While many organizations were using information communication technology in-office, the move to a completely remote workforce accelerated many organizations' digital transformations (Drenik, 2020; Lund et al., 2020) and changed the way workers were used to working with each other. Even though there was a great need to implement new methods of collaboration and connection, employees still struggled to adopt new technologies (Drenik, 2020). While there have been struggles, organizations are also seeing benefits to this new way of working, and many are believing that it is the way of the future (Sawatzky & Macrae, 2020; Lund et al., 2020, Choudhury & Salomon, 2020). Organizations are evaluating hybrid models where workers can spend a certain percent of the time at home or in the office alongside a more permanent remote model (Sawatzky & Macrae, 2020; Lund et al., 2020). This shift in how a considerable portion of the workforce engages in their work will impact organizational culture and interpersonal trust between employees.

Trust is created over time through multiple interactions (Singh & Srivastava, 2009). For remote or hybrid models to be successful, remote workers must be trusted by their peers and managers (Sawatzky & Macrae, 2020). However, in a remote environment, many of the ways we create trust are challenged due to a lack of physical proximity and less frequent social discussions (Mortensen & Gardner, 2021). Building trust in a remote environment brings about new challenges, and so trust will need to be built not only with individuals and teams but also with new digital environments, knowledge repositories, and digital content. In a remote environment, individuals will interact with the content that the person creates before they interact with this person, and so the content will become an extension of how individuals build trust with each other. Not only will organizations be challenged in this new way of building trust, but individuals will also have to overcome their habits and preconceived notions of how to build trust. Historically, remote work was seen as a perk for senior management (Gallacher, 2020). Many workers worried that they would hurt their careers if they were not in the office (Sawatzky & Macrae, 2020), and so individual perceptions of remote work will need to change to better support this type of work in the future.

This chapter aims to define the role of trust within knowledge-sharing and examine the different organizational culture factors that influence building a culture of trust where knowledge is shared effectively and leveraged by workers. Potential solutions and recommendations are proposed for how to build trust to enable knowledge-sharing between individuals and teams, and the role of leadership will be discussed. Given the drastic changes to the workforce brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, creating digital trust amongst employees to enable knowledge-sharing in a new reality of more remote work will also be explored.

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