

## Social Exchange Relations at Work: A Knowledge Sharing and Learning Perspective

<sup>1</sup>Ishfaq Ahmed, <sup>2</sup>Tabassum Riaz, <sup>1</sup>Muhammad Zeeshan Shaukat and <sup>3</sup>Hashim Awais Butt

<sup>1</sup>Development of Human Resource and Faculty of Management,  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>University of the Punjab Jhelum Campus, Jhelum, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Hailey College of Commerce, University of the Punjab, Pakistan

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**Abstract:** This research endeavor is a theoretical focuses on the outcomes of social exchange relations at work. The main outcomes and advances directed by this research are knowledge sharing behavior and development of learning culture in organization. This study shows that provision of support at work: managerial support, supervisory support (LMX) and co-worker support (positive exchange relations) can increase the strength of social bindings of employees, which ultimately can increase knowledge sharing amongst various internal stakeholders (employees, supervisors and management) and how this knowledge sharing can becomes base for learning culture and organization becomes learning organization.

**Key words:** Knowledge sharing % Learning organization % Social exchange % Perceived organizational support % Supervisory support % Co-workers' support

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### INTRODUCTION

In today's business world organizations are striving to compete globally, where they have to manage work force across the globe. At present, neither organizations are area bound, nor do the pools of employees belong to one background. The real challenge faced by organizations is to maintain such diversified workforce in such a way that it offers them competitive edge over its rivals [1]. Organizations are bound to retain their workforce, as they invest huge amount in shape of training and development costs to keep their pace with technological, structural, social and other changes [2].

[3] argued that merely retaining workforce is not important as unproductive employees are not target of such policy. Thus only those employees are given due importance those are part and parcel of organizational gains and they perform their role in achievement of organizational goals [2]. Such employees are regularly trained and developed to keep them in the race of change and get best out of them. Thus organizations create a learning environment where employees are given opportunity to learn and improve themselves at their jobs. Organizations not only put emphasis on their learning but also on sharing of knowledge [4,11]. Organizations put

emphasis on the sharing of knowledge amongst employees in order to enable those who have not received training or they are not new comers.

Such knowledge sharing and dissemination process amongst employees creates bonds between employees where on employee offers something valuable to other employee. Here knowledge is the main shared value amongst employees. This sharing of knowledge creates a moral obligation on the receiving party to reciprocate it with something of same value (knowledge they possess) or something different. Thus a continuous exchange relation is created among employees. This knowledge sharing relation is the same as discussed by [5]. The exchange relationship proposed by [5] is based on the norm of reciprocity. According to [5], when one party offers something valuable to other party, it creates a sense of obligation to return something of great value and thus a continuous process is created. While considering the social exchange relation among employees and comparing it with the knowledge sharing process it can be assumed that knowledge sharing process works at the same line as the social exchange relation of [5].

While talking about social exchange relations at work, Ahmed, Ismail, Amin and Ramzan [6] concluded that there are three forms of exchange relations at work:

exchange relation between organization-employee exchange relation, supervisor-employee exchange relation and employee-employee exchange relation. It is also proposed that better these exchange relations are better will be the jobs done at work [3]. If we take knowledge sharing a job, it can be proposed that if there is presence of positive exchange relation between employee and other party (organization, supervisor and employee), the knowledge sharing will also be maximum, which will help in development and fostering of learning organization culture.

When we have an in-depth look of the exchange relations at work and how they are brought up, it is evident that these relations flow from top to down [7]. When employee is supported and taken care of by organization (leadership and top management), supervisor and other employees, he feels himself bound to return it with something with same value or higher [6]. So, it can be assumed that knowledge sharing will also stem from the top and will flow downward, but when the top or upper level is offering something valuable they knowledge sharing process and outcome will be higher at low level, due to huge number of knowledge recipients and disseminators at lower level.

While considering the forms and types of exchange relations at work, it is evident that there are three forms of exchange relations at work: organization-employee exchange relation, supervisor-employee exchange relation and employee-employee exchange relation [6, 8, 9]. Managerial support is support from the management in form of care and affection shown by the management in day to day affairs of job [3]. Considering the social exchange relation of [5], when organization shows care towards employees; they are morally bound to repay with something valuable. [10] called this moral obligation as the norm of 'reciprocity'. Applying the concept on knowledge sharing and learning organization, when organization will provide support and care to employees, they will reciprocate it in positive way, one of the outcomes could be better sharing of knowledge. Employees may feel it obligatory for them to share the knowledge they possess for the benefit of organization. This will increase the knowledge sharing within organization. When all the employees will participate in the sharing of knowledge, it will create a culture of knowledge sharing and organization would become learning organization.

Similarly, when supervisor and co-worker will provide support to employee they will be obliged to return it with something valuable to the giver/sender of support [6].

This will also create a relation of favor and affection between employees and supervisor; employee and employee. The recipient will be morally bound (reciprocation), to offer all sort of positive returns. This will increase the sharing of knowledge from employee to supervisor and from one employee to other. Thus a continuous process of favor and knowledge sharing will come into being. It will remain till the time each party is playing its role in the reciprocation.

This relation can work other way round as well. When there is presence of learning culture and high knowledge sharing aptitude at work, employees will feel bound to return in shape of knowledge and learning. They will feel that they are supported by others. This may stem from organization (where organization provides knowledge to perform tasks), or from supervisor (where supervisory share knowledge and skills with employees) or it may be in form of employee-employee knowledge sharing, where employee offers learning to other fellows and peers. When any of them offers knowledge and learning to employee, the recipient feels that it is actually a support to perform his/her tasks effectively. Thus sharing of knowledge and learning culture becomes base for learning of organization.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

While looking at the discussion presented above, it can be concluded that the concepts of [5] (social exchange relation) and [10] (reciprocity) can be applied at the learning process, knowledge sharing and learning culture at work. This is a form of outcome or relation which has not been investigated in past. This study gives new direction by linking the social exchange relation, form of reciprocity, knowledge sharing and learning organization. It helps us conclude that support at work (managerial, supervisory and co-worker support) can offer returns in shape of increased knowledge sharing propensity and fostering the learning culture. This study also entails that presence of learning culture can also increase the feelings of support at work. So this study gives new direction by highlighting the two way relation of learning culture/knowledge sharing and social exchange relations.

Future researchers should try to see the empirical evidence of this relation and they should look which of the factors is the leading factor. This relation should be tested in various settings to see the flow of information and support and their relationship.

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