

## Additional case studies

### Leadership, Knowledge Sharing and Task Performance

**Relevant to: Chapter 16, Leadership, Organizational Culture Management, and Knowledge Management**

Xiao et al (2017) examine the relationship between transformational leadership, people's willingness to share knowledge, and task performance. It also examines the extent to which a person's 'exchange ideology', the factors shaping their general willingness to share knowledge, moderates the relationship between leadership and knowledge sharing. In total, four hypotheses are examined. Firstly, the extent to which transformational leadership directly and positively affects people's willingness to share knowledge is examined. This relationship is assumed to be positive as transformational leadership is argued to provide the type of personal motivation to people necessary to encourage them to share knowledge. Secondly, the nature of people's exchange ideology is argued to moderate this relationship is also examined. Thirdly, the relationship between people's willingness to share knowledge, and task performance, is examined. Finally, the direct relationship between transformational leadership and task performance is also examined.

In examining transformational leadership, the focus is on attributed charisma, one of its key components. This is argued to be the component of transformational leadership which most directly influences the motivation and willingness of followers. Exchange ideology builds from the idea that before people share knowledge they evaluate the potential gains and losses that may occur if they do so. The assumption is that people will only share knowledge if they perceive the gains to be greater than the losses. However, the types of gains and losses people consider can vary, with some focussed more on tangible material rewards or extrinsic motivations), and others, more focussed on perceptions or morals and social obligations to others. In the model that it tested, it is assumed that exchange ideology will have a negative influence on the relationship between leadership and knowledge sharing, where the relationship between leadership and knowledge sharing will be strongest for people with a low exchange ideology, where people are less focussed on extrinsic motivators. This is because people with high exchange ideology, who are focussed primarily on extrinsic rewards from knowledge sharing, are less likely to be influenced by the motivational leadership qualities of transformational leaders.

The research data used to test these hypotheses was collected via surveys completed by Chinese graduate students who were taking part in an organizational coordination experiment.

Statistical analysis found that all the hypotheses were strongly supported, with transformational leadership being positively related to both people's willingness to share knowledge, and also task performance. Secondly, exchange ideology did moderate the relationship between leadership and knowledge sharing, with this relationship being weaker for people with a high exchange ideology. Thus, the leadership-knowledge sharing relationship is strongest with people who have a low exchange ideology, and who are motivated by morals, ethics, and social obligations. Thus overall, the research shows the positive relationship that can exist between transformational leadership,

knowledge sharing, and task performance. However, when people have a high exchange ideology the leadership-knowledge sharing relationship is weaker.

Question:

1. To what extent do these results suggest that there is no single, effective leadership style that can motivate everyone, and that effective leadership requires leaders to take account of people's individual differences?

Source:

Xiao, Y., Zhang, X., de Pablos, P. (2017). 'How Individuals' Exchange Orientation Moderate the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing?' *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 21/6: 1622-1639