

What Role Does Trust Play in the Relationship Between Psychological Distance and Knowledge Sharing?

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Abstract. The existence of psychological distance implies that individuals have a sense of uncertainty, resulting in a non-trust attitude; the increase of psychological distance also makes employees unable to obtain psychological pleasure and will not produce knowledge-sharing behavior. Therefore, the distance between the minds has a negative impact on trust and knowledge sharing. Trust can reduce each other's uncertainty, increase mutual psychological commitment, enhance the knowledge sharing in the organization. Therefore, trust has a direct positive impact on knowledge sharing and can play an intermediary role in psychological distance and knowledge sharing.

Introduction

In the era of knowledge-based economy, managers fully realize that knowledge is an important resource that affects the development of an enterprise, and it is also the key to the competitive advantage of an enterprise. Knowledge sharing can help enterprises establish a resource-rich knowledge base and provide the driving force for the development of enterprises (LinLU and Xue-LingLIANG, 2009). Therefore, knowledge sharing becomes one of the organizational behaviors that enterprise managers attach great importance to (Tian-QiNIE, 2017). However, knowledge is inevitably hindered by various factors in the process of sharing within the organization. For example, when employees' working habits and work experience are different, their original psychological distance will be increased, which makes them unwilling to share knowledge at work because of their mutual uncertainties. This kind of psychological distance caused by the background difference can also alienate the emotional connection between employees. Emotional factors, as a psychological response to objective things, can generate trust by establishing good emotional relationships (McAllister, 1995), while Chinese trust relies more on emotional factors (Zhong-FangYANG and Si-QingPENG, 1999). Emotional connections among employees are established through regular communication and increased familiarity.

And familiarity is the fundamental determinant of trust (Giddens, 1994), and this sense of familiarity in the organization is manifested through psychological distance. Individuals form trust with each other through social relations with surrounding individuals (Granovetter, 1986). Trust among members increases each other's psychological commitment and thus enhances knowledge sharing among organizations (Higgs, 2005).

Thus, knowledge sharing may not only be directly affected by the trust and psychological distance, but also indirectly influenced by the psychological distance through trust. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the psychological distance and trust impact on knowledge sharing, share knowledge effectively internally to provide management advice.

Theoretical Review

What is Psychological Distance(PD)?

The concept of "psychological distance" originated in Western aesthetics and was first proposed by psychologist Edward Bullough, as a psychological distance between the subject of aesthetics and the subject of aesthetics (Wang 2010). After development, psychological distance has been applied

to the process of human social interaction, affecting people's attitudes, behaviors, intentions, all aspects of decision-making. Psychological distance is the result of the interaction of cultural factors, perception and understanding are key components (Swift, 2005).

Salzmann & Grasha (1991) showed that PD is the relationship between leaders and subordinates in work by drawing circles. It is emphasized that personal background and emotion are the basic factors that affect the relationship between groups, and the distance between circles is PD. Nordstrom & Vahlne (1994) argue that PD is a factor in the individual's understanding of unfamiliar surroundings and impedes interpersonal communication because of the increased PD associated with aggression (Bandura, 1999) and there is hostility between groups in society (Schwarzwald & Turkaspa, 2004). PD is the counteracting force of spatial distance and social distance (Hassel & Cunningham, 2004). This counteractive force means that the increase of interpersonal distance will increase the uncertainty of interpersonal communication, which hinders the establishment of interpersonal relationships (Ray L. Bnendicktus, 2008). Wang Liping and Zhi-Chuan YU (2013) define PD through the concept of uncertainty and distance as follows: staff members have a sense of uncertainty about their surroundings due to differences in status, values and cultural background, resulting in close or alienated employees. The subjective sense of distance.

Thus, PD is the personal relationship in the interpersonal cognitive, interest, attitude, cultural differences, but in the process of communication generated uncertainty. This uncertainty may hinder interpersonal communication, but also may promote interpersonal communication.

From the perspective of social psychology, different research backgrounds have different divisions of PD. Salzmann & Grasha (1991) divided the PD into three dimensions: knowledge level, status and working ability. Trope & Liberman (2007) is divided into time distance, social distance, spatial distance, probability four-dimensional structure. Tian-Qi NIE (2017) is divided into four dimensions: professional background distance, regional culture distance, right distance and expected distance.

What is Trust?

Trust is a relatively stable personality developed through social learning (Rotter, 1967). In a common normative organization, trust is the expectation that members will be honest and cooperative with each other (Fukuyama, 1995). Chinese people's interpersonal trust relies more on emotional factors (Zhong-Fang YANG and Si-Qing PENG, 1999), with the colors of their rights and their close connection with their loyalty (Ke LIANG, 2002).

Kee & Knox (1970) presented a scenario in the study of trust that a person at a disadvantage recognizes the possibility of being hurt or betrayed by others; the risk that trust can be perceived as being someone depends on the performance of others (Coleman, 1990). One side is disadvantaged by others because one side considers the specific behavior of others to be important to oneself (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Trust is an optimistic expectation of outcomes (Hosmer & Tone, 1995) and is also an expectation or belief of the likelihood that others will act in the future in their own interests (Robinson, 1996). In other words, trust is a state of mind willing to accept vulnerability (Sitkin, 1993; Rousseau & Burt, 1998) and is the expectation and assumption of the individual's influence on others and their own earnings (Romano, 2003).

Thus, we can see the three basic meanings of trust: (1) when one trusts others, he believes that others behave in good faith; (2) trust represents one's own willingness to take risks due to each other's actions; (3) Trust means reliance on others, which means that their own results are influenced by each other.

For the trust structure, most scholars think it is a multi-dimensional structure (Wei-Min LI, Yu-Cheng LIANG, 2002), mainly including two-dimensional and three-dimensional views.

Mishra et al. (1984) divided the internal trust in organizations into upward trust and downward trust, while You-Min XI (2004) considered the relationship as one-way, with the members of the organization as the trusting party and the organization as the trusted party. Nyhan & Marlowe (1997) divided trust into three dimensions of colleague trust, supervisor trust, and organizational trust.

Juan-Ru WANG (2012) summarized it as supervisor trust and colleagues trust.

What is Knowledge Sharing (KS)?

In the study of knowledge sharing, different scholars define their knowledge sharing from different perspectives, mainly from the perspectives of information communication, organizational learning, knowledge transformation and knowledge transfer, which is shown in table1:

Table 1. Definition of knowledge sharing

Perspective	Author	Definition
Information communication	Lee(2001)	KS is the act of transferring information among individuals, groups and organizations of two organizations.
	Hooff & Ridder(2004)	KS is the process of exchanging knowledge among individuals and developing them into organizational knowledge.
Organizational learning	LinDongqing (2005)	KS is the act of sharing knowledge through different channels and means within organizations.
	Sheng-TaiZHANG and Ya-Zhou WANG(2015)	KS is a kind of behavioral process of organizing the optimization result of system design and arrangement
Knowledge transformation	Nonaka(1995)	KS is the process of mutual transformation of tacit knowledge between individuals
	Ipe(2003)	KS is not only a process of transformation, but also a process of making others understand, absorb and use it
	Jiang WEI(2006)	KS is the process of three: individual into individual process; organization into individual process; organization into organizational process
Knowledge transfer	Wijhoven(2003)	KS is a combination of the two behaviors of knowledge transferors including externalizing their own knowledge and knowledge recipients internalizing others' knowledge
	Helmastadte(2003)	KS is a voluntary and knowledge-based interaction process among actors

Even KS is defined from different perspectives, some of them share some common characteristics: whether KS is a kind of behavior or process involves two subjects, which is, KS is the sharing of knowledge through interaction between knowledge owners and knowledge acceptors.

On the division of KS, the current main is divided into single-dimensional and multi-dimensional.

Scholars will be one-dimensional KS from the behavior and attitude of two aspects to be divided. Based on behavioral aspects: knowledge sharing behavior (Lu,2006); tacit knowledge sharing (Lin,2007). Based on attitudes: willingness to share knowledge (Ehow & Ehan, 2005); knowledge sharing attitude (Hwang & Kim, 2007); knowledge sharing tendencies (Wah & Evers, 2007).

Hooff & Ridder (2004) understood KS as two dimensions: contribution and collection of knowledge, which was consistent with the idea of KS by Li Tao and BingWANG (2003); Jiang-TaoSHI (2012) divided KS into knowledge output and knowledge absorption. Bock & Kim (2002) divided KS into three dimensions: the attitude of knowledge sharing, the willingness of knowledge sharing and the behavior of knowledge sharing.

The Relationship between Psychological Distance and Trust

The individual's perception of the distance between society, space and time can affect individual attitudes and perceptions about things (Tian-QiNIE, 2017), while interpersonal trust is a kind of interpersonal attitude (RongWANG, 2016). Trust refers to the positive assessment of one side's intentions and behavior toward the other (Yan-FeiWANG, 2012). Uncertainty is an important factor affecting trust (Daley,1991). Increasing interpersonal distance increases interpersonal communication determinants (Ray L. Benedicktus, 2008), then affect interpersonal trust. Due to the existence of PD, there is an alienation between people (Li-PingWANG and Zhi-Chuan YU et al., 2013), which may reduce the positive estimation of the other's behavior and enhance the mentality

of fortification. As a result, PD hinders interpersonal communication and affects individual understanding of unfamiliar environments (Nordstrom & Vahlne, 1994). A smaller PD increases the certainty of interpersonal relationships and promotes the establishment of a stable and reliable relationship among individuals (Ray L. Benedictus, 2008). Familiarity reduces uncertainty, so familiarity narrows PD (Edwards, 2009), and familiarity determines the basis for trust (Giddens, 1994), so PD affects trust in relationships.

In organizational relationships, PD refers to the subjective feeling of emotion due to the differences in status and cultural background among employees (Li-Ping WANG and Zhi-Chuan YU et al., 2013), thus affecting employees' trust in each other's social relations (Granovetter, 1986). The existence of PD means that employees have a sense of uncertainty about the organization's performance of their commitments and make them feel untrustworthy about the organization (Li-Ping WANG and Zhi-Chuan YU et al., 2013).

Based on the above analysis, the psychological distance will have a direct impact on trust both at the individual level and the organizational level.

The Relationship Between Psychological Distance and Knowledge Sharing

Psychological distance is the prerequisite for the transmission and reception of information, and can create a harmonious communication condition for communicators and recipients (Tian-Qi NIE, 2017). KS mainly includes knowledge providers and receivers, and knowledge is transferred to receivers through the interaction between the two parties (Senge PM, 1997). The existence of PD means that there is a large background difference between the supplier and receiver of knowledge, which is not conducive to knowledge-sharing behavior (Li-Ping WANG and Zhi-Chuan YU et al., 2013).

Tian-Qi NIE (2017) explored the impact on KS from the four dimensions of PD: professional background distance, regional culture distance, right distance, expected distance. Professional background distance has a negative impact on the KS of knowledge workers, which is consistent with the conclusion that Anconc (1992) considers that the professional backgrounds lead to the widening resources of the organization, but also causes the difficult to share knowledge. Regional cultural distance has a negative impact on the willingness of knowledge workers to share knowledge. Research by Shan-Shan LU (2013) also shows that the human and cultural environment in different regions has an impact on entrepreneurship and behavior patterns, which in turn affects whether they adopt knowledge-sharing behaviors in enterprises. The right distance has a negative impact on knowledge-sharing willingness of knowledge workers (Tian-Qi NI, 2017). Employees with high-rights usually choose to be silent and not share their own information and ideas (Morrison & Milliken, 2003). The expectation distance has negative influence on KS intention of knowledge workers.

Thus, PD has a negative impact on KS. The increase of PD makes it impossible for employees to obtain psychological pleasure or to share the cognition of the organization, so as not to produce knowledge sharing behavior. (Li-Ping WANG and Zhi-Chuan YU et al., 2013).

The Relationship between Trust and Knowledge Sharing

In order to achieve the sharing of knowledge, people first learn to trust each other (Senge, 2008). Once unconditional trust has been generated, the will to share knowledge is also formed (Ye Baizhong, 2014). People must have trust and knowledge must be shared (Senge, 1997). Trust is an important factor affecting KS (P Wang, TW Tong, 2004).

Trust is an interactive process. Believing each other as upright, trustworthy, and willing to take on the risks involved, it is the organization's glue (Bao-Zhong YE, 2014). Research shows that trust among team members is the basis of their tacit knowledge sharing behavior. (Nonaka, 1995; Toyama & Konno, 2007), which can reduce mutual psychological uncertainty and increase mutual psychological commitment (Higgs M, 2005) Without having to worry about being exploited by the other party (Bradach & Eccles, 1989), and enhance KS in the team. Zaheer (2006) also argues that organizations have a close relationship of trust to contribute to KS; trust has a positive impact on KS (Yan-Fei WANG, 2012).

The higher the supervisor's confidence in the subordinate, the higher the willingness to share knowledge (Stevenson, 1997); when employees agree with other co-workers' ability to work and their work is consistent, employees believe that KS will also get the rewards from colleagues. In this situation, employees also tend to generate altruistic behavior and increase knowledge sharing (Juan-RuWANG, 2012); staff's trust in supervisors can create common goals and thus enhance the ability of KS among members (Gambetta, 1988) and promote knowledge sharing behavior (Ke-YanCAO, 2008). This is because employees believe the KS will be affirmed by the supervisor (Juan-RuWANG, 2012). Increasing the trust among employees, supervisors and organizations can enhance employees' willingness to share knowledge (Bao-Zhong YE, 2014).

Based on the above analysis, it is necessary to maintain trust among members who share knowledge within the organization, whether they are subordinates and supervisors, or members and members. Only in this way, both sides have the will to share knowledge.

Theoretical Model

Based on the perspective of interpretation level theory, the individuals whose psychological distance is far more explain the event, resulting in a lower level of individual trust (Wang, 2016). The decrease of members' trust will not be conducive to knowledge sharing (Nelson & Coopriider, 1996). Psychological distance diminishes the impact of social embeddedness on individuals (Wang Li-ping, 2013). Individuals are strongly influenced by embedded social relations and form mutual trust (Granovetter, 1986). The generation of trust promotes knowledge sharing among employees and organizations. (Bakker & Leenders et al., 2006).

Tian-Qi NIE (2017) proceeded from the difference between people and showed that the psychological distance negatively affected the willingness of knowledge-based employees to share knowledge. This discrepancy can create obstacles to the exchange of information between providers and recipients of knowledge (Anconc, 1992), which may lead to the intention of distrust. The existence of psychological distance leads to the uncertainty between the knowledge supplier and the receiver, which reduces the trust between each other and ultimately leads to the difficulty of knowledge sharing. (Li-Ping WANG, 2013).

From this, it can be seen that the psychological distance influences the sharing of knowledge with the promotion of trust to knowledge sharing. Psychological distance not only directly affects knowledge sharing, but also indirectly influences knowledge sharing through the intermediary role of trust. This can be the theoretical model shown in Figure 1:

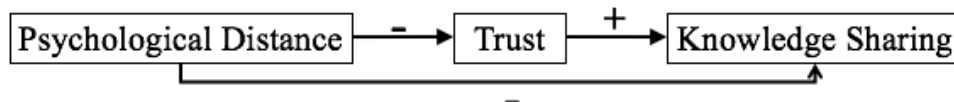


Figure1. Theoretical model.

Conclusion

The degree of psychological distance is not only directly influencing knowledge sharing, but also affects the sharing of knowledge by influencing the trust between individuals. Far distance psychological staff will have inhibitory effect on knowledge sharing and trust; on the contrary, near psychological distance will promote the knowledge sharing and trust among individuals. Trust within organizations has a positive impact on knowledge sharing. Trust plays an intermediary role in the relationship between psychological distance and knowledge sharing.

Therefore, in the process of management, the individual's psychological distance becomes a factor which cannot be neglected when organizations generate trust and carry on knowledge sharing. In the organization, each employee has their own psychological distance, we need to analyze employee psychological activities and their basic ideas, and fundamentally enhance each other's emotional connection and trust, and promote knowledge sharing. Organizations need to focus on the

employee's psychological distance and reduce it. For example, when employees select employees with similar backgrounds as employees, similar work habits and work experience can reduce the psychological distance between newly recruited employees and existing employees, and ensure that employed employees can integrate into the organization as soon as possible. Through staff training to eliminate background differences and promote communication, to reduce the psychological distance and enhance mutual trust between employees, and ultimately ensure the level of knowledge sharing within the organization.

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