

Trust and Knowledge Sharing of Employees in Organizations

Magda Lužar*

Fakulteta za organizacijske študije v Novem mestu, Ulica talcev 3, 8000 Novo mesto,
Slovenija
magda.luzar@fos-unm.si

Annmarie Gorenc Zoran

Fakulteta za organizacijske študije v Novem mestu, Ulica talcev 3, 8000 Novo mesto,
Slovenija
a.zoran@fos-unm.si

Abstract:

Research Question (RQ): How does trust as a factor promote and influence knowledge sharing of employees in organizations?

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to examine existing literature on how trust influences or promotes knowledge sharing in organizations. We examined existing research from the USA and EU in the field of trust among employees and its impact on knowledge sharing and the incentives and consequences of knowledge sharing at work.

Method: The review of existing scientific research was performed using the guidelines of an integrative literature review. We searched for keywords through the following databases: ABI / INFORM, Business Source Premier, dLIB, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Link, Web of Science. From the search, we found 23 articles with keywords related to knowledge sharing and trust in organizations. The review included articles that were younger than ten years, published in indexed journals with an impact factor above 1. The articles had to refer to the working population, articles that included research from the EU and USA that focused on quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods and published in English and Slovenian, respectively.

Results: Through an integrative review of research studies from the EU and USA, we examined the incentives for knowledge sharing, trust, and the consequences of knowledge sharing. We found that in all regions, the most significant element is that the organization has such an organizational culture among employees that encourages trust and leads to the exchange of implicit and explicit knowledge. In an intensive environment, this facilitates the organization to respond to change because it creates new knowledge, is innovative, and competitively.

Organization and society: The review of articles and findings help the organization, especially leaders, to strive to create an organizational culture at a level that creates trust among employees, leading to knowledge exchange and creation of new knowledge, with the goal of being and working in a changing environment.

Originality: The research offers findings from the EU and the USA, on the specific incentives for knowledge sharing, the importance of trust in sharing, and the consequences of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation for organizations.

Limitations/Future Research: The research is limited due to the number of articles reviewed, the geographical research context, and journal indexation and age. At the same time, other factors that help

or hinder knowledge sharing could be taken into account. This would lead to a better and more comprehensive view of the issue of the influence of various factors on knowledge sharing.

Keywords: knowledge, trust, knowledge exchange, employees, organization, encouragement, tacit knowledge, explicit and implicit knowledge.

1 Introduction

Bennet, Bennet, and Avedisian stated that “Knowledge determines the quality of every single decision we make”. (2015, p. 5) How to make the best use of the decision-making process for yourself, for an organization, or for society? It is with knowledge that we can act effectively in various, intense, and uncertain situations that are ever more present today. Decision-makers play an essential role in decisions in each situation. For lasting competitive advantage, knowledge ownership is not enough, but also the ability to disseminate knowledge by promoting knowledge exchange. A Chinese proverb summarizes this well: “When there is trust, you don’t need evidence. When there is no trust, no evidence can stand.” The decision to accept or offer knowledge may be based on or influenced by the factor of trust.

In this article, we intend to present how the factor of trust influences or promotes the exchange of knowledge in an organization. We intend to examine existing research in the field of trust among employees and its impact on the exchange of knowledge and the incentives and consequences of knowledge exchange at work in various regions of the world.

2 Theoretical framework

Knowledge that is functionally defined is the potential or actual ability by which an owner can act effectively in a variety of uncertain situations (Bennet & Bennet, 2004, p.). "In the economy, the only certainty is uncertainty, and knowledge is a reliable source of lasting competitive advantage," states Nonaka (1991, pp. 96–104).

Nonaka (2007, pp. 162–171) classifies knowledge into explicit knowledge that is formal and systematic and can be easily communicated and shared in various specifications or scientific formulas or computer programs. Tacit knowledge is very personal, difficult to formalize, and challenging to share with others, and is deeply rooted in an individual’s actions and commitment to a particular context. Bennet, Bennet, and Avedisian (2015, p. 27) state that knowledge sharing is in dimensions: explicit, implicit, and tacit, which are useful to understand and clarify the expression of knowledge. There are no clear boundaries between these types of knowledge dimensions. Nonaka and Takeuchi write only about the existence of only explicit and tacit part of knowledge (1995, p. 72).

Nonaka (1994, pp. 14–37) and Bock, Zmud, Kim, and Lee (2005, pp. 87–111) define knowledge sharing as the willingness of employees to share tacit and explicit knowledge with co-workers. Ipe (2003, pp. 337–359) defines knowledge exchange as a conscious process of

employees who transform their knowledge into a form of knowledge for one or more recipients, which in turn leads to collective ownership of knowledge.

The role of the relationship between the knowledge provider and the recipient is important in an organization. It can inhibit or accelerate knowledge exchange among employees. Levin and Cross state that trust improves knowledge exchange (2004, pp. 1477–1490). Argote (1999) also notes that in the context of long-term activities in an organization, trust plays an important role and influences the exchange of knowledge.

Interpersonal trust is defined as a benevolent trust based on an 'emotional bond' between individuals (i.e., trust in basic feelings, genuine care, honesty, and personal attachment) and competence trust that is based on competency and responsibility (i.e., reliability based on ability and responsibility). (Ko, 2010, pp. 202–213)

Ko (2010, pp. 202–213) research the role of trust and its impact on knowledge sharing and found that well-intentioned trust affects knowledge exchange, but competent trust does not.

How does the element of trust encourage and influence knowledge exchange of employees in an organization? Kipkosgei, Son, and Kang (2020) research study showed that organizations among public sector employees could increase knowledge exchange by focusing on building knowledge among workers. Alsharo, Gregg, and Ramirez investigated the effects of knowledge sharing on virtual groups and found that knowledge sharing has a positive effect on trust and team participation, but does not have a direct effect on group effectiveness (2017, pp. 479–490). A high level of interpersonal trust between customers and employees increases the innovative behavior of employees, and affective trust regulates the relationship between the emotional participation of customers and the innovative behavior of employees. (Li & Hsu, 2018, pp. 2112–2131). Bao, Xu, & Zhang (2016, pp. 362–375) cite research findings that trust at different levels influences knowledge sharing and knowledge pooling. The authors further state that trust is a prerequisite rather than a sufficient condition for actualizing knowledge sharing and pooling.

3 Method

An integrative scholarly review of the literature was conducted (Torraco, 2005, 2016). We collected, reviewed, and analyzed existing literature in the field of knowledge exchange in organizations. We searched and collected articles based on inclusion criteria, which we then edited through the referencing tool Mendeley, making it easier for all collaborators to organize and facilitate the research work. We have included the most relevant seven in the article. The inclusion criteria included searching through the following databases: ABI / INFORM, Business Source Premier, dLIB, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Link, Clarivate Analytics (Web of Science). Table 1 shows the keywords that were used for the search of articles related to knowledge exchange in an organization. We further limited ourselves to journals that had an impact factor, age of the literature, and region (EU & USA).

We included scholarly articles that were younger than ten years and published in indexed journals with an impact factor above 1. The chosen articles considered all study methods. We considered scholarly work from different regions of the world. Categorization of suitable articles was then further classified under the following levels: individual, group, management, and organization.

Table 1. Keywords for literature review

Keywords Slovenian	Keywords English
znanje + vrste znanja	knowledge + types of knowledge
izmenjava znanja + izmenjava znanja med zaposlenimi	knowledge sharing + knowledge exchange between employees
zaupanje + zaupanje med zaposlenimi	trust + trust among employees
zaposleni	employee
organiizacija	organization

4 Results

For the integrative literature review, we searched for articles by keyword. After reviewing, we then used the inclusion criteria described in the Methods section and selected the most relevant articles listed in Table 2 related to the research question.

Table 2. Selected articles

Author, year of first publication, the title of the article, journal	Impact factor
Literature or articles whose research is relevant to the EU	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sankowska, A. (2013). Relationships between organizational trust, knowledge transfer, knowledge creation, and firm's innovativeness. <i>The Learning Organization</i>, 20(1), 85–100. doi:10.1108/09696471311288546 Rutten, W., Blaas-Franken, J., & Martin, H. (2016). The impact of (low) trust on knowledge sharing. <i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>, 20(2), 199–214. doi:10.1108/jkm-10-2015-0391 Casimir, G., Lee, K., & Loon, M. (2012). Knowledge sharing: influences of trust, commitment and cost. <i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>, 16(5), 740–753. doi:10.1108/13673271211262781 	1.46 2.053 1.474
Literature or articles whose research is relevant to the USA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swift, P. E., & Hwang, A. (2013). The impact of affective and cognitive trust on knowledge sharing and organizational learning. <i>The Learning Organization</i>, 20(1), 20–37. doi:10.1108/09696471311288500 Holste, J. S., & Fields, D. (2010). Trust and tacit knowledge sharing and use. <i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>, 14(1), 128–140. doi:10.1108/13673271011015615 Wang, S., & Noe, R. A. (2010). Knowledge sharing: A review and directions for future research. <i>Human Resource Management Review</i>, 20(2), 115–131. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.10.001 Evans, M. M. (2013). Is trust the most important human factor influencing knowledge sharing in organisations? <i>Journal of Information & Knowledge Management</i>, 12(04), 1350038. doi:10.1142/s021964921350038x 	1.46 1.248 2.796 1.257

The key findings from existing research findings in the EU are summarized in Table 3, with key elements highlighted in bold.

Table 3. Key research findings for the EU

Author	Key findings
Sankvoska, A. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust should be seen as a foundation for innovation. • The connection between trust and knowledge creation, knowledge transfer and innovation. Trust influences innovation directly and indirectly through knowledge transfer and knowledge creation. • There are strong links between trust and the creation and transfer and innovation of knowledge. This explains the emergence of differences between companies in competitiveness and innovation. • For management in organizations operating in an intensive environment, the key recipe is to understand the role of trust in the organization and in individuals if they want to be innovative and competitive. • Trust plays a key role in knowledge transfer. The task of management is to "care" for organizational trust. • The survey focused on some aspects of the consequences of trust and data were obtained from only one respondent from each company (202 companies per company listed on the Polish Stock Exchange in Poland), indicating the possibility of bias in the method.
Rutten, W., Blaas-Franken, J. & Martin, H. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore implicit and explicit knowledge and trust based on knowledge and trust based on affect • A high level of trust leads to a high level of knowledge exchange and vice versa. • Greater effect of sharing implicit knowledge due to affect-based trust. • The impact of trust on the amount of knowledge shared, where the "direction" of trust runs from the knowledge provider to the knowledge seeker and not vice versa • Awareness of the importance of trust is necessary among employees in the organization, because they would gain an increase in knowledge exchange. • Empirical research was conducted in only one organization among 102 experts dealing with complex investment decisions in a financial organization in the Netherlands.
Casimir, G., Lee, K., & Loon, M. (2012).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust among employees is based on and influences the behavior and success of knowledge exchange • Organizational culture fosters influence and fosters trust between co-workers and facilitates knowledge sharing • Creating a work environment that encourages employees, cares for employees, establishes a system that enables the exchange of knowledge and establishes an organizational structure that facilitates the flow of knowledge. • Empirical research conducted in fifteen service organizations (496 surveys) in ten industries in the fields of: accounting, banking, education, finance, information technology, insurance, legal sector, logistics, shipping and trade.

The key findings from existing research findings in the USA are summarized in Table 4, with key elements highlighted in bold.

Table 4. Key research findings for the USA

Author	Key findings
Swift, P. E., & Hwang, A. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affective trust is more important than cognitive trust, the willingness of employees to share knowledge varies depending on the type of trust • Need to develop structures and processes that support the development of trust in the organization. Informal events and gatherings encourage the development of affective trust, formal organizational meetings encourage the development of cognitive trust. • Survey conducted among 157 marketing and sales managers. Limitations of the survey: short questionnaire, due to time constraints of marketing managers who participated in the survey
Holste, J. S., & Fields, D. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of trust type affect the level of willingness to share and use tacit knowledge. • Affect-based trust has a significantly greater effect on the willingness to share knowledge, cognition-based trust plays a greater role in the willingness to use tacit knowledge. • Both types of trust are involved in decisions that affect the exchange and use of tacit knowledge. • Research conducted on a sample of 202 expert managers at the international headquarters of the international organization, in the fields of: strategic planning, research, accounting, human resources, information technology, public relations.
Evans, M. M. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust is the most important factor influencing the exchange of knowledge and has a positive effect on: willingness to share, willingness to use and perceived receipt of useful knowledge. • Trust and a shared vision are the most influential factors in the willingness to share and use knowledge. • A quantitative survey conducted among 275 legal professionals in Canada. Limited research is in the sense that it was done among employees of one industry.
Wang, S., & Noe, R. A. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational culture directly influences the behavior and trust of employees for the exchange of knowledge and the emergence of innovation. • Management support is key to creating initiatives to share knowledge among employees. • The inner satisfaction and trust of individuals leads to the exchange of useful knowledge with others. • The research is based on a review of the literature, where the emphasis is on the exchange of knowledge. A literature review was conducted between 67 qualitative and quantitative studies conducted since 2008 and three studies prior to 1999.

Figure 1 shows key findings that are relevant to the EU in connection with the articles examined. The incentives facilitate the organization to encourage the impact of trust among employees, thus facilitating knowledge sharing. Sankovska (2013) states that trust is transformed into organizational success (pp. 85–100).

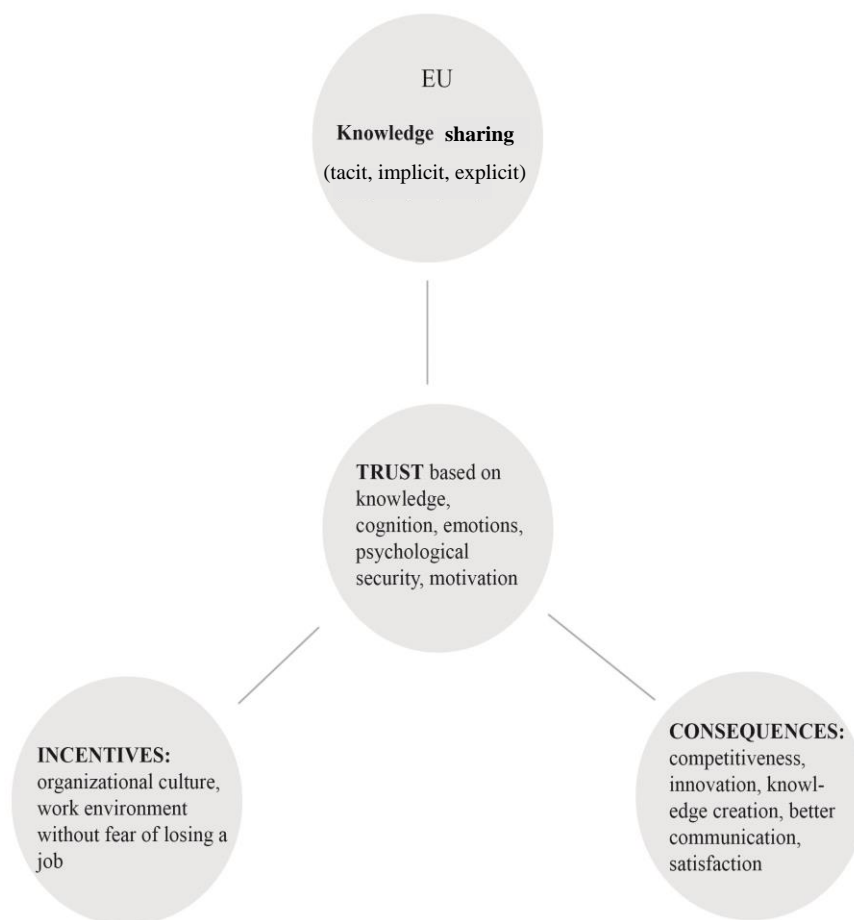


Figure 1. Radial diagram of the role of trust in the EU

Figure 2 depicts key findings that are relevant to the USA. In the USA, trust is a factor influencing knowledge sharing. Evans (2013) notes that trust has a positive effect on willingness to share, willingness to use, and perceived receipt of useful knowledge (pp. 1350038-1–17). Wang (2010), however, states that organizational culture is a factor that directly influences employee behavior and trust for knowledge sharing and generating innovation (pp. 115–131).

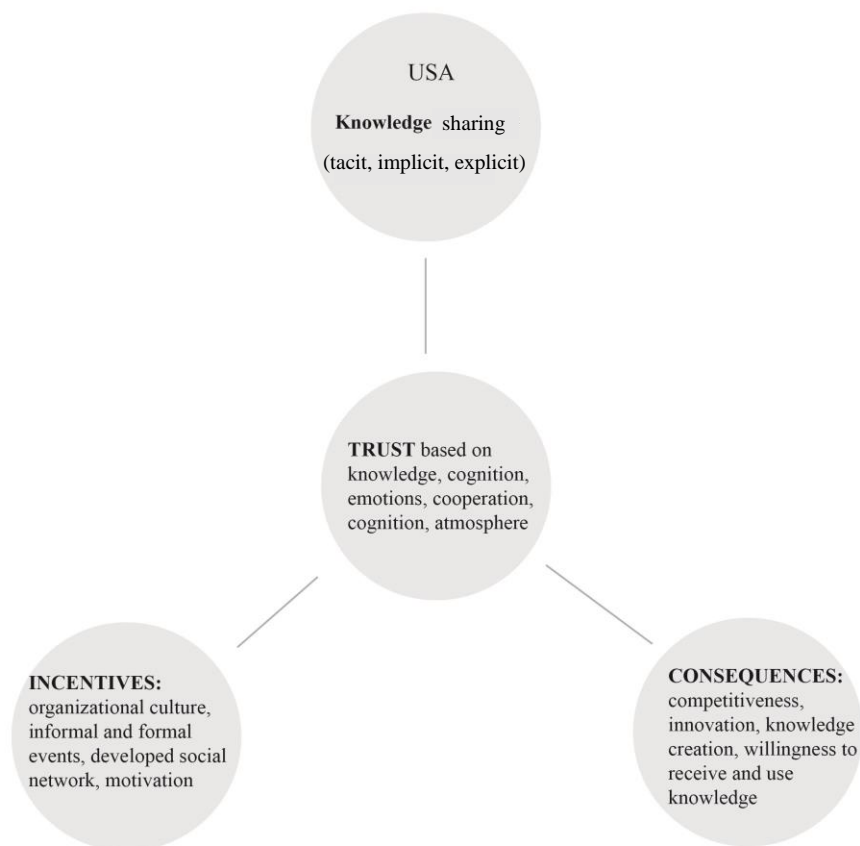


Figure 2. Radial diagram of the role of trust in the USA

Figure 3 shows key similarities and differences between the EU and the USA. Trust based on knowledge, cognition, and emotions is essential in both regions. However, differences between the EU and the USA in terms of trust, incentives, and consequences are also shown. Casimir, Lee, and Loon (2012) state that the role of organizational culture is vital in developing trust among employees and influencing them (pp. 740–753). We also found that organizational culture is essential, but other incentives are also listed.

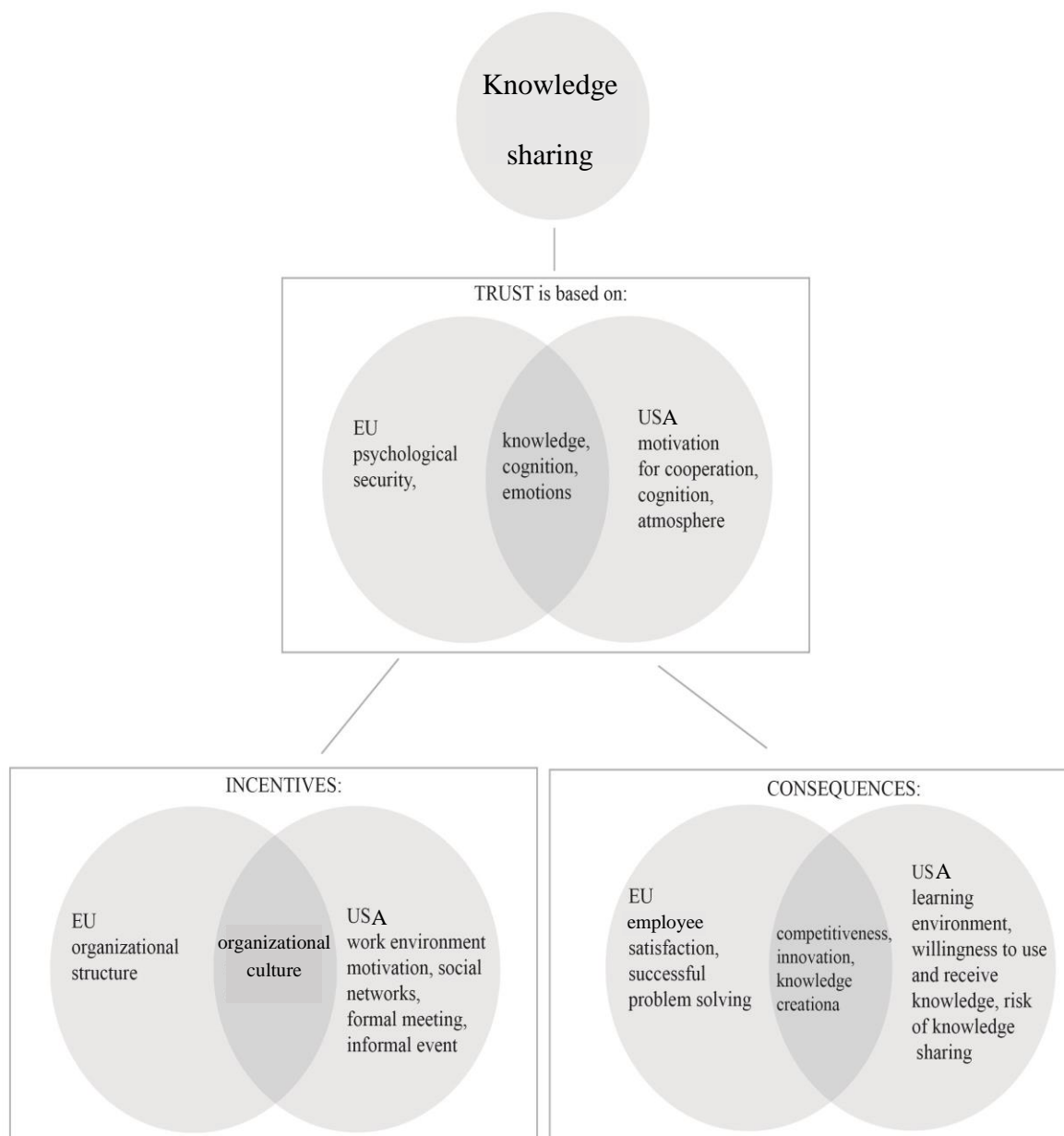


Figure 3. Similarities and differences between the EU and the USA

5 Discussion

Whether it is in the EU or the USA, the common element is that trust influences knowledge sharing of employees in organizations. Trust among employees is promoted by organizational culture and is a facilitator in sharing knowledge.

From the results of the reviewed articles for the EU, we will discuss incentives, the impact of trust on knowledge sharing, and the implications for the individual and the organization.

Incentives: Incentives causes someone to be more industrious, diligent and maintains what is happening, functioning (SSKJ, 2014). Incentives in the organization and in the individual are

necessary for the development of events, in our case trust, knowledge sharing. Sankovska (2013) states that leaders in an organization need to 'nurture' and build trust among employees. In the results of this study, this is shown as the establishment of an environment for formal and informal socializing, where it is possible to encourage any discussion, exchange of ideas, concepts from different fields. In-depth research needs to be developed among co-workers in work environments, co-worker behavior that leads to collaboration, and open communication for knowledge dissemination. Organizational culture is one that promotes the impact of trust among co-workers and facilitates knowledge sharing. If they want to promote affective and cognitive trust in organizations, it is necessary to focus on organizational processes that include job rotation, training seminars, meetings, informal events that are useful for creating and developing affective and cognitive trust.

Trust: Sankovska (2013) presents as a structural equation, the connection between trust and knowledge creation and innovation. Trust is directly and indirectly influenced onto the transfer and creation of knowledge. A high level of trust leads to a high level of knowledge sharing, and a lower level of trust leads to less knowledge sharing. The direction of trust runs from the knowledge provider to the knowledge seeker. A high level of trust in the organization occurs with good personal contacts, friendship, and with no perceived costs (negative impact of knowledge sharing on the individual).

Knowledge sharing: In an organization, employees are often educated, and the skill of the employee is improved, which leads to the desire and need for knowledge sharing that is based on trust. Depending on how employees feel about their organization and their co-workers, it has a significant impact on voluntary knowledge sharing. Emotional commitment to the organization can reduce the negative impact of perceived costs (self-interest, job security, organizational status, rewards, time, and effort) of knowledge sharing. The impact of cognitive trust on organizational learning supports trust in another person's knowledge and affects knowledge sharing.

Consequences: Sankovska (2013) notes that trust is transformed into organizational performance, and trust is seen as the foundation of innovation, and in terms of how much trust is converted into organizational performance, there are differences in competitiveness and innovation between companies.

From the results of the reviewed articles for the USA, we will discuss incentives, the impact of trust on knowledge sharing, and the implications for the individual and the organization.

Incentives: For organizations to share knowledge, it is necessary to establish a shared language and a shared vision among employees of an organization, which affects the readiness to share knowledge. It is crucial to build organizational culture, interpersonal and team relationships, cultural characteristics, and motivational factors in an organization. Management support is crucial for creating knowledge-sharing initiatives.

Trust: Trust is based on affect and has an effect on the willingness to share tacit knowledge, trust based on knowledge plays a more significant role in the readiness for tacit knowledge. Trust is the most important factor influencing knowledge sharing and has a positive effect on the willingness to share, the willingness to use, and the willingness to receive useful knowledge.

Knowledge sharing: Employees are based on influencing and recognizing a willingness to share and use tacit knowledge. Both affect-based trust and cognition-based trust influence decisions to transfer and use tacit knowledge.

Consequences: Organizational culture directly influences the behavior and trust of employees for the exchange of knowledge and the emergence of innovation.

Similarities and differences between the EU and the USA: We examined the similarities through an integrative review of articles and found that organizational culture fosters trust among employees and leads to the exchange of implicit and explicit knowledge, which facilitates organizations to create knowledge, be innovative, and competitive. We found that trust in the EU affects knowledge sharing also due to incentives such as organizational structure and work environment. In the USA, trust affects knowledge sharing if incentives are organized in the form of formal meetings and informal events, motivation, and social networks. In EU organizations, there is employee satisfaction and successful problem-solving, due to successful knowledge sharing, and in the USA, employees are ready to use and receive knowledge and create a learning environment. We list similar positive outcomes of knowledge sharing in an organization in the EU and the USA, which are: competitiveness, innovation, and knowledge creation.

6 Conclusion

Through an integrative review of research studies from the EU and USA, we examined the incentives for knowledge sharing, trust, and outcomes of knowledge sharing. We found that in both regions, the most significant element is that the organization has such an organizational culture among employees that encourages trust and leads to the exchange of implicit and explicit knowledge. In an intensive environment, this facilitates the organization to respond to change because it creates new knowledge, is innovative, and competitive.

The results of existing studies assist organizations, especially managers, leadership, and organizations, to strive to create an organizational culture at a level that creates trust among employees, leading to knowledge exchange creation of new knowledge. This is how innovative and competitive organizations operate in a changing environment.

This study has its limitations regarding the number of articles. Being more inclusive with the research studies from various regions could be studied and for a more extended period of time. At the same time, other factors that facilitate or hinder knowledge sharing could be explored.

Further research studies could include different geographical regions while considering quantizing qualitative data for further analysis. Additionally, mixed methods could be used to research elements of knowledge sharing. This would lead to a better and more comprehensive overview on the influence of various factors of knowledge sharing.

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Magda Lužar, Master of Quality Management She has many years of experience in the field of financial management in the public and private sectors. He transfers his work experience and theoretical knowledge through lectures to higher education students. He is currently researching the field of knowledge and exchange and its transfer among employees in organizations.

Annamarie Gorenc Zoran is a Professor at the Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto as well as teaches distance learning courses abroad. Her research interest is an interdisciplinary approach to communication, as a channel in e-learning, framework for continuous improvement in terms of quality standards feedback, a tool in education and teaching, as an analytical framework to research, and as a contribution to management. She has published book chapters, numerous articles, and presented at international, national, and regional conferences.

Povzetek:

Zaupanje in izmenjava znanja zaposlenih v organizaciji

Raziskovalno vprašanje (RV): Kako dejavnik zaupanje spodbuja in vpliva na izmenjavo znanja zaposlenih v organizaciji?

Namen: V članku nameravamo predstaviti, kako dejavnik zaupanje vpliva ali spodbuja izmenjavo znanja v organizaciji. Nameravamo proučiti obstoječe raziskave s področja zaupanja med zaposlenimi in vplivanje le tega na izmenjavo znanja ter spodbude in posledice izmenjave znanja, ki so na delovnem mestu v EU in ZDA.

Metoda: Pregled obstoječih znanstvenih raziskav smo opravili po smernicah integrativnega pregleda literature. Po ključnih besedah smo iskali preko baz: ABI/INFORM, Business Source Premier, dLIB, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Link, Web of Science in smo s ključnimi besedami povezanimi z izmenjavo znanja in zaupanjem v organizaciji pridobili 23 člankov. V pregled smo vključili članke, ki so stari 10 let ali mlajši in so objavljeni v indeksiranih revijah s

faktorjem vpliva nad 1, vzorec v raziskavah se nanaša na delovno populacijo v gospodarstvu, raziskave so opravljene z vzorcem iz EU in ZDA, upoštevajo se samo kvantitativne, kvalitativne in mešane metode ter članki objavljeni v angleškem oziroma slovenskem jeziku.

Rezultati: Skozi integrativni pregled člankov, kjer so bile raziskave opravljene smo preučevali spodbude za izmenjavo znanja, zaupanje, izmenjavo znanja, posledice izmenjave znanja. Ugotovili smo, da je v EU in ZDA najpomembnejše, da je v organizaciji prisotna organizacijska kultura med zaposlenimi, ki spodbudi zaupanje na spoznanju in čustvih ter vodi v izmenjavo implicitnega in izrecnega znanja. To pa v intenzivnem okolju pripomore, da se organizacija odzove na spremembe, ker ustvarja novo znanje, je inovativna in konkurenčna.

Organizacija in družba: Omenjeni pregled člankov in ugotovitve pripomorejo v organizaciji, predvsem voditeljem, da strmijo k ustvarjanju organizacijske kulture na nivoju, ki med zaposlenimi ustvarja zaupanje, ki vodi v izmenjavo znanja in ustvarjanje novega znanja, s ciljem biti in delovati v spremenljivem okolju inovativno in konkurenčno.

Originalnost: Raziskava ponuja neposredne zbrane ugotovitve iz EU in ZDA, katere so spodbude za izmenjavo znanja, pomen dejavnika zaupanje pri izmenjavi in posledice izmenjave znanja in ustvarjanja znanja za organizacijo..

Omejitve/nadaljnje raziskovanje: Raziskava je omejena, saj bi bilo lahko preučeni več člankov iz različnih regij in tudi za daljše časovno obdobje. Hkrati pa bi lahko upoštevali tudi druge dejavnike, ki pripomorejo ali pa zavirajo izmenjavo znanja. Tako bi prišli do boljšega in celovitejšega pogleda na problematiko vpliva različnih dejavnikov na izmenjavo znanja.

Ključne besede: znanje, zaupanje, izmenjava znanja, zaposleni, organizacija, spodbuda, tiho znanje, izrecno in implicitno znanje.

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