Abstract

I examined whether and how motivational orientations in the social domain (conceptualized as status striving and communion striving) and in the task domain (conceptualized as achievement striving) predict two types of discretionary behaviors: knowledge sharing and creativity. Data collected from full-time employees confirmed the positive relationship between achievement striving (but not the other motives) and employees’ creativity. As predicted, social motivations displayed an interactive effect: employees with high levels of communion striving had a greater propensity to share their knowledge when they were also high in status striving.

1. Introduction

Employees’ motives guide their subsequent behavioral choices at work, including their performance and discretionary behaviors. One way to classify underlying motives is by determining whether they are related to social interactions (i.e., agentic vs. communal motives, or status striving vs. communion striving, [1]) or to accomplishing the task to be executed (i.e., accomplishment striving; [2]). Researchers confirmed the positive relationship between motives (i.e., status and communion striving) and discretionary behaviors (proactive behaviors and helping, e.g., [3]). However, the influence of various types of motivational orientation on the extent to which employees chose to share information with colleagues and to engage in creative behaviors has not been established.

The advantage of using motivational orientations as a predictor lies within the comprehensive coverage of the construct. Specifically, motivation orientations focuses on both task-related motivation (accomplishment striving) and interaction-based motives (in their agentic – status striving –, or communal – communion striving – forms). Research on motivational predictors of knowledge sharing and creativity complements existing studies where contextual aspects (such as the direct leader; [4], [5], [6]) or within person characteristics which are personality or affect-based [7], [8] are examined as drivers of knowledge sharing and creativity ([9], for a review).

One advantage of differentiating motivations in task- and interpersonal-based is being able to determine the extent to which each contributes to knowledge sharing and creativity. Based on existing theory, employee creativity should be predicted mainly by accomplishment striving. Employees who want to improve the task at hand, or related processes, will be more likely to engage in cognitive elaboration and related improvements. Conversely, sharing knowledge takes place in a social environment [10]. While accomplishment striving is not negligible, social motives should take precedence in determining whether employees will want to share their knowledge. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between motivational orientations and both knowledge sharing and creativity and explore the existence of possible interactive effects.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Knowledge sharing happens in an interpersonal and social context [10], [11]. As a result, being motivated to get things done (accomplishment striving; [2]) should be less important than socially-directed aspects of motivation. For example, Chiaburu and co-authors (2007) show that status striving and communion striving predict seeking and receiving help among coworkers. In a similar way, knowledge sharing may be enhanced by a desire to get ahead of others (status striving). Employees who are helped by the
information received will tend to attribute higher status to the source providing this information. Getting along with other employees, on the other hand, may be important for the decision to share information because of the desire to maintain good relationships with others at work.

H1. Employees’ (a) communion striving will be positively and (b) status striving will be positively related to their knowledge sharing (after controlling for achievement striving).

For creative behaviors, social motivations are less likely to play a major role. Creativity has to do with improving task-related processes or outcomes. As demonstrated in prior work, accomplishment striving and achievement motivation are important motivators of employees’ creativity [12]. Motives from the interpersonal and social domain should, such as getting along (communion striving) or getting ahead (status striving) should be less important. Instead, accomplishment striving will be the most important driver in determining employees’ creative involvement.

H2. Employees’ achievement striving will be positively related to their creativity (after controlling for communion striving and status striving).

In addition to differential predictions for knowledge sharing (predicted by social motives), motivational orientations within the social domain can interact and influence how employees share information and knowledge. Employees who want to get along with others (high communion striving) will be more likely to share, given their tendency to take into account other’s needs. Others, who want to acquire status, may also be inclined to provide information, based on their underlying motivation to acquire more status and power and get ahead others at work [13]. It results, then, that knowledge sharing could be enhanced by a motive to both get along with others and get ahead of them (significantly correlated in prior research; [2], [3]). Even though employees may be more creative when motivated to get along with others (high communion striving), high levels of motivation to also get ahead (high levels of status striving) will enhance knowledge sharing, because of the combined advantage of obtain communion and status advantages. Overall, the prediction is consistent with models proposing mixed motives as drivers of knowledge sharing (e.g., in the form of “co-opetition,” [14]).

H3. Status striving and communion striving will interact in influencing knowledge sharing. Specifically, employees with high levels of communion striving will engage in more knowledge sharing when their levels of status striving are also high.

3. Method

I obtained data from employees in the United States contacted through a professional association (33 percent response rate, N = 165). Both managerial and professional employees were targeted, given their opportunity to engage in creative behaviors and knowledge sharing. Most industries (as described in the Standard Industrial Classification System) were represented, except agriculture. The majority of the respondents were in managerial positions (N=95), supervising between one and one thousand employees (M=34.15, SD=110.10), and with organization tenures between 6 months and 38 years (M=8.20, SD=8.23). Both genders were represented (with males constituting 73 percent of the sample) and respondents’ ages ranged from 21 to 67 years.

I used three items for each motivational orientation dimension: achievement striving (“I put a lot of effort into completing my work tasks,” α=.86), status striving (“I never give up trying to perform at a level higher than others in my workgroup,” α=.90), and communion striving (“I attempt to develop a reputation as someone who is really easy to work with,” α=.70; [2]).

Creativity was measured with five items from Zhou and George (2001; e.g., “I come up with new ways to increase quality,” α=.89). Finally, knowledge sharing (four items, α=.90) was measured with items from Faraj and Sproull (2000), further validated by Srivastava and colleagues (2000). Examples of questions are “I share my special knowledge and expertise with my colleagues” and “I freely provide other colleagues with hard-to-find knowledge.” Questions were anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

4. Results

A factor analysis using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation revealed that items loaded on their three motivational orientation factors,
with no cross-loadings higher than .28. The median loading across the items was .77. Bivariate correlations revealed that accomplishment striving was positively correlated with status striving (.37) and with communion striving (.16). Communion and status striving were correlated .31 (all correlations were significant at levels higher than p < .05).

Multiple regression analyses were used, with standardizing the variables before creating interaction terms for an easier interpretation of the results [17], [18]. The results of the regression analyses are provided in Table 1 and described as follows. Concerning the main hypotheses, after controlling for accomplishment striving ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$), status striving ($\beta = -.01$, $ns$) and communion striving ($\beta = .17$, $ns$) did not explain significant additional variance in knowledge sharing ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $ns$). Therefore Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Conversely, Hypothesis 2 was supported: after controlling for status striving ($\beta = .18$, $ns$) and communion striving ($\beta = .01$, $ns$), accomplishment striving was positively related to creativity ($\beta = .29$, $p < .05$; $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .05$). Finally, Hypothesis 3 was also supported: communion and status striving interacted ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .05$), explained significant additional variance in knowledge sharing after controlling for direct effects ($\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p < .01$), and operated in the predicted direction (Figure 1).

Table 1. Regression Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Knowledge Sharing ($\beta$)</th>
<th>Creativity ($\beta$)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$H1$</td>
<td>$H3$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achievement Striving (AS)</td>
<td>$R^2 = .06$</td>
<td>$\Delta R^2 = .06$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion Striving (CS)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Striving (SS)</td>
<td>$.17$</td>
<td>$.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS x SS</td>
<td>$\Delta R^2 = .03$</td>
<td>$R^2 = .09$</td>
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* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2$ over and above the previous step

5. Discussion

The study contributes to the knowledge sharing and creativity literature with testing a motivational model of discretionary behaviors, using a combination of motives that are interpersonally-oriented (status and communion striving) and of task-related motives (accomplishment striving; [2], [3]). The results indicate that accomplishment striving (a task-related aspect of motivation) is positively related to creativity. While distal organizational culture and climate influences on creativity are not to be neglected [19], from an intra-individual perspective, motives such as focusing on the immediate task may motivate creative engagement. Future research is necessary to determine mechanisms connecting accomplishment striving to creative actions. These can take the form of increased self-efficacy [20] which may lead to more efficient task execution and the creation of slack resources.

Contrary to the initial hypotheses, knowledge sharing was not predicted by either status striving or communion striving. However, a predicted interactive effect was found, showing that a combination of high levels of communion striving and status striving is beneficial for employees’ inclination to share information with their colleagues at work. Communion striving and status striving taken separately may not be sufficient to drive a significant increase in employees’ knowledge sharing behaviors. However, their combined effect leads to higher levels of knowledge sharing, a result.
consistent with the finding that both competition and cooperation (“co-opetition,” [14]) are necessary for employees to engage in sharing information. The result argues for more attention paid to interpersonal motivational factors in general, and to interventions aiming at increasing both getting along with and getting ahead of others, two competencies crucial in managerial and leadership work [21].

The results are subject to limitations, based on design of the study. The data were collected at the same point in time, from one single source, and from organizations in the United States. To diminish concerns about self-reported data, I used the marker variable approach [22]. Specifically, I used respondents’ self-concept clarity [23], as a marker to determine whether the significance of zero-order correlations for the variables in the study is reduced (to non-significant levels) when the marker variable – unrelated to the study constructs and obtained from the same respondents -- is controlled for. When controlling for employees’ self-concept clarity, there were no statistically significant changes in the zero-order correlations, thus indicating that common method variance is unlikely to cause problems in these data. In addition, researchers argued for the utilization of “self-reported creative performance” measures due to the complex and intra-personal nature of creative processes [24]. Similarly, knowledge sharing may be better reported by employees engaging in this behavior rather than by observers who may not have the opportunity to observe their colleagues’ actions [25].

Future studies can, however, use longitudinal designs, data obtained from a different source (e.g., supervisor, colleague) to measure employees’ knowledge sharing and creativity. Testing the connection between motives and behaviors on samples from other countries is also necessary [12]. Theoretical advancements are possible by testing the extent to which motivational orientations influence similar discretionary behaviors of a proactive nature, such as innovation [5]. Sharing and withholding knowledge may not be symmetric actions [26] and, as a result, future work should replicate and extend the current findings – especially the interactive effect – using withholding knowledge as an outcome. The specific mechanisms through which motives influence the outcomes are not clear, and mediators such as goal orientations or perceptions of the workgroup [3] may be interesting to explore in the future.

6. References


