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# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING BY SHARING PROCESS AND THE FOUR DIFFERENTIATIONS OF AN ORGANIZATION: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIANS COMPANIES

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Abstract

**Purpose** – To analyze how learning by sharing process works taking into account the four differentiations of an organization, namely knowledge differentiations, competency differentiations, cooperation differentiations and competition differentiations. **Methodology** – Based on a quantitative research and a sample consisting of managers from small and large organizations, from various activity domains, located in Nord-East region of Romania. **Findings** – The results show that learning by sharing process is highly influenced by the four differentiations involved in the systemic learning by sharing diamond. **Research limitations** – Through future research can be identified measures for learning by sharing improvement by taking into account the influence of individual and organizational characteristics. **Practical implications** – This study provide empirical evidence for testing a new integrated model by taking into account the four organizational differentiations. **Originality/value** – Through this study a empirical base is conceived by testing the systemic learning by sharing diamond. From a managerial perspective, the study identifies key factors essential for leaning by sharing process and presents the implication on the development of organizational strategy to maintain a sustainable competitive advance held by those four differentiations.
**Keywords:** learning by sharing, differentiation, competitive advantage

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In current economy, in order to face competitiveness challenges, organization must address several issues, such as rapid technological changes, shortening of product life cycle,

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customer trends, and the economic crisis and so on. Thus, organizations have tended to focus on the most competitive dynamic resources known, knowledge. Hence, in the last decade organization tended to pay increasingly more attention to creation, transfer, search, knowledge sharing.

Knowledge is power, yet most important is to understand the process of knowing, learning and knowledge sharing [1]. In this sense, if organization will understand the need of exploiting the knowledge, they will be more conscious about the crucial issue of creating a work environment based on knowledge sharing and organizational learning process, within and between organizations.

New knowledge is generated every day in any organization around the world. Thus is quite difficult to store and transfer this new knowledge created, this will require a long-term oriented strategy. This article aims to analyze how learning by sharing works taking into account the four differentiations' of the organization, namely knowledge differentiations, competences differentiations, cooperation differentiations, and competition differentiations. In deep, the current article analyzes existing relationships influences within the model based on learning by sharing proposed by Pohonțu, et al. [2].

## 2. ANALYSIS MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

According to the literature there are many empirical studies that made an approach to influencing factors of knowledge sharing and organizational learning. However, these factors are divergent in some cases, and their relationships are different in some cases. In addition, the theory used to explain knowledge sharing and organizational learning is different. Given these arguments, extracting the most important factors of influence can be a great challenge. In this sense, authors, such as Hutinghs and Michailova [5] suggested that knowledge sharing is influenced by a high degree of personal cultural values. Therefore, the results of the empirical studies on knowledge sharing may depend on national and ethnic origin group [6]. Regarded as a whole, organizations differ in terms of several aspects. Thus, identifying the most influencing factors of organizational learning is very valuable. Fixing these factors would allow individuals within organizations to benefit from certain aspect that would encourage an environment based on organizational learning. In this sense, Lohman [7] stated that factors such as initiative, positive personality, commitment, trust, and need for learning can be motivators for organizational learning. In contrast, an unfavorable organizational culture, lack of availability, lack of time, and lack of colleague's proximity can have a high influence on reducing organizational learning. At the same time, Albert [8] stated that top management support and practices that promotes knowledge sharing can be both motivators for organizational learning. In addition to the above influencing factors, determinants of co-opetion were added in order to present a set of dimensions to assess openness for learning by sharing.

Considering the systemic model of learning by sharing proposed by Pohonțu [2], the following research model is proposed with the role of investigating the relationship between the four differentiations included. After using the approach proposed by Rajagopalan [9] the analytical framework of this study is threefold: determinants, processes and outcomes.

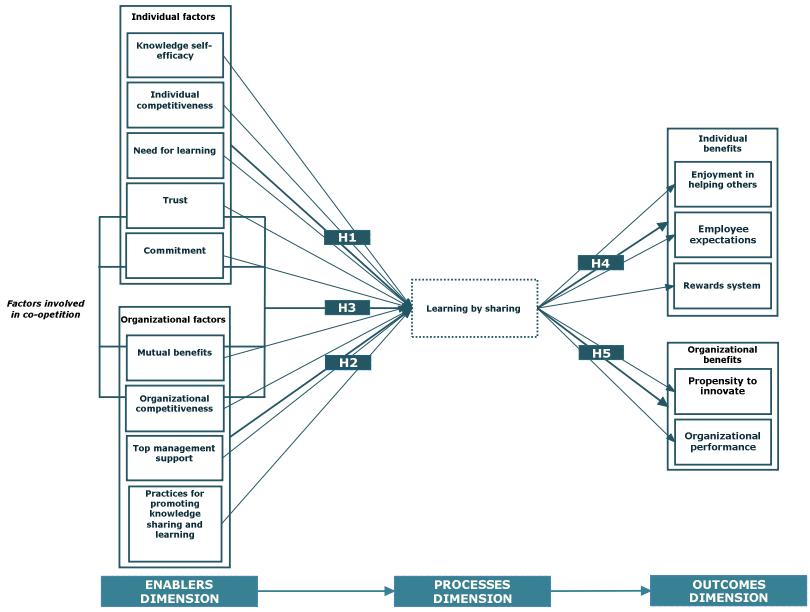


**Fig.1 - Proposed Learning by sharing research framework**

Enablers are those factors that are included in the mechanism who promote organizational learning and facilities knowledge sharing between the employees or between groups. In previous research, the determinants of knowledge sharing have been analyzed in terms of individual perspective and not organizational one.

Regarding the learning by sharing dimensions, it refers to the way in which employees can share their experiences, expertise and contextual information with others.

Outcomes dimensions reveal the extent to which the process of learning by sharing has influence on individual and organizational benefits. In terms of individual benefits, they refer to intangible benefits such as accumulation of new knowledge, relationship with colleague's improvements, and tangible benefits such as reward system. As for organizational benefits, they refer to the innovation orientation and organizational performance capability.

As can be seen in the figure, the research model, the emphasis is on knowledge sharing and organizational learning, these two variables were combined under a single process and checked in accordance with the key factors of co-opetition, individual and organizational factors and individual and organizational benefits.
Therefore the following hypotheses are proposed to be studied in accordance with the previous framework presented:
H1 – Individual factors positively influence learning by sharing process.
H2 - Organizational factors positively influence learning by sharing process.

H3 - Factors involved in co-opetition positively influence learning by sharing process.
H4 – Learning by sharing process positively influences individual benefits.
H5 - Learning by sharing process positively influences organizational benefits.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Method

The research methodology is based on an integrative study and requires a complex research strategy, due the large number of variables involved, the complexity of each variable, and the relatively ambiguous and poorly defines nature of some of the involved variables. As it is already stated, each dimension considered was constructed or adopted based on the literature, a set of representative questions in order to reach the most important aspects of the dimension. In designing and the adaptions of the questions were considered the following basic rules: questions applicability, clarity and accuracy of the questions, subject's ability to respond correctly, simplicity of the language used, and avoidance of the double meanings.

Sample and data collection

In order to test the questionnaire, 10 managers have been interviewed the consistency of message sent. In this phase, respondents were asked to examine the meaning, relevance and clarity of the questions used in the questionnaire. Taking into account the intended purpose, the population concerned in this research consists of employees from private sectors from North-East region of Romania. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail based on a call for study participation to a total of 5600 organization. Of the total e-mail sent, 280 valid questionnaires have been received, representing a response rate of 5%. From the sample, most of the organizations are based on services activities (57.1%), and production (31.4%), while only 5.7% of them are based on commercial activities. Regarding the organization dimension, most of the organizations are medium size (37.1%), while 15% are large organization. Concerning the respondents, 62.1% have graduated a faculty, and 28.6% have graduated a master's program. Regarding the position within the organization, 40.7% are middle management, and 35% are top management.

Measures

The proposed questionnaire will comprise only closed questions, and the responses will be measured based on 5 Likert scales, due the fact that it creates the premises for a higher response rate of the respondents. A list of items of each scale is presented in the appendix. The measurement approach of each theoretical construct in the model is described briefly below.

Knowledge sel-efficacy is adapted based on a scale used by Spreitzer [10], this dimension assesses individual judgments about the ability to share knowledge valuable for organization. Individual competitiveness is measured by a scale with three items made by Mowen [9], through this dimension is made an examination of individually competitiveness. Regarding the need for learning dimension, it evaluates the importance of learning given by employees to learning needs, the items used here were added from a study of Mowen [9]. Trust dimension is measured by a scale of six items adapted from a study of Sherer [10] and Ramaseshan and Loo [11], this dimension examine the extent to which managers are opened

to cooperation with competition. Engagement dimension is measured by a scale of five items, taken from studies conducted by Bucklin and Sengupta [12]. This dimension examines the extent to which managers undertake engagement to a successful collaboration with competition. Mutual benefits examines the extent to which managers are open to collaboration with a competitor according to certain predetermined conditions, the used scale is taken and adapted from studies of Ramaseshan and Loo [11], Hooley and Fahy [15]. Organizational competitiveness dimension is measured by a scale consisting of five items adapted from a study of Chen, et al. [16]. Through this dimension, is examined the extent to which organizational competitiveness is manifesting. Top management support is measured using a scale of six items adapted from a study of Tan and Zhao [17]. The used items assess the extent to which individuals perceive their support and encouragement to promote knowledge sharing at higher level. Practices for promoting knowledge sharing and learning dimension are based on a study of Moorman and Miner [16]. This dimension measures the extent to which the organization promotes a culture of knowledge sharing and learning. Concerning learning by sharing dimension, this dimension is based on three sub-dimension, namely knowledge donating and collecting (for knowledge sharing) and organizational learning. This dimension consist of items taken from studies of Van den Hooff and Van Weenen [17], Ames and Archer [18], and Weitz and Kumar [19], and examines the extent to which employees willingness to donate and collect knowledge from colleagues, and the behavior of organizational learning. Enjoyment in helping others is measured by four items derived from a study of Wasko and Faraj [20] and focuses on the perception of obtaining enjoyment through knowledge sharing. Employee expectation is measured by a scale consisting of ten items, derived from studies of Ardichvli et al. [21], Teigaland and Wasko [22]. This dimension examines the extent to which employees exact certain interests and benefits received as a result of their involvement in organizational community. The reward system dimension is measured by four items developed by Davenport and Prusak [23] and defines the extent to which employees receive incentives due to knowledge sharing. Capability to innovate is measured using five items derived from the study Calantone et al. [24] and focuses on organization willingness to innovate. Concerning the last dimension used, organizational performance is measured by items taken and adapted from previous studies of Morgan et al. [25]. The used scale refer to both internal (employee satisfaction, long-term developing strategy) and external context (level of responsibility to meet customer needs, competition comparison).

## Data analysis and results

There are several statistical techniques that can be used to provide high accuracy conclusions about employee's motivations. The information contained in this study will be analyzed using SPSS software by using descriptive and inferential tests. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages are used to describe respondent's profiles. Also, Spearman correlation is used to measure linear bivariate importance between independent and dependent variables in order to achieve the purpose of the study.

Given that the questionnaire used in the research represents a tool for psychological assessment, Cronbach's Alpha analysis is required to ensure safety and consistency. Taking into account this fact, the value obtained in the research data base is 0.913, indicating a very good internal consistency.

In order to test the hypothesis, if there is a significant correlation between analyzed variables, total scores for all variables and component dimension were calculated. Afterwards,

the distribution normality of variables was checked. Due the fact that only one variable (learning by sharing) had a normal distribution (KS z = 1.219, p=0,102> 0.05), the Spearman correlation test was done for hypothesis testing. To make a clear view of research results, coefficient correlation values have been added into the model for each dimension.

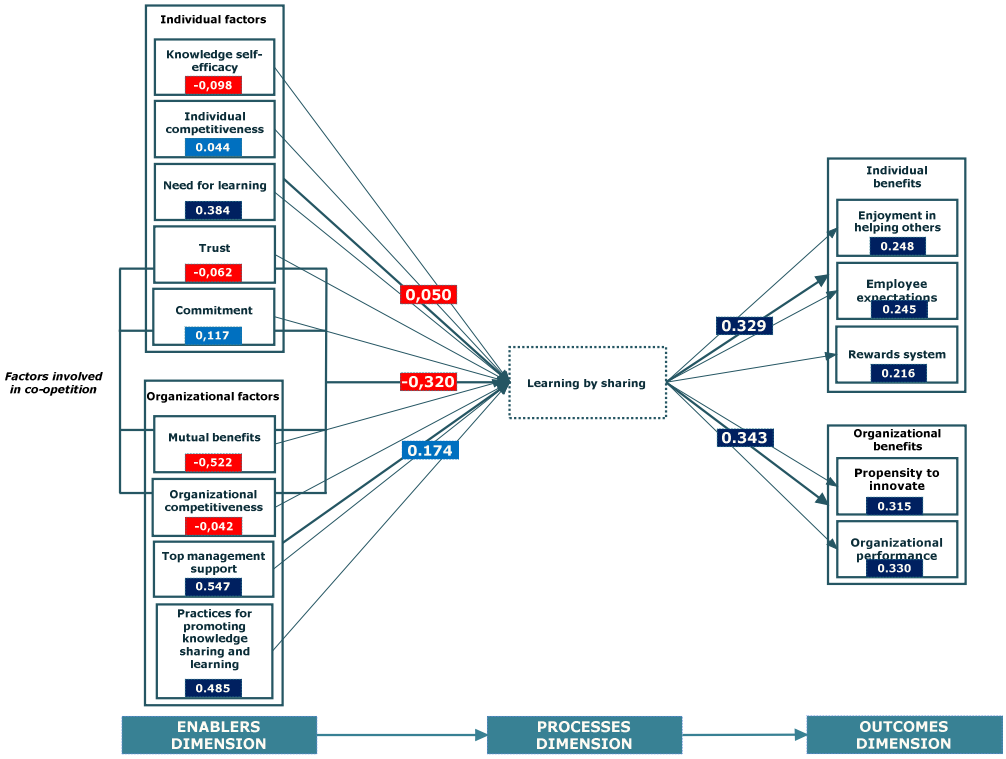


**Fig. 2 – Results of research model**

Following result tabulation, the conducted tests showed that from 5 tested hypothesis, one hypothesis was partially rejected (H1 – Individual factors positively influence learning by sharing process), and another one was entirely rejected (H3 - Factors involved in co-opetition positively influence learning by sharing process), the remaining hypotheses were fully confirmed. In terms of dimensions correlation, of 15 dimensions used in the research, 4 recorded negative scores.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Discussion of findings

The study results are interesting from both perspectives, theoretical and practical. Theoretical speaking, this study offer a research framework in order to investigate learning by sharing process. In terms of practical perspectives, managers could have a view about individual and organizational factors, and individual and organizational benefits of learning by sharing, and based of level of influences they could develop long-term strategy for innovating and have a sustainable performance.

At first glance, the results show that individual factors have partially influence on learning by sharing processes. Taking into account in-deep dimension analysis, knowledge

self-efficacy had negative scores (-0,092). In essence, this result is contrary to expectations, according to the literature knowledge self-efficacy has positive relationship on knowledge sharing [26]. However, noteworthy is the fact these factor has been analyzed only on knowledge sharing, or organizational learning. In terms of need for learning, this dimension recorded the highest (0.384). This result shows that individuals who feel need for learning will be more prone to learning by sharing, but will not be driven by performance [27]. Individuals who are performance oriented do not engage in activities to improve skills and knowledge, which are complex and have long-term effects [28], but rather are directed towards activities that ensure immediate success. On other hand, the knowledge self-efficacy dimension who recorded the lowest value of the correlation, shows that individuals who do not trust on their personal capabilities and they do not believe that can contribute to organizational efficiency and will not be predisposed to learning by sharing processes. In such situations, mangers need to encourage a proactive behavior.

In terms of organizational factors, results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between those two variables analyzed. Regarding this influence, it was found that there is a consistency with past studies that used same dimensions. In terms of this organizational factor, top management support recorded the highest value of correlation coefficient (0,546). A high influence on of top management support has been observed in other empirical studies found in the literature [29]. On other hand, mutual benefits dimension recorded the lowest value, namely -0,522. Thus, it is clear that individuals who are open to cooperation with competition will not be reluctant when it comes of availability of learning by sharing.

In terms of relationship between factors involved in co-opetition with learning by sharing, showed a negative influence. In this case, the result cannot be compared with previous studies, due the fact that it cannot be found such examples in previous literature. The component dimensions were analyzed individually. As can be seen in the results, most of the component dimensions recorded negative values. From this result it appears that individuals who commit to a relationship with the competitor may be open to learning by sharing.

In terms of learning by sharing outcomes, both of the benefits, namely individual and organizational recorded a positive influence on learning by sharing processes. These results are similar to previous empirical research carried out. Thus, enjoyment in helping dimension is the main reason why individuals are predisposed to learning by sharing; this dimension recorded the highest value of coefficient correlation in terms of individual benefits (0,248). From practical perspective, managers are encouraged to promote a behavior based on social exchanges. On other hand, rewards system recorded the lowest coefficient, namely 0,216. This result is confirmed by previous studies who confirm that reward system is not a relevant factor in promoting knowledge sharing [30]. An efficient reward system could provide a temporary effect on knowledge sharing [31]. Concerning the organizational benefits, organizational performance dimension recorded the highest value of coefficient correlation (0,330). Yet, the results of the second dimension does not know high differences, which means that promoting a learning by sharing process could ensure both innovation capabilities and organizational performance.

Implications for practitioners

The research findings highlight several implications in practical terms who can be considered by managers in order to promote a culture based on learning by sharing. First, it

confirms again that certain individual factors can have a high influence on learning by sharing. Thus, managers should promote a positive state of social networking, because this is the preliminary phase of knowledge sharing. Second, they should not be concentrated on reward system, but rather on promoting a positive attitude in terms of enjoyment due to willingness to share knowledge. Such strategy could have a long-term effect and not short-term. On other hand, regarding the outcomes dimension, managers can view that learning by sharing has a high influence on innovation and organizational, this result is an observable proof when a long term perspective is taken into account.

Limitations and directions for future research

Study results show empirical evidence about motivating factors on learning by sharing based on sample composed by 280 employees. Due to sample characteristics, the results cannot be generalized easily. Moreover, in the context of future research, demographic characteristics can be considered for analysis in relationship with learning by sharing process. At the same time, it can be indicated to use a qualitative research (based on interviews with top managers and case studies) in order to investigate in details the results of present quantitative research. Thus, the results could provide a proposed guidance

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