Chapter 6
Re-Examining Trust Development and Knowledge Sharing in Virtual Teams

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ABSTRACT
It is crucial to effectively identify and leverage organizational team member knowledge. As virtual teams are becoming increasingly common in global companies, knowledge sharing in virtual teams is gaining attention among practitioners and scholars. In particular, the role of trust in effective knowledge sharing has been emphasized among scholars. However, there have been few attempts to integrate trust and knowledge sharing behaviors in virtual teams. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present the integrative perspective of knowledge sharing and trust in virtual teams. The authors thoroughly explore the existing literature on different approaches to trust and the knowledge sharing process and then introduce an integrative three-stage process model of trust and knowledge sharing in virtual teams.

INTRODUCTION
As company boundaries expand across geographic borders, virtual teams, which work together from different locations and primarily rely on technology for their communication, are becoming more common in organizations (Cohen & Gibson, 2003). It has always been crucial to identify and leverage team member knowledge effectively. As virtual teams become more common in the workplace, knowledge sharing in virtual teams is also gaining more attention among practitioners and scholars (Hendriks, 1999; Goodman & Darr, 1998; Storck, 2000). Particularly, as virtual knowledge sharing involves fewer social cues than face-to-face communication among team members.
Re-Examining Trust Development and Knowledge Sharing in Virtual Teams

members, the role of trust in knowledge sharing among virtual teams is attracting more interest from scholars and practitioners alike (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004; Panteli & Sockalingam, 2005; Pinsonneault & Caya, 2005; Powell, Piccoli, & Ives, 2004; Staples & Webster, 2008; Webster & Staples, 2006).

Diverse approaches to examining trust have been established in many different fields for several decades (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Ring & Van de Ven, 1992; Zaheer & Venkatraman, 1995; Zand, 1972). One of the traditional approaches is the developmental view of trust, which suggests that trust evolves over time based on direct personal interaction and communication (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). In this view, trust is seen as a trustor’s positive evaluation, which is based on a trustee’s repeated behavior. On the other hand, several researchers have emphasized the multi-dimensional constructs of trust, such as cognition-based trust, which refers to a rational-based evaluation of a party, or affect-based trust, which focuses on the emotional attachment between parties rather than the process of trust building (Lewis & Wiegert, 1985; McAllister, 1995). Recently, a new concept of trust in a virtual environment called swift trust, which refers to unexpected high initial trust in virtual teams, has also been discussed (Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner 1998; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

Many previous studies investigating trust in virtual teams have taken one of these three views of trust (Staples & Webster, 2008). However, we believe that these three views of trust – the developmental view, the multi-dimensional view, and swift trust – are not contradictory, but rather complimentary in explaining the complete process of trust building in virtual teams. Thus, in order to fully understand trust development in virtual teams, we argue that these three views of trust represent different aspects of trust developed through different stages. Even though trust in virtual teams has been considered a critical factor for knowledge sharing, limited attention has been given to integrating the different approaches of trust and knowledge sharing behaviors.

Therefore, we intend to present in this chapter an integrative perspective of knowledge sharing and different approaches to trust in virtual teams. On the basis of examining previous literature pertaining to knowledge sharing and trust in virtual teams, we will then explore the importance of knowledge sharing in virtual teams, the process of knowledge sharing behaviors, the role of trust in knowledge sharing and different views of trust in virtual teams. With a broadened understanding of trust and knowledge sharing in virtual teams, we will suggest an integrative model of knowledge sharing and trust in virtual teams. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for organizational leaders interested in developing trust between virtual team members.

BACKGROUND

Virtuality, Trust, and Knowledge Sharing

As reported by Martins, Gilson, and Maynard (2004), more than half of companies with greater than 5,000 employees have deployed virtual teams, and upward of 60% of professional employees have worked in virtual teams. The virtuality of teams, defined as the degree to which members use technology to interact across geographic, organizational, or other boundaries, has changed the landscape of collaborative work in organizations (Picoli et al., 2004). With their virtuality, virtual teams can enable more flexible team composition strategies (Townsend, DeMarie, & Hendrickson, 1998), more proactive assignment options for dispersed employees (Cascio, 2000), and faster channels to support collaboration among globally distributed employees (Picoli et al., 2004).

Despite an increased prevalence of virtual teams, there are no consistent findings or clear answers about a host of process and outcome