The Influence of Positive Emotions on Knowledge Sharing

Emergent Research Forum Paper

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Abstract
Capturing, structuring and disseminating knowledge is critical for success, yet challenging. For knowledge sharing to happen, it is necessary to create an appropriate environment. This environment is not enough to stimulate such sharing; other variables can influence the interaction of individuals. We contend that a variable calling for further attention is positive emotions. Hence, the goal of this study is to identify research that addresses sharing and positive emotions. We describe the systematic approach taken for identifying and analyzing these studies. We find a variety of useful insights in these studies. However, we suggest that there is room for additional research to examine knowledge management and positive emotions in the future. Lastly, the initial results of this project highlight the importance of IS researchers developing a multilingual understanding of phenomena that they study.

Keywords
Knowledge Sharing, Positive Emotions, Knowledge Management

Introduction and Motivation
Management of knowledge has become a popular topic among researchers and practitioners alike because it proposes ways for an organization to capture, structure and disseminate knowledge (Dalkir 2011). One particularly challenging task is sharing of tacit knowledge, through direct experiences and socialization (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Such experiences may be informal and common in the day to day of organizations (i.e. conversations among employees, information exchanges and sharing of one's own experiences, and so on). For knowledge sharing to happen, it is necessary to overcome barriers (Davenport and Prusak 2000) stemming from structures, operational processes, culture and organizational climate (Tonet and Paz 2006; Vasconcelos et al. 2013). Because of these barriers, knowledge sharing needs to be facilitated by creating and using tools and mechanisms (Davenport and Prusak 2000). One of these mechanisms is the "ba", a social space of people's interaction, which can provide facilitating conditions for sharing (Vasconcelos et al. 2013). But a "ba" environment alone is not enough to stimulate the sharing of knowledge among individuals. Indeed, those seeking to stimulate sharing must consider that individuals bring their emotions to work (Jonker and Merwe 2013).

Social Psychology researchers routinely examine social circumstances that elicit specific emotions (e.g. Sauerbronn et al. 2009). They have also captured a range of benefits positive emotions produce for the individual, including improving one's intellectual, physical, social and psychological resources; thus leading to tangible benefits such as longer life (Fredrickson et al. 2003). In a similar vein, information systems (IS) researchers have also started to consider roles of emotions in IS phenomena (e.g. Stein et al. 2014). This study focuses on positive emotions (+E), such as joy, interest, pride, contentment, and love. As positive emotions expand individuals’ repertoires of thought-action (Fredrickson 1998), they may also contribute to knowledge sharing. Additionally, the influence of +E on thought-action repertoires can promote more flexible thoughts and ideas (Fredrickson 2011). An individual experiencing +E tends to also be more creative. Hence, +E can improve both knowledge sharing and creation.
While these insights are valuable, we currently lack an understanding of the range of research that discusses the influence of positive emotions on knowledge sharing. When we set to carry out a literature review, we recognized that knowledge sharing is not of concern only for English-speaking researchers. Indeed, publications in other languages may also provide important insights. For example, Google Scholar acknowledges this by providing search results in languages different from the language of the search terms. The field of Physics provides a historical example of how ignoring results published in other languages may delay the development of science. Gunnar Norström published his pioneer work on the extra-dimensional theories in 1914. As Norström’s work was partly published in Swedish, his contribution was not widely recognized. Instead, the theory is now known as Kaluza-Klein theory; after Kaluza and Klein published their work later in 1920s. Decades later, Nordström’s original publication was found by a researcher who could read Swedish and it turned out that it contained important insights that nobody else had been able to develop in the meanwhile. The theory is still researched and debated today.

Thus, to provide a richer understanding of the research on the influence of positive emotions on knowledge sharing, we expanded the search beyond English language sources to include research published in Portuguese. Our study consists of a systematic literature review that seeks to answer this question: How do studies published in multiple languages contribute to understanding the influence of positive emotions on knowledge sharing? This paper reports on one, early facet of a larger on-going study that will also incorporate field work to understand positive emotions’ connections with knowledge management and sharing.

**Methodology**

To answer this study’s research question, we conducted a systematic literature search and review, including scientific literature in English and Portuguese. This choice of the Portuguese language is justified for two reasons. First, scientific literature is routinely published in Portuguese language but its contributions are typically ignored in IS literature reviews. Second, our team’s fluency in these two languages facilitated finding and analyzing a more varied set of literature. We employed a phased literature review method described by Tenório (2010) for identifying salient articles, their contributions, and the gaps that remain in this literature stream. Next, we briefly describe each phase.

**Design**

In the design phase, we identified a number of relevant search terms that corresponded with our research question. The terms were identified in English and Portuguese. Table 1 provides examples of these term sets. Additionally, we set the time frame for the literature review to the current decade (2011 to 2016). The next phase of our research will expand our search to cover the discussion of all relevant terms describing different aspects of knowledge sharing, including e.g., knowledge integration (e.g. Grant 1996) and knowledge transfer (e.g. Szulanski 1996). We will also expand the timeframe of our search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English search term</th>
<th>Portuguese equivalent term</th>
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<td>Knowledge management</td>
<td>Gestão do conhecimento</td>
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<td>Positive emotions</td>
<td>Emoções positivas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge sharing</td>
<td>Compartilhamento do conhecimento</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>Informação compartilhada</td>
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Table 1. Examples of English and Portuguese Search Terms
Selection of Databases and Search Term Combinations

Next, we developed a list of databases and a set of search term combinations. We sought databases that provide full-text access while covering a variety of fields that address knowledge management, emotions, and related terms. As a result, we chose a number of databases to search. Next, we developed a series of Boolean search combinations in English and Portuguese and ran the searches. The search resulted in 43 articles.

Selection of Articles

We started the selection by applying multiple criteria for excluding candidate articles (e.g. the article only addresses negative emotions). Next, we read each article’s metadata, title, and abstract. Occasionally, we needed to read the full text. Of the 43 articles, twelve (see Table 2) were selected for further review. Each of these articles addresses one or more relationships relevant to this study’s focus: the relationship of knowledge management with positive emotions; or the relationship of sharing with positive emotions.

<table>
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<th>Relationships with Positive Emotions</th>
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<td>Knowledge Management and Positive Emotions</td>
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Table 2. Papers Addressing Relationships with Positive Emotions

Analysis

The still-ongoing extraction phase entails analyzing the findings of the literature, categorizing the selected studies (e.g. by research context and concepts used), and determining areas for future research. While this phase is incomplete, our work to this point has proved to be insightful. Hence, we report on initial findings and the implications they have for this research.

Initial Findings

The papers examined here encompass a wide variety of topics and settings, as illustrated by these four examples. First, Bande et al. (2015) analyze the influence of emotions on the workplace and turnover within the context of sales. Second, Pinho et al. (2012) take a different focus of investigating the barriers and facilitators of four knowledge processes: acquisition, creation, sharing and transfer. Pinho and

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1. Our Boolean search combinations were:
   - In English: (“knowledge management” AND “positive emotions”) OR (knowledge OR information) AND (sharing));

2. We searched these databases: Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, Instituto Brasileiro de Informação em Ciência e Tecnologia (IBICT), JSTOR, Portal de Periódicos da Capes, Proquest, Scielo, Science Direct, and Scopus.
colleagues propose KM improvements arising from constructive tension between positive and negative aspects of organizational life. Third, Hong et al (2016) explore the role that students’ emotional expressions play in promoting interpersonal skills and the ability to gain the support of a supervisor. Lastly, Stephens and Carmeli (2016) examine the ability of teams that develop technology products to express negative emotions, facilitating the ability to create knowledge and thus improvement of project results.

While offering useful insights, these twelve studies highlight areas that merit additional attention. None of these studies seem to address the range of relationships (knowledge management and positive emotions; knowledge sharing and positive emotions) on which our work focuses. Hence, there appears to be a need for future studies to examine these relationships together. Several articles (Berg and Karlsen 2014; Stephens and Carmeli 2016; Vuori and Huy 2015) examine issues of emotions in information technology (IT) companies. However, it is noteworthy that these relationships have not yet been studied in a particular kind of IT organization: software companies. This observation suggests that there is merit in additional studies on positive emotions and managing knowledge by IS researchers.

This project also calls attention to the value of undertaking multilingual literature reviews. Arguably, it is tempting for IS researchers to focus on work written in their native languages or in a commonly-spoken language (e.g. English). Taking that narrow focus can bring two undesirable costs. First, we can forget that we are a diverse community, whose members speak and work in varied languages. Second, efforts to develop rich understandings of IS phenomena can be hampered by focusing exclusively on research written in a familiar language. We acknowledge that practical considerations (e.g. research budgets) can discourage multilingual literature reviews. However, applying a multilingual approach brings about benefits such as additional insights and increased rigor. When research considers different linguistic and cultural contexts, important contextual influences may be better highlighted, or relevant concepts that do not exist in English may be readily available in another language. Further, accessing more studies allows discovering which variables have the most support overall or are robust across different contexts. The fact that replication studies are rarely published in IS highlights the importance of including these journals in other languages. Such journals often publish rich studies focusing on early steps of theorizing, adding to the volume of empirical evidence available. Thus, we contend that the benefits of thoughtfully applying a multilingual approach are worth the additional costs incurred.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have described the focus, design, and initial findings of part of a larger study on positive emotions and knowledge management/sharing. Initial findings from our literature review point to topics that have garnered attention. The findings also point to other topics that merit attention if we are to develop a richer understanding of +E in these knowledge processes. Our work also has limitations. By choosing to focus on studies in Portuguese (in addition to those in English), we do not examine studies in other commonly-used alternatives to English (e.g. Mandarin). In addition, our focus on +E constitutes a choice to ignore (for now) the possibility that negative emotions (e.g. envy) may also contribute positively to knowledge management and sharing. We suggest these areas as sources of fruitful topics for further research.

REFERENCES


Positive Emotions’ Influence on Knowledge Sharing


