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## **Research Statement**

### **„Networking Bureaucratic Organizations“**

#### **Overview**

Knowledge is essential to the functioning of every social system, especially for professionals in knowledge-intensive government organizations. And certainly, it is not difficult to understand the motivation of individuals seeking solutions to their problems. What is less clear is why anybody would share their knowledge to help a peer. Sharing knowledge takes time, and can potentially undermine the source's competitive position. While prior research has mainly focused on antecedents and consequences of knowledge sharing and understanding why people do not share knowledge (Hansen, 1999; Hansen 2002, Fulk/Heino/Flanagin/Monge/Bar, 2004), less is known why people actually provide knowledge, and what conditions trigger voluntary engagement in knowledge transfer. There has been some research on knowledge contributions to online listservers (Wasko/Faraj, 2000; Wasko/Faraj, 2005) and open source programming communities (Lakhani/Wolf 2005), but less research has been conducted on positive attitudes of voluntary engagement in knowledge sharing in cases where knowledge is a scarce resource among members of geographically dispersed government organizations without officially established communication structures. My project addresses this gap by proposing a model of voluntary engagement from a relational perspective and seeks to understand what the impact of relationships on the a) individual, b) dyadic, c) triadic and d) group level have on the willingness to help others.

The other side of knowledge sharing is: Where do people go when they have questions? Knowledge seeking is endemic in organizations, and effective access of individuals to answers is essential to the functioning of organizations. There has been ample research highlighting the role of human to human sharing of knowledge (e.g., Borgatti/Cross 2003; Hansen 1999; Hansen 2002). There have also been recent efforts at examining the flow of information among human and non-human sources (Carley 2003; Krackhardt/Carley 2003), as well as the utilization of computer-mediated communication to facilitate knowledge transfer (e.g., Constant/Sproull et al. 1996; e.g., Sproull/Kiesler 1986). Most of this research has been mono-source, however. There has been limited research that examines how individuals choose to seek answers from the entire menu of choices, human and non-human. Why, for example, does one individual spend days combing through references before calling a trusted friend with a query, and another immediately poses her question to a listserv? Little is known about this, yet it has enormous implications for the effectiveness of knowledge transfer processes. The goal in this second part of the project is to shed light on individual search strategies by drawing on existing research about knowledge sharing and social networks. On the basis of this analysis, a four level framework for understanding the choice of some sources over others: (1) individual level: why some individuals systematically prioritize certain sources over others; (2) question level: why certain types of questions systematically lead all individuals to prioritize some sources over others; (3) relational level: why the relationship of individuals with particular sources affects the prioritization of those sources; (4) system level: how some systems push individuals in particular contexts toward some sources and not others.

## **Empirical setting**

In this project knowledge sharing is studied in a specific context: highly regulated communities of elites such as specialized government officials and agencies within government whose knowledge sharing capacities are highly regulated by the law, regulations and security concerns.

This project will provide evidence from three knowledge intensive government domains: a) DNA Forensic Scientists, who need to share knowledge regarding technical procedures in order to solve cases; b) State Health Officials, who need to share information about public health issues, such as pandemic preparedness; and c) Staff members of Members of Congress' offices in Washington who need to access information about innovative practices to communicate with their constituents in their districts.

## **Research Design**

*Data collection:* The data basis consists of data collected from the above mentioned three different government entities. Comparable interview protocols and questionnaire items were applied to all three data collection processes and a cross-case examination of three empirical cases of government elites is attempted. The following data sets were collected so far:

- a) State Health Officials, Social Network Survey (93% response rate), 44 interviews with current State Health Officials (SHOs), 7 + 7 interviews with newly appointed SHOs (Impact analysis), Access to +190 alumni SHOs for quantitative network survey
- b) Members of Congress: 101 interviews with staff members of Members of Congress' offices, Access to quantitative data of coded website content (xx years time period)
- c) DNA Forensic Scientists: ~ 100 interviews with CODIS administrators and technical managers in DNA crime labs, Quantitative data of survey on knowledge sharing about analysis techniques (n = 175 government DNA labs in the U.S.), plus two one week organizational ethnographies in two DNA labs.

*Data analysis:* The data analysis strategy is based on a mixed-method approach: a) quantitative surveys of all State Health Officials, a subset of Members of Congress and all DNA Forensic Science labs in the U.S., b) confirmation of results and consolidation of quantitative overview from interview data and in-depth case studies of selected government organizations, especially relational approaches to understand networking aspects within and across agency boundaries.

## **Expected outcomes:**

Several scholarly articles, amongst them one theoretical contribution (target journal: Academy of Management Review) and 3-5 empirical articles (target journals: Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Public Policy Analysis and Management; Book with comparative analysis of three empirical cases.