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Chapter 4

Unlocking Strategic Information Sharing as a Key Work Behavior: The Impact of Power Construals and Perceived Ability on the Sharing of Private Information

In today’s knowledge-intensive economy, knowledge is a power resource that protects organizations’ competitive advantage. Although organizations depend on individual information sharing, people often withhold information and act in their self-interest, constantly enforcing the default perception in organizations that ‘knowledge is power’. Still, when in a power position, it is one’s ability that makes a difference for organizational outcomes. High individual ability often results in power gain, and high power implies often the ability to reward or punish. Ability and power are thus often confounded. In addition, it is more the power perception than the power position that drives the behavior of decision-makers. We aim to experimentally disentangle between individuals’ power perception and perceived ability and to expand the view of information sharing as strategic behavior. In particular, we aim to examine how power construals (as opportunity vs. as responsibility) and ability feedback (high vs. low) affect especially the sharing of private information; information sharedness (public vs. private) was used as a within-subjects factor. The main findings showed that construing power as responsibility (vs. as opportunity) increased the sharing of private information only when people received high ability feedback. Implications for organizations and knowledge management are discussed.

Keywords: strategic information sharing, power as opportunity, power as responsibility, ability feedback, information sharedness
4.1. Introduction

Knowledge has been recognized as a valuable intangible resource that holds the key to competitive advantage for every organization (Grant, 1996). In practice, however, it’s a real challenge to stimulate information sharing (Argote, Ingram, Levine, & Moreland, 2000; Szulanski, 1996). People working together often keep implicit (e.g., expertise) and even explicit (e.g., written documents) knowledge to themselves. One reason for this behavior might be striving for power, i.e. the opportunity to achieve own goals (Sassenberg, Ellemers, & Scheepers, 2012).

Relatively recent research (e.g., Osatuyi, Hiltz, & Fjermestad, 2012; Steinel, Utz, & Koning, 2010; Toma & Butera, 2009; Utz, Muscanell, & Goeritz, 2014) showed that information sharing is strategic behavior such that individuals deliberately share especially a particular type of information, as a motivated response to an implicit expectation (or explicit request) of sharing information. For instance, Steinel et al. (2010) showed that social motives influence prosocials (i.e., individuals concerned with collective welfare) to share the private and important information while proselfs (i.e., individuals concerned with self-interests) share especially the public and unimportant information, just to make a cooperative impression. However, various research areas (i.e., organizational behavior and communication, knowledge management) have yet to explicate how other situational factors, beside social motivation, shape strategic information sharing (SIS). Motivations that individuals bring to bear on social interactions are much broader and more multifaceted (De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008) when it comes to either enhancing joint outcomes or the pursuit of personal outcomes (Van Lange, 1999): power is one of them.

When people associate the sharing of information with the loss of power, they are less likely to share information (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Although previous research looked at how a low versus a high power position (i.e., power differentials) affect information sharing (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015; Wang & Noe, 2010), the current study aims to provide understanding on how power construals (i.e., a different facet of power) stimulate especially the sharing of private information; to examine what type of
information people share we use the information pooling paradigm of Steinel et al. (2010) with actual pieces of information.

Commonly perceived in organizations as the opportunity to achieve one’s goals, power can also imply having responsibilities for others (Sassenberg et al., 2012). Investigating the relationship between power construals (Sassenberg et al., 2012) and strategic information sharing (Steinel et al., 2010), Bălău and Utz (2014) showed that people who construe power as responsibility for others share mainly more private information than people who construe power as opportunity to achieve own goals. Our research essentially aims 1) to replicate the findings of Bălău and Utz (2014) and to bring further evidence for the distinction of power construals (Sassenberg et al., 2012) in relation to SIS and 2) to extend the findings of Bălău and Utz (2014) by introducing ability (i.e., task-related knowledge) as a moderator. Whereas having low ability can hinder information sharing (Van Den Hooff, 2012), having high ability usually motivates people to share what they know, for instance, for expertise recognition (Stewart & Stasser, 1995). However, ability is generally salient in work settings and it often leads to power gain; with few exceptions (e.g., Blau, 1979), previous research also investigated power confounded with ability (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015), assuming that having power is aligned with its source (e.g., knowledge, expertise). Overall, we aim to examine how power construals and perceived ability, separately and in interaction, affect SIS.

4.1.1. Theoretical Background
A fairly large body of research (e.g., Osatuyi et al., 2012; Stasser & Titus, 1987; Stasser, Vaughan, & Stewart, 2000; Winquist & Larson, 1998) has shown that people are more likely to share information that is known to all members than information that is unique (i.e., known by one/some member(s) only); this is termed in the literature as the information sampling bias (Brodbeck, Kerschreiter, Možisch, & Schulz-Hardt, 2007). This phenomenon has been explained with various cognitive biases rather than motivational factors in the information sampling literature (Brodbeck et al., 2007). Moreover, previous research has largely studied information sharing in cooperative contexts (Brodbeck et al., 2007; Schulz-Hardt, Brodbeck, Možisch, Kerschreiter, & Frey,
2006; Stasser & Stewart, 1992; Stasser & Titus, 1985) and neglected to study it in mixed-motive situations. Thus, it is not surprising that the focus was on cognitive rather than on motivational factors. Social motivation, for instance, rests on the idea that individuals are either prosocial (i.e., concerned with collective welfare and joint success) or proself (i.e., concerned with self-interests, ignoring others’ needs, interests and beliefs) motivated (De Dreu et al., 2008). These social motivations have been shown to influence information sharing.

To study strategic information sharing, such as sharing several pieces of relatively unimportant information but keeping the important private information for oneself, Steinel et al. (2010) invented the information pooling paradigm. They manipulated social motivation (prosocial vs. proself) and varied the importance (important vs. less important) and sharedness (public vs. private) of information orthogonally; to exclude cognitive biases such as the evaluation bias, subjects were presented only with labels (e.g., important, private) and not with actual information. By telling participants how many pieces of information were needed to solve the task at hand, an anchor for cooperative behavior based on the equality norm was created (Messick, 1993). The findings showed that social motive affected both the amount and type of information: prosocials shared more of their private and important information while proselfs shared especially their public and unimportant information, just to make a cooperative impression. However, social motive is only one in many motivational factors that drive behavior. The widely-acknowledged saying ‘knowledge is power’ already indicates that power might also play a role. In order to advance understanding on how to stimulate especially the sharing of private information, our research extends prior investigations to power construals.

According to the MIP-G model (De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008), for instance, information processing is primarily driven not only by social but also by epistemic motivations, i.e., willingness to expend effort to achieve a thorough, rich and accurate understanding of the world. Several antecedents of these umbrella motivations drive information processing and power is one of them (for more details, De Dreu et al., 2008). We focus on
power construals, in particular, because most studies (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2011) simply compared a low power and a high power condition and disregarded power perceptions even regardless of the power position one might hold; to serve own goals and interests is a *default* perception of power in organizations. At the same time, we focus on power construals because the findings have immediate echoes in practice (i.e., can be easily manipulated or subject to change) while recommendations stemming from research on power differentials (Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) have limited applicability. This is because power differentials are structurally part of the organizations and less likely subject to change or changeable under specific conditions (e.g., promotions). Ultimately, no systematic research focused on how power perceptions may affect especially SIS. By investigating power construals (Steinel et al., 2010), we thus aim to replicate the study of Bălău and Utz (2014) who brought first evidence showing that people who construe power as responsibility for others share mainly more private information than people who construe power as opportunity to achieve their own goals. We look at the moderating role of ability because ability is generally salient in work settings, leading often to power gain. We empirically disentangle power from ability to further extend the study of Bălău and Utz (2014) and also because the focus in previous studies has been guided either by *power* defined as the ability to exert control over/for others (Pierro, Raven, Amato, & Belanger, 2013; Raven, Schwarzwald, & Koslowsky, 1998) or by *ability* defined as the competence to gain control over resources and control the work of others (Robert, Dennis, & Hung, 2009). Finally, this research challenges the widely-acknowledged idea that sharing information results in power loss; this idea is reinforced particularly by work settings that require fewer specialists or people possessing broad expertise (Blau, 1979) and less or not necessarily by those professional organizations (e.g., law firms) in which team members who showcase their expertise are often afforded power and status.
4.1.1.1. Power Construals and the Sharing of Private Information

A wide body of research showed that people with power place greater importance on their own interests and subordinate those of others (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2003; see Keltner et al., 2003, for a review). However, an increasing body of research showed that people with power consider other’s needs, power leading, for instance, to fairer interpersonal treatment (Galinsky, Magee, Rus, Rothman, & Todd, 2014) and interpersonal sensitivity (e.g., Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009). In other words, individuals with an exchange versus a communal relationship orientation (Clark & Mills, 1979) mentally associate the concept of power with different goals. Managers, for instance, develop either the “power over others” perspective, enforcing a rather negative face of power, i.e., view power in competition (Tjosvold & Wu, 2009) or the “power with others” perspective, enforcing a more positive face of power, i.e., view power in cooperation (Tjosvold & Wu, 2009). Overall, the effect of power is notably determined by the way it is being perceived.

According to Sassenberg et al. (2012), one can distinguish mainly between two construals of power: as responsibility versus as opportunity. Individuals construing power as responsibility are those power holders who feel responsible for the outcomes of others who depend on them (Sassenberg et al., 2012; Torelli & Shavitt, 2010, 2011). If power is seen as a resource that can be developed and enhanced in cooperation with employees, managers will be more likely to support employee empowerment initiatives (Coleman, 2009). Conversely, individuals construing power as opportunity are those power holders who seek to serve their own interests (Sassenberg et al., 2012). Viewing power as a fixed-pie entity (Coleman, 2009) will lead to an increased sense of competitive interdependence between managers and employees. Based on the above considerations, individuals who construe power as responsibility are expected to share especially their private information while individuals who construe power as opportunity are expected to share less especially their private information, which might equate with losing in competition. This has been previously shown by Bălău and Utz (2014). Since people who construe power as responsibility embrace cooperative social motives (Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin,
& Joireman, 1997) and those construing power as opportunity embrace competitive social motives, we expect the effects of social power construals on SIS to parallel the effects that social motives were shown to have on SIS (Steinel et al., 2010): this is because the self- versus others-orientation is also the core distinction between proselves and prosocials. We therefore expect:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): People who construe power as responsibility share more private information than people who construe power as opportunity.

4.1.1.2. Perceived Ability and the Sharing of Private Information

Ability has been defined as the task-related skill that enables an individual to be (perceived as) competent within some specific domain (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Robert et al., 2009); (perceived) ability is important to trust and in interpersonal relationships (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). In this paper, we focus on one’s own perceived ability. Ability feedback, in particular, is an important factor influencing participants’ reasoning and acting (Mayer et al., 1995), supporting one’s feelings of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), affecting thus information sharing behavior.

Receiving a high ability feedback promotes self-efficacy (Hau & Salili, 1996), contributes to self-confidence and exerts a motivational effect on individual’s behavior (Schunk, 1983). High ability individuals are those individuals who show competence and mastery over a body of knowledge and a set of techniques (Blau, 1979). Experts are able to cope with complex uncertainties (Blau, 1979), coordinate the work and share, for instance, good technical suggestions which prove extremely useful to meet project objectives (Dahlander & O’Mahony, 2011). Sharing considerable experience and/or training, high ability individuals often provide sound job-related advice (French & Raven, 1959; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989), they feel eager to let others know what they know because they themselves consider it valuable and feel a strong drive to showcase their expertise (Van Den Hooff, Schouten, & Simonovski, 2012). Engaging especially in the sharing of private information might be perceived as a way to validate their task-related expertise, promoting thus
successful outcomes. Moreover, having high ability drives consideration for the recipient in need of knowledge, justifying the act of sharing information.

Conversely, receiving a low ability feedback obstructs self-efficacy (Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007), contributes to self-insecurity and motivates individuals to hide that they lack task-related expertise (Schunk, 1983). Low ability individuals are those individuals who have low consideration for their self-image (Van Den Hooff et al., 2012) and do not want to misinform others; they protect themselves from others’ criticism (i.e., fear of evaluation) (Bordia, Irmer, & Abusah, 2006), being, at the same time, concerned to avoid the negative consequences (e.g. to be held accountable for, lack of adequate expertise) (Gibbs, Rozaidi, & Eisenberg, 2013) that might emerge from sharing what they know (Wang & Noe, 2010). They do this to prevent thus a possible failure because social undermining may take different forms (e.g., belittling you or your ideas) (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012). Low ability individuals are uncertain about the knowledge they own and face cognitive limitations in the way they mentally represent the task (Hinds & Pfeffer, 2003). Since they believe that this may have unforeseen and possibly negative consequences for others (Connelly et al., 2012), low ability individuals are less likely to share especially their private information. Moreover, having low ability drives individuals’ concerns regarding their potentially valuable contributions to the recipient, justifying the act of information sharing. We therefore expect:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): People who receive a high ability feedback share more private information than people who receive a low ability feedback.

4.1.1.3. Power Construals and the Sharing of Private Information: The Moderating Role of Perceived Ability

Until now, this paper has focused on how power construals and perceived ability, separately, affect the sharing of private information. We have argued that people who construe power as responsibility share more of their private information than people who construe power as opportunity. Similarly, people who receive a high ability feedback share more of their private information than
people who receive a low ability feedback. However, in real life and work settings power is often confounded with ability because people with high ability often get promoted and end up in high power positions. Since information sharing is the basis for decision-making processes, these overlaps between power and ability create distortions at the perceptual level (Humphrey, 1985) that may subsequently result in misattributions (e.g., attributed to ability or to power) when it comes to explain successful outcomes. Previous research also has indicated that people in a power position are often perceived as more favorable than others of equal ability (Humphrey, 1985) who are not necessarily in a power position. Moreover, for those who are high in the organizational hierarchy and who do high-skill-level tasks, ability is what that makes a difference for the quality of decision-making. Since previous research investigated power confounded with ability (for a review, see Sturm & Antonakis, 2015), it is theoretically interesting to disentangle the two. Keeping the position of power constant, we investigate how power construals and high ability interactively affect especially the sharing of private information; we shed light on the moderating role of high ability on the relationship between power construals and SIS; we assume that having high ability enhances one’s power perception.

The relationship between construing power as responsibility and the sharing of private information is expected to become stronger when individuals receive high ability feedback. Specifically, people who feel responsible for others (i.e., power construed as responsibility) would share more of their private information, to contribute to group goals, when they perceive to have high ability. In other words, people construing power as responsibility (Sassenberg et al., 2012) feel more intense their drive to serve collective interests and thus share more of their private information when they also believe that the contribution they bring is valuable. Furthermore, because they believe the knowledge they have is valid (Ellis & Kruglanski, 1992), they would also feel the urge to legitimate this knowledge and thus will share more of their private information. Conversely, the relationship between construing power as opportunity and the sharing of private information is expected to become stronger when individuals receive high ability feedback. Specifically, people who
seek to serve their own interests (i.e., power construed as opportunity) would share even less of their private information, to contribute to own goals, when they perceive to have high ability. In other words, people construing power as opportunity (Sassenberg et al., 2012) feel more intense their drive to serve their own interests and thus share less of their private information when they believe that what they know is valuable. Furthermore, if individuals believe that the knowledge they have at their disposal is valid (Ellis & Kruglanski, 1992), they would not necessarily feel the urge to seek confirmation about the validity of their knowledge from others and will share less of their private information. In sum, we expect:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): When receiving a high ability feedback, people who construe power as responsibility share even more of their private information and people who construe power as opportunity share even less of their private information.

4.2. Method

4.2.1. Participants and Design
179 participants from the Netherlands (55 males, 124 females, between 18 and 41 years old, M\text{age} = 22.33, SD = 3.85, 60.3% hold a master’s degree) participated in a lab experiment (M\text{time task} = 34.69, SD = 7.93) in exchange for either money, course credits or for free. The experiment had a 2 (social power construals: as responsibility vs. as opportunity) x 2 (ability feedback: high vs. low) between subjects design; information sharedness (public vs. private) was varied as a within-subjects factor.

4.2.2. Procedure
In the laboratory, each participant was escorted to an isolated cubicle, seated in front of a computer providing all the instructions. Participants read that the study is about information processing and decision making while organizing events, it is divided in two parts and that it takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. After answering the demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, education), participants were asked to complete a few tasks that
allegedly trained their cognitive ability; the tasks varied from assigning value points (task 1, measuring SVO1), to following guidelines and applying (American Psychological Association (APA)) rules (task 2, manipulating ability feedback), to making decisions about a sport event (task 3, manipulating social power construals). Two power construals manipulation check questions were answered, participants received the ability feedback and answered two corresponding manipulation check questions. Subsequently, participants started a decision making task about a music event; they read that they are the leader of the Planning Department (PD) of ProStage and coordinate a five-member team; they were told that ProStage is a leading event planning organization in the Dutch music industry. As a leader of the PD, they are in charge of making a sketch representing the spatial security layout for an upcoming indoor music event; they have to consider details regarding the planning and the implementation of safety rules, placement of the security officers, position of the windows and panels for venting etc. In an online meeting the leader and the team will be discussing how to make the sketch to help the Security Department to implement the safety measures for the music event; prior to the online meeting, they will receive information that will help them prepare the meeting. Information was randomly displayed one by one, labeled as either public or private. For each piece of information, participants had the possibility to share it or not with the other team members by pressing either a ‘Share’ or a “Don’t share’ button; they were told that only after they go through the information they are able to collaborate via the computer with the other team members to discuss about how to make the sketch. After the information sharing task was completed, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

1 As an exploratory factor to the design, social value orientation (SVO) was measured according to Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, and Joireman (1997); SVO categories were formed in line with past studies (De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995; DeDreu & Van Kleef, 2004; Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994). Out of 179 participants, 69 (39%) were identified as prosocials, 58 (32%) as individualists, and 22 (12%) as competitors; 30 (17%) participants fell into none of the three categories. Due to unequal and very low cell sizes for some conditions we decided to leave SVO out from further analyses.
4.2.3. Independent Variables

Social power construals were manipulated as in Sassenberg et al. (2012): participants had to imagine being the leader of an Organizational Committee and had to make decisions about twelve measures concerning a sports event (e.g., “Extensive security checks at the venue should be implemented to reduce the danger of terrorist attacks. These checks partly interfere with the preparation of the athletes”). In the power as opportunity condition participants judged whether each measure would contribute to the success of the event; in the power as responsibility condition they judged whether each measure would be an ethically responsible action. Answers were given on a 6-point scale (1 “not at all helpful”, 6 “very helpful” and 1 “not at all justified”, 6 “completely justified”, respectively).

Ability feedback was manipulated by telling participants that, as demonstrated by research, quickly applying new rules indicates a flexible cognitive ability. Participants did, ostensibly, a cognitive ability (i.e., to correct scientific citations applying APA guidelines) framed as relevant to the subsequent task. Specifically, after reading about the APA general rules with examples, they were given 20 incorrectly formatted references and were asked to identify the errors. Participants were provided with false feedback and were told that they either have an overall high cognitive ability when it comes to applying rules “if you correctly answer 17 or more of the reference questions” or that they have an overall low cognitive ability when it comes to applying rules “if you correctly answer 13 questions or less”.

Information sharedness was manipulated by labeling the information pieces either as ‘public’ (e.g., #PUBLIC – Backstage access is only possible for security or when somebody has a backstage pass, no other exceptions are made.) or as ‘private’ (e.g., #PRIVATE – During the arrival peak it can be useful to open a third entrance to disperse the crowds and to be able to clear the streets rapidly.). Participants were told that public information came from a public source (i.e., the Internet and it was about safety measures adopted at other previous music events) and that the other team members also had access to it; private information was provided by a market research company that did an independent survey among security officers working in the music industry and
only the leader of the Planning Department had access to this information. Each participant received a total of 24 pieces of information (i.e., 12 public and 12 private).

**4.2.4. Dependent Measures**

Sharing of information is the dependent variable in this study. It was scored by counting how many pieces of each type of information (i.e., public and private) the participant shared.

Two statements adapted from the study of Sassenberg et al. (2012) were used as **social power manipulation check items**: “As the leader of the Organization Committee, 1) I thought about the consequences of my own decisions on others” and 2) I helped with the success of the event”. Answers were given on a 7-point scale (1 “Not at All”, 7 “Very Much”); the two items measure two different power construals (Sassenberg et al., 2012) and are used separately. Two specific questions (Ackerman, Beier, & Bowen, 2002) were used as **ability feedback manipulation checks items**: 1) “I was very capable of performing this task”, and 2) “If I were to take another test in applying rules I’m sure I would do well.”, adapted from Miller, Behrens, Greene, and Newman (1993); answers were given on a 7-point scale (1 “Strongly Disagree”, 7 “Strongly Agree”); an index ($\alpha = .66$) for ability feedback manipulation check was created.

As low ability feedback is sometimes used as a self-esteem manipulation (e.g., in Study 2a Callan, Kay, & Dawtry, 2014; Dodgson & Wood, 1998), we also controlled for **self-esteem**, measured using the 10-item (e.g., “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”) scale of Rosenberg (1965); answers were given on a 7-point scale (1 “Strongly Disagree”, 7 “Strongly Agree”). An index for self-esteem was created ($\alpha = .85$). The study also contained some personality scales not relevant to the hypotheses of the present paper.

**4.3. Results**

### 4.3.1. Manipulation Checks

A multivariate analysis of variance with **social power construals** and **ability feedback** as independent variables and the two power construals manipulation check items as dependent variables was performed. Results showed a
marginally significant overall effect of power construals, $F(2, 174) = 2.97, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .03$; a marginally significant effect for the second item, $F(1, 175) = 3.82, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .02$, indicated, as expected, that participants in the power as opportunity condition said that they helped more with the success of the event than participants in the power as responsibility condition ($M = 5.66, SD = 1.13$ vs. $M = 5.34, SD = 1.09$). Although non-significant, $F(1, 175) = 1.31, p = .25, \eta^2_p = .01$, the means of the first item were in the expected direction, indicating that participants in the power as responsibility condition thought more about the consequences of their own decisions on others than participants in the power as opportunity condition ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.09$ vs. $M = 5.44, SD = 1.27$). No other significant results were found, $F's < 0.05, p's > .20, \eta^2_p's < .02$. Nevertheless, due to the marginal overall effect we consider the manipulation successful.

To check the effectiveness of the ability manipulation, a univariate analysis of variance with ability feedback and power construals as independent variables and the ability feedback manipulation check as dependent variable was performed. Results showed a significant main effect of ability feedback, $F(1, 175) = 11.85, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .06$, indicating that participants in the high ability feedback condition felt more certain that they would do well if they were to take another test/were very capable at performing the task than participants in the low ability feedback condition ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.16$ vs. $M = 4.69, SD = 1.23$). No other significant results were found, $F's < 0.05, p's > .83, \eta^2_p's < .00$. We therefore conclude that the manipulation of the ability feedback was successful.

To evaluate whether to include self-esteem as a covariate we performed a two-way analysis of variance with power construals (as opportunity vs. as responsibility) and ability feedback (high vs. low) as independent variables and, self-esteem as dependent variable. A marginally significant effect of power construals was found, $F(1, 175) = 3.29, p = .07, \eta^2_p = .02$, indicating that participants in the power as responsibility condition tended to report higher self-esteem than participants in the power as opportunity condition ($M = 5.40, SD = 0.80$ vs. $M = 5.18, SD = 0.82$). No other significant effects were found, all $F's < 0.43, p's > .51, \eta^2_p's < .00$, and therefore we decided to leave self-esteem out of further analyses.
4.3.2. *Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations*

Although the correlation coefficients did not reach significance (Table 1), social power construals and ability feedback are positively correlated with the sharing of private information.

Table 1.

*Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the dependent measures and independent measures and variables.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Social Power Construals</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ability Feedback</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Provision of Public Information</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Provision of Private Information</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self-esteem</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Power Construals is recoded from the experimental manipulation (0 = as opportunity, 1 = as responsibility). Ability Feedback is recoded from the experimental manipulation (0 = low, 1 = high).

**p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

4.3.3. *Information Sharing*

A mixed analysis of variance was performed, with social power construals (as opportunity vs. as responsibility) and ability feedback (high vs. low) as between-subjects factors and information sharedness (public vs. private) as a within-subjects factor. A significant main effect of sharedness, $F(1, 175) = 38.94$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .18$, indicated that more public than private information was shared ($M = 9.73$, $SD = 2.22$ vs. $M = 8.50$, $SD = 2.96$). A significant main effect of social power construals, $F(1, 175) = 4.45$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2_p = .03$, indicated that more information was shared in the power as responsibility condition than in the power as opportunity condition ($M = 9.46$, $SD = 2.24$ vs. $M = 8.75$, $SD = 2.23$).

No other significant main effects were found, $F$’s < 7.98, $p$’s > .37, $\eta^2_p$’s < .01. Although a mean difference in sharing public vs. private information was slightly more pronounced for people construing power as opportunity ($M = 9.41$, $SD = 2.43$ vs. $M = 8.09$, $SD = 3.15$) than for people construing power as responsibility ($M = 10.02$, $SD = 1.98$ vs. $M = 8.88$, $SD = 2.74$), the two-way
interaction effect between information sharedness and social power construals was not significant, $F(1, 175) = .27, p = .61, \eta^2_p = .00, ns$. H1 is therefore not supported. In line with H2, we found a significant two-way interaction effect between information sharedness and ability feedback, $F(1, 175) = 7.04, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .04$, indicating, that people tended to share more private information in the high ability feedback condition than in the low ability feedback condition ($M = 8.91, SD = 2.88$ vs. $M = 8.09, SD = 3.00$), whereas there was no significant difference with regard to public information between people in the high ability feedback condition and people in the low ability feedback condition ($M = 9.61, SD = 2.26$ vs. $M = 9.84, SD = 2.19$). More important, these effects were qualified by the three-way interaction between information sharedness, social power construals and ability feedback, $F(1, 175) = 4.68, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .03$ (Figure 1). In line with H3, only people who received a high ability feedback shared more private information in the power as responsibility condition than in the power as opportunity condition ($M = 9.60, SD = 2.24$ vs. $M = 8.21, SD = 3.29$); power construals did not affect the sharing of private information when people received a low ability feedback ($M = 8.19, SD = 3.01$ vs. $M = 7.98, SD = 3.03$). In Figure 1, the dashed line indicates a marginally significant difference (i.e., $p < .07$), all other continuous lines indicate significant differences.

Figure 1. Mean differences for information sharing as a function of power construals, ability feedback and information sharedness
4.4. **Discussion**

This paper examined how power construals and perceived ability affected the sharing of private information. Our main finding was that construing power as responsibility (vs. as opportunity) increased the sharing of private information only when people received high ability feedback. This indicates that power and ability are dependent on each other when it comes to explaining the sharing of private information. The findings also showed that people who received a high ability feedback also tended to share more private information than people who received a low ability feedback; more information was shared when construing power as responsibility (vs. as opportunity).

4.4.1. **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The results of this study have several implications for research in the area of information sharing, organizational behavior and communication. We replicated and extended the findings of Bălău and Utz (2014) who looked at other motivational factors than social motives (Steinel et al., 2010) to explain SIS. We showed not only that the sharing of private information is also a matter of how power is being perceived but that it is also affected by both power construals and ability since they are dependent on each other in explaining especially the sharing of private information. The findings of Bălău and Utz (2014) are replicated in the high ability condition of the current study. In the light of what Bălău and Utz (2014) found, our findings indicated that people perceiving themselves able might be a *default* perception given that we explicitly provided participants with a low ability feedback; we advanced this line of research showing that one should account for a person’s perceived ability to explain how different power construals affect the sharing of a particular type of information. By looking at power construals (Sassenberg et al., 2012) in particular, we advanced the literature on power since previous research in the area of information sharing simply compared a low and a high power position (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2014). Focusing on power construals regardless of individuals’ power position allowed us to expand our understanding with regard to the dynamic ignited by power in organizations; power perceptions can also be much easier altered than power positions. Beyond advancing the understanding
of strategic information sharing (Steinel et al., 2010), we brought empirical evidence challenging one of the assumptions of the MIP-G model (De Dreu et al., 2008), i.e., individuals are primarily motivated to maximize their personal gain and ignore what others get. We thus found that individuals in power positions, construing power as responsibility, were less motivated to maximize personal gain by keeping information for themselves; not only the concern for others but also the power perception can be a motivator to act in a selfless manner. Moreover, previous research in the area of information sharing investigated power confounded with ability (Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Sturm & Antonakis, 2015; Wang & Noe, 2010). Our research experimentally disentangled between the effects of power and ability on information sharing to better understand how people gain knowledge and seek to maintain their power. This line of research has important theoretical implications for the cognitive and evaluative bias literature as well as for studies in the area of human resource management and associated processes (e.g., recruiting, employee performance evaluations).

From a practical perspective, despite the fact that power may seem less attractive to leaders when it is associated with responsibility (Sassenberg et al., 2012), organizations should consider emphasizing more the responsibilities than the opportunities implied by a leading position, in order to stimulate the sharing of private information. The default perception of power in organizations is as opportunity (to achieve one’s goals) and, as results also indicated, organizations should not encourage this perception otherwise it’s being done at the expense of sharing the unique and valuable information. Also, ability appraisals made by others efficiently stimulate especially individuals construing power as responsibility to share information. However, information sharing depends also on the power construals and organizations should consider the different outcomes. On the one hand, high ability feedback complemented with power construed as responsibility may optimally stimulate the sharing of valuable information. When receiving a low ability feedback, individuals may share more public than private information. This is what we found in the current research and we explain this behavior by the fact that people care not to harm the group outcome by sharing potentially unhelpful private information;
they shared the public information knowing that it was safe to be shared and could at least help the group decision somehow. On the other hand, high ability feedback complemented with power construed as opportunity may influence individuals to act strategic and thus share especially public, potentially unhelpful information. When receiving a low ability feedback, similar to individuals construing power as responsibility, individuals may share more public than private information. This is what we found in the current research and, contrary to the motivations underlying information sharing of the people who construed power as responsibility, we explain this behavior by the fact that information sharing might have been a way to restore self-competence (Mugny, Quiamzade, Pigiere, Dragulescu, & Buchs, 2002) or to motivate others to share information as well (Steinel et al., 2010). Finally, the current findings are useful to those professional environments that require fewer specialists or people possessing broad expertise and need to overcome the behavior of withholding information, given that nowadays ‘knowledge is power’.

4.4.2. Limitations and Strengths

Using a convenience sample with the majority of participants holding a master’s degree may be seen as a limitation of the current study, a threat for the external validity of the findings. However, the relationships investigated in this study explained underlying mechanisms and we expect these relationships to hold over different age and professional categories. Future research could test and find support for the current findings in organizational settings, with employees, having various levels of education. Secondly, we looked at behavioral aspects but did not additionally measure the supposed underlying motivations (e.g., to help) and attributions (e.g., due to ability) that may have implications for subsequently explaining success outcomes. Thirdly, we acknowledge a lack of alignment between the ability task (i.e., correcting incorrectly formatted references) and the decision making task (i.e., making a sketch representing the spatial security layout for an upcoming indoor music event) for which the ability was expected to be employed. However, this lack of alignment resembles with situations in practice, i.e., organizations investing in developing employees’
specific skills (e.g., abstract reasoning exercises, case studies), with direct application to a wide range of decision-making situations.

An important strength of this study is the experimental approach that helps formulate causal inferences about the relationships under investigation. Although most of the information sampling studies in social psychology are experiments (Stasser & Titus, 2003), the studies in the area of organizational behavior and communication or in the area of information management systems are mostly based on self-reports. In this respect, the current study contributes to the small but increasing body of experimental studies as part of the latter stream of research (e.g., Wang & Noe, 2010; Witherspoon, Bergner, Cockrell, & Stone, 2013). A second important strength is the use, with more and actual information, of the information pooling paradigm developed by Steinel et al. (2010). This paradigm allowed us to investigate SIS by objectively measuring the amount and especially the type of information shared (i.e., public vs. private). Derived from the use of the information pooling paradigm, a third essential strength is the simultaneous accessibility to public and private information that is a characteristic of those online collaboration tools, for instance, used in police investigations or by private detectives to display and identify associations among clues of a crime.

4.4.3. Future Research Directions and Conclusions
Future research should provide additional understanding with regard to why people receiving low ability feedback share more public than private information when construing power as responsibility as well as when construing power as opportunity. Interestingly, future research could investigate whether current effects involving sharedness of information extend to other characteristics of information as well (e.g., importance: important vs. unimportant). Future research could also assess the impact of actual ability (i.e., objectively measured) versus perceived ability (i.e., manipulated via bogus feedback) on SIS. Taking power into account, future studies could assess the interactive effects of power construals (responsibility vs. opportunity) and power differentials (high vs. low) on SIS; the use of different social power construals manipulations should also be explored (e.g., recall task). The extent
to which responsible people hold morality as part of his or her self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002) beyond what the power position/construal implies may influence the degree to which people emphasize their own versus others' needs (DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceramic, 2012) and subsequently influence how much and what they share. Future research could thus disentangle between the job-related responsibility (Sassenberg et al., 2012) and person-related responsibility; sharing information when power is construed as responsibility might be determined by one's own values of morality (DeCelles et al., 2012), regardless of work-related responsibilities (e.g., I felt responsible vs. I had/was expected to be responsible). Other different connotations of responsibility (Winter & Barenbaum, 1985) could also inspire future research directions (e.g., moral standard, obligation, concern about consequences, self-judgment). Future research could also look at both social power construals on a continuum (Sassenberg et al., 2012) or consider them as two separate dimensions, to clarify whether it is a sequential or a simultaneous conceptualization of the two social power construals, suggesting common measurement methods to establish commensurability. Different types of power (e.g., legitimate power, coercive power) (Liao, 2008) in relation with ability would also contribute to a comprehensive picture about SIS.

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