

Chapter 3

Exploring Shared Work Values and Work Collaboration With a Network Approach: A Case Study From Italy

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ABSTRACT

A real-life case study presented in this chapter reports on how organizational network analysis approach was used in a medium-sized Italian company with circa 100 employees to examine how the company employees were connected by shared values at work, what these values are, and whether and how their value connectedness impacted the quality of their collaboration. The findings indicate that there was a positive correlation between shared work values and work collaboration, present benchmarks for network parameters, as well as propose macro-categories of work values. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to use the network-analysis approach to explore shared values and employee collaboration at work. The chapter should be of substantial interest not only to academic scholars but also to organizational leaders and HR practitioners.

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INTRODUCTION

Collaboration at work is typically described as an interaction among employees within and across teams, organizations and sectors to achieve a shared goal (Bedwell et al., 2012). Although it helps organizations to be creative and flexible, and thus increase competitive advantage, collaboration often does not come naturally to employees. The culture of competition which prevailed in organizations for many decades is often seen as one likely cause of this phenomenon (Kelly & Schaefer, 2014). Organizations seek to break-up of organizational silos and to increase collaboration among their employees by introducing cutting-edge technologies (e.g. Slack). However, to be effective and sustainable, collaboration needs to be embedded in an organizational culture (Kelly & Schaefer, 2014), which includes, among other factors, values that guide the behavior of members of the organization (The Business Dictionary, 2018). This implies that values can be the key to understanding how people collaborate at work.

Values provide a bonding mechanism between people, set the tone for the environment, and produce a culture that facilitates work toward common goals (Meglino et al., 1989). Previous research has demonstrated that when employees are similar in terms of their values, these values result in congruent interpretations and compatible perceptions regarding tasks and environments (Cannon-Bowers & Salas, 2001). However, there needs to be more work to investigate specifically the association between work values and employee work behavior or work outcomes including, for example, collaboration at work (Mazzocchi, 2008). Indeed, few of the existing studies that have looked at the values employees share, and their work behavior or outcomes, has taken into consideration that in the workplace personnel interact not only with their line managers or direct co-workers but with a range of different people employed by the company (e.g. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Especially, considering that these may work in different departments or at diverse geographical locations. This limitation in the current published literature was meant to be addressed in a real-life single case, in which a medium-sized Italian company examined how its employees were connected by shared values at work, what these values were, and whether and how this value-connectedness impacted the quality of their collaboration. To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to use network-analysis approach to explore shared values and employee collaboration at work.

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