

It's better to give than to receive: Personality affects knowledge exchange

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Personality plays an important role in knowledge exchange. Researchers at the Knowledge Media Research Center (KMRC) in Tübingen and the University of Tübingen validate Adam Grant's interaction styles in the context of knowledge transfer.

Givers share more important knowledge than takers, according to a recent study conducted by researchers at the Knowledge Media Research Center (KMRC) in Tübingen and the University of Tübingen. In a large online study, working professionals were classified as givers, matchers and takers based on a personality measure developed by Adam Grant (The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania). The researchers examined how these three interaction styles affected resource and [information](#) sharing. The main finding: Givers not only share more resources and more information, but they also share mainly the important information. Takers keep everything for themselves.

Adam Grants' bestseller "Give and take: Why helping others drives our success" is a must-read for managers. In his book, Grant, questions the common assumption that self-centered individuals are more successful in their careers and makes a new suggestion that might seem counterintuitive at first glance – that the self-less, altruistic people can actually be more successful in professional settings.

Adam Grant distinguishes between three main interaction styles: givers, matchers, and takers. Givers are always helpful and give more than they receive, without expecting anything in return. Matchers apply a tit-for-

tat strategy. Takers try to get as much as possible without giving anything in return. To classify people, Grant has developed a questionnaire in which participants have to decide how they would behave in 15 different situations, both everyday and professional scenarios.

New findings from a study that will be published soon in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*, suggest that this concept of givers, matchers and takers can also be applied to organizational knowledge sharing. Prof. Dr. Sonja Utz (professor at the University of Tübingen and leader of the social media group at KMRC), Nicole Muscanell (KMRC) and Prof. Dr. Anja Göritz (University of Freiburg) used this new personality measure to examine how it relates to sharing in a sample of over 1200 working professionals. They also examined a more established (related) measure, which classifies people as being prosocials, individualists and competitors. In the study, working professionals first completed the measurements classifying their interaction styles, along with several personality constructs such as narcissism.

Two weeks later, Prof. Utz and her colleagues assessed cooperative behavior in a social dilemma and a strategic information sharing task. In the social dilemma task, participants were allotted a fictitious endowment of 300 Euros. They were then asked to decide how much of their 300 Euros they would give to a shared group pool. They were told that the money in the pool would be doubled and divided equally among all group members. Thus, it would be more beneficial to the group (as a whole) if everyone contributed their individual endowments; however, it would be more beneficial at the individual level, if everyone else from the group contributed, while the individual kept his/her own endowment. The researchers used this strategic [information sharing](#) task to examine how much and which pieces of information participants shared: the less important and already known information or the really important information only known by the individual. The results showed that givers

are less self-oriented and narcissistic than takers. Moreover, compared to the traditional classification of prosocials, individualists and competitors, this new classification of givers, matchers and takers was better at predicting behaviors measured two weeks later. Givers shared not only more money with the group, but they also shared mainly the important information. Takers on the other hand kept both money as well as different types of information.

These results have important implications for organizational knowledge management. The findings suggest that it may not be enough to simply provide [knowledge](#) management tools in order to optimize [knowledge exchange](#). It may also be necessary for leaders and managers to keep in mind the personality and interaction styles of their employees. Specifically, they should be wary that takers may keep the important information for themselves.

More information: Utz, S., Muscanell, N. & Göritz, A.S. (in press). Give, match, or take: A new personality construct predicts resource and information sharing. *Personality and Individual Differences*. Advance online publication [DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2014.06.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.06.011)

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