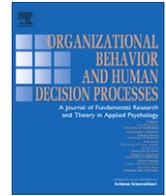




Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp

It hurts both ways: How social comparisons harm affective and cognitive trust

Jennifer Dunn^{a,*}, Nicole E. Ruedy^b, Maurice E. Schweitzer^c^a Michigan State University, N475 North Business Complex, East Lansing, MI 48823, United States^b Foster School of Business, Center for Leadership and Strategic Thinking, University of Washington, Box 353200, Seattle WA 98195-3200, United States^c The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 556 JMH, 3730 Walnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19104, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 January 2008

Accepted 1 August 2011

Available online 26 August 2011

Keywords:

Trust

Affect

Ability

Social comparison

ABSTRACT

Organizations often expect employees to collaborate with and trust the same coworkers with whom they compete for promotions and raises. This paper explores how social comparisons in self-relevant achievement domains influence affective and cognitive trust. We find that both upward and downward social comparisons harm trust. Upward comparisons harm *affective* trust and downward comparisons harm *cognitive* trust. We find no benefits of upward comparisons on cognitive trust, and we find no benefits of downward comparisons on affective trust.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

“Rhonda, age thirty-four, is one of twenty-five female secretaries at a midsize legal firm. Her boss, impressed by Rhonda’s computer skills, suggests she go for further training so she can help with the information technology needs of the firm. He offers to accommodate her time away for classes if she will agree to stay with the firm for a year after she finishes. When Rhonda tells her coworkers about the opportunity, they congratulate her, but in the weeks that follow, the emotional climate of the office grows noticeably cooler. Within a month of starting classes, Rhonda is no longer invited to lunch with the other women, and they frequently ‘forget’ to pass on important messages that arrive while she is in class.” (Dellesega, 2005, p. 8).

Many organizations routinely compare employees with each other. For example, managers frequently rank employees or publicly recognize an employee for special achievement (e.g., an employee of the month award; Garcia & Tor, 2007). In a 2006 survey, Hewitt Associates found that over 60% of organizations used a competitive reward system, and Greenberg, Ashton-James, and Ashkanasy (2007) argue that the use “of comparative social information in the workplace is, in some ways, an institutionalized process” (p. 36). Given the frequency of such comparisons, individuals are likely to compare their accomplishments with those of their colleagues not only when their managers formally engage in comparison processes, but also on their own even without an institutionally driven comparison (Exline & Lobel, 1999; Festinger, 1954).

In the opening example, a manager’s recognition of a high-potential employee harms relationships between that employee and her co-workers. Even though this manager may not have intended to make the comparison between Rhonda and her co-workers salient, Rhonda’s co-workers made the social comparison and consequently withdrew from Rhonda and began to undermine her performance. Prior research has shown that social comparisons in the workplace have implications for interpersonal liking (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004) and aggression (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). In this paper, we examine the implications of social comparisons on trust.

A substantial literature has documented the importance of trust (Hosmer, 1995; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2007). Trust facilitates cooperation (Pillutla, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003), reduces transaction costs (Granovetter, 1985), and enables managers and organizations to operate effectively (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Jones & George, 1998; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006). Although trust is critical in many workplace relationships, common organizational practices trigger social comparisons that may unintentionally damage trust.

In this paper, we describe how social comparisons influence subsequent trust. Although prior work has found that individuals may harm competitors during a competitive interaction (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Garcia, Tor, & Gonzalez, 2006; Schweitzer, DeChurch, & Gibson, 2005), no prior work has examined how competitive interactions influence trust in subsequent cooperative contexts. We show that comparisons with someone whose performance is superior to one’s own (*upward comparisons*) and comparisons with someone whose performance is inferior to one’s own (*downward comparisons*) harm trust. The type of trust

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 517 432 1111.

E-mail address: dunn@bus.msu.edu (J. Dunn).

that is harmed by upward and downward comparisons depends on the direction of the comparison. Downward comparisons harm cognitive trust, and upward comparisons harm affective trust.

Interpersonal trust

In this paper, we refer to the person who trusts another person as the *truster*, and the person who may or may not be trusted as the *trustee*. In our investigation, the truster receives social comparison information and the trustee is the target of the comparison.

Integrating prior trust research, we define trust as a willingness to accept vulnerability based upon beliefs about the trustee's ability and character and the emotional bond between the truster and the trustee (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Williams, 2001). One model of trust introduced by McAllister (1995) identifies two distinct types of trust: affect-based trust and cognition-based trust. This distinction is similar to distinctions made by Johnson-George and Swap (1982) and Lewis and Weigert (1985) in earlier work. These distinctions disentangle the emotional/affective dimension of trust from the intellectual/cognitive dimension. In this paper, we use the terms affective and cognitive trust to label the two forms of trust.

Affective trust is a willingness to be vulnerable to the trustee that is based primarily on the emotional bond between the truster and the trustee (Chua, Ingram, & Morris, 2008; McAllister, 1995; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). This bond is based on beliefs about the trustee's benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995) and an affective attachment between the truster and trustee (Williams, 2007). Affective trust implies a feeling of emotional security and a belief that one's concern for another is reciprocated (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; McAllister, 1995; Wilson, Straus, & McEvily, 2006). Trusters with high affective trust are willing to make themselves emotionally vulnerable to the trustee because they expect the trustee to respond in a supportive and considerate way.

Cognitive trust is a willingness to be vulnerable to the trustee that is based primarily on beliefs about the trustee's ability and integrity (Chua et al., 2008; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Wilson et al., 2006). Cognitive trust forms through direct interactions with the trustee as well as from learning about the trustee's reputation (Kollock, 1994; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). Trusters with high cognitive trust are willing to rely on the trustee because they have sufficient evidence that the trustee has the ability and character to represent their interests.

In a meta-analysis of trust in leaders, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) described three types of trust: affective, cognitive and overall trust. They conceptualized "overall trust" as a combination of affective and cognitive trust. In their review of prior work, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) focused on cognitive trust and overall trust, explaining that prior research has largely neglected the study of affective trust. As Dirks and Ferrin (2002) explain, "We focus on these two types [overall trust and cognitive trust] because we found that nearly all of the studies included in the meta-analysis used one of these two; there is presently insufficient data to directly examine affective trust" (p. 616).

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) found that cognitive trust and overall trust had different antecedents and outcomes. The authors speculate that the moderating effects of trust would be even stronger if affective trust was compared to cognitive trust and concluded that "more theory is needed to understand the antecedents and consequences of alternative dimensions of trust . . . future studies might include multiple dimensions (affective and cognitive) within a single study and attempt to distinguish between the processes involved" (p. 623). In this paper, we address this open question. We describe how social comparisons differentially influence affective and cognitive trust.

Social comparisons and trust

Our work contributes to the social comparison literature by simultaneously exploring the affective and cognitive consequences of social comparisons. Buunk and Gibbons (2007) declare this area of study "a central issue that nevertheless has received relatively little attention" (p. 16). Prior work has suggested that people seek upward comparisons for cognitive reasons (e.g., information useful for self-evaluation or self-improvement) and seek downward comparisons for affective reasons (e.g., in order to feel better about oneself) (Gruder, 1971; Wheeler, 1966; Wills, 1981). Although people may be motivated to seek social comparisons for these reasons, we demonstrate that the affective and cognitive consequences of upward and downward social comparisons are quite different. The consequences of upward comparisons on trust are primarily affective. The consequences of downward comparisons on trust are primarily cognitive.

We build on Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model (SEM) to develop two hypotheses linking social comparisons with trust. According to the SEM model, individuals have a strong motivation to maintain a positive self-image (Achee, Tesser, & Pilkington, 1994; Tesser, Pilkington, & McIntosh, 1989).

An individual's ability to maintain their self-image depends on the type of comparisons they make with others. In the SEM model, Tesser (1988) focuses on three factors that influence the status of one's self-evaluation after a comparison: (1) the comparison direction (upward vs. downward), (2) the relevance of the comparison domain (highly self-relevant vs. not relevant to one's identity), and (3) the psychological closeness of the compared person (similar/friend vs. different/stranger). These three factors determine the amount of threat an individual feels to her self-image following a social comparison. When the domain is self-relevant (e.g., an engineer comparing her math ability with a peer), upward comparisons threaten the self-image, and the threat is stronger when the compared person is psychologically close than when the person is distant. In contrast, downward comparisons enhance one's self-image when the domain is self-relevant, especially when the compared person is close. When the domain is low in self-relevance (e.g., an engineer's ability to write poetry), upward comparisons with someone who is close can enhance one's self-image by affiliation (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976). Downward comparisons that are low in self-relevance have little effect on one's self-image.

In our studies, we focus on social comparisons that are high in self-relevance. Our participants compare job prospects, scores on a graduate school entrance exam, or feedback from intelligence tests. Self-relevant comparisons are common in the workplace and we expect these comparisons to influence both affective and cognitive trust in important and predictable ways. We develop our hypotheses with respect to self-relevant comparisons.

Social comparisons provide information, trigger affective reactions, and motivate individuals to maintain their self-evaluation (e.g., Achee et al., 1994; Tesser et al., 1989; Tesser, 1995). Through these mechanisms, we expect social comparisons to differently influence affective and cognitive trust. Below, we consider how upward and downward comparisons influence trust relative to a similar comparison (i.e., a situation where the truster and trustee have very similar performance outcomes).

Social comparisons and affective trust

Upward comparisons

Upward comparisons are generally aversive. Upward comparisons threaten an individual's self-image and evoke feelings of threat, envy and anger (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). Threats trigger

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات