

# The impact of team-member exchange on employee's sensegiving level

— Self-efficacy as mediator —

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## Abstract

In recent years, organisational sensemaking process has been recognized as an important process affecting the establishment of strategy to cope with ambiguous issue. An exchange relationship between members (team-member exchange) is critical but largely unaddressed in the field of organisational behaviour. This paper aims to review the literature on TMX and then propose a model to explain the impact of team-member exchange on the level of sense-giving conducted by employee. The influence of team-member exchange at individual and aggregate level in affecting employee's sensegiving level will be discussed respectively. This paper attempts to build a model illustrating team-member exchange, both at individual and aggregate level, triggers or discourages employee from carrying out sensegiving activities. The current paper also aims to identify the mediating impact of self-efficacy at individual level on the relationship between team-member exchange and the level of employee's sense-giving. The relationship between team-member exchange and sensegiving level proposed in the present study requires to be further testified. Future study should also shed lights on how team-member exchange as a climate may affect the aggregate level of sensegiving conducted by organisational members.

## Introduction

Scholars have had a major interest in the question of why some organisations can establish better strategies than others. Despite the great amount of literature that sheds light on how an organisation can grow and expand, scholars (e.g., Wright & Stigliani, 2012) have further mentioned the surprisingly small amount of studies focused on why and how firms make certain decisions or construct certain strategies according to distinct patterns of information processed. Recently, there has been cumulative research starting to shed light on the

pattern of the organisational sensemaking process and its consequences on an organisation. Wright & Stigliani (2012) have pinpointed the importance of the styles of cognitive systems and knowledge structures applied by members in the firms to process information and make decisions for expansion. Disparate organisations are likely to create different forms of information-processing systems and cognitive structures that lead to the generation of different decisions regarding a similar issue. Moreover, recent research on sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005) suggested that the pattern of the organisational sensemaking process might be a combination of the sensegiving level conducted by critical stakeholders and the organisational leader. In order to open the black box of the organisational sensemaking process, the level of sensegiving carried out by elemental members requires further discussion. Sensegiving, which has been referred to as a critical role in organisational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), has been recognised as the mean applied by leadership to influence major changes and to ensure stability. Sensegiving has also been recognised as an important activity carried out by critical stakeholders within the firm. Through sensegiving, which involves making suggestions and promulgating one's perspectives regarding an issue to gain support, organisational members who do not have formal authority are still capable of affecting the process of decision making (Balongun, 2003; Dutton et al., 2002). However, sensegiving is not cost or effort free. There is a cost if an individual engages in sensegiving activities. Individuals may not always carry out sensegiving activities, even though the issue encountered affects the welfare of the individual and the firm for which he/she works. The factors that affect the decision of whether to carry out sensegiving, which Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) have defined as a trigger for sensegiving, should receive more attention. If the trigger for sensegiving could be better understood, it might imply that the formation of the organisational sensemaking process could be better depicted. The study of consequences of different patterns of organisational sensemaking processes, including the impacts on performance and the nature of strategy, therefore, may also be contributed. Previous literature regarding sensegiving, nevertheless, mostly focused on identifying the individuals involving sensegiving activities and the techniques or resources they utilised to pave their way for sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). The potential factors that may motivate an individual in conducting sensegiving remain little addressed in the sensegiving study.

In the current study, the quality of the team-member exchange relationship, which has been referred to as team-member exchange (Seers, 1989), has been proposed as the trigger of sensegiving that is likely to influence the level of sensegiving devoted by an organisational employee. The high quality of exchange relationship with colleagues perceived by a member

implies that he/she is likely to engage in activities such as information sharing, resource exchanging and feedback appreciation (Seers, 1989). Hence, team-member exchange at individual levels, which refers to the quality of the exchange relationship with coworkers as a group perceived by an individual, can be regarded as an attitudinal factor that possesses powerful impacts on the individual's attitude or preference towards certain behaviour (Ilgen, 1999). Phrased differently, team-member exchange represents the perception of an individual regarding his/her exchange relationship with other colleagues. Team-member exchange, therefore, may be considered a factor motivating employees to or hindering them from conducting voluntary activities that may benefit the organisation and the actor him/herself. Overall, if regarding team-member exchange at an individual level, it is reasonable to suggest that team-member exchange considerably impacts the level of sensegiving conducted by employees.

Apart from considering team-member exchange at an individual level, some empirical studies have argued for research focusing not only on the nature of interactions among group members but also on the organisational context affecting how employees are supported and rewarded. An individual's behaviour and activity may be the consequences derived not only from the attitudinal factor but also from the organisational contexts he/she situates. Each organisation or group to which an individual perceives him/herself to be a member has its unique shared beliefs, norms and preferences or inclinations. Those norms and beliefs, serving as a guideline for the range of behaviour that has been favoured and expected by other members, should be considered a powerful factor affecting an individual's perception of whether he/she should or should not conduct certain behaviour. Other team-member exchange studies, such as the research conducted by Farmer et al. (2015), have started to highlight the importance of incorporating team-member exchange at different units of analysis into the study. Team-member exchange as a climate, therefore, can be seen as a normative construct or an organisational context that members in the organisation commonly share. In the current study, the influence of team-member exchange as a climate has been recognised as another trigger of sensegiving. It is proposed in this study that, due to norms and shared beliefs, an employee may be motivated or discouraged to engage in sensegiving activities. In other words, peer pressure may take place, affecting an employee's decision of whether to devote him/herself to conducting sensegiving. Involving team-member exchange at the individual level and team-member exchange as a climate in the sensegiving study, hence, may provide a more thorough understanding of the impacts of team-member exchange as a trigger for sensegiving.

Self-efficacy has also been included in the current study as the mediator affecting the relationship between team-member exchange and the level of sensegiving. Although self-efficacy has been identified as a powerful predictor to explain actual behaviour carried out by an individual, limited research of sensegiving sheds lights on the role of self-efficacy. The current study, therefore, aims to illustrate the role of self-efficacy in mediating the relationship between team-member exchange and the level of sensegiving carried out by organisational members. It is worth noting that the current study focuses on how team-member exchange at individual and aggregate level may affect 'individual's' self-efficacy. In aggregate, the present study has built the model (see Figure 1<sup>a</sup>):

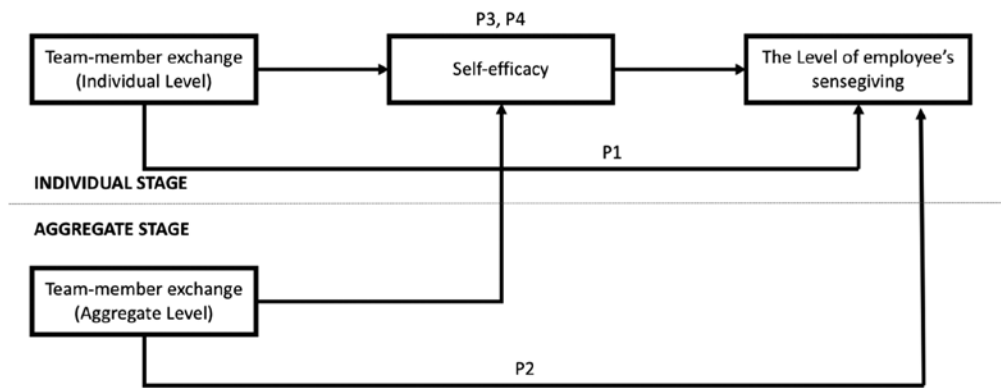


Figure 1. The conceptual model

The main objective of the current study is to review previous literature regarding the impact of team-member exchange on the level of sensegiving engaged by organisational employees and establish a conceptual model which self-efficacy at individual level plays a role as mediator. The current study, therefore, attempts to respond to the call to identify a possible factor, which may discourage or engender employees to carry out sensegiving activities. Previous literature has recognised the leader's incompetence and the perception of the importance of the issue as a potential trigger for sensegiving, influencing the stakeholders' sensegiving levels (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Although team-member exchange has been regarded as a critical factor that affects the individual's behaviour, team-member exchange, as a trigger of sensegiving, remains little discussed in sensegiving literature. The present study, therefore, aims to extend earlier studies by relating team-member exchange to the

<sup>a</sup> In Figure 1, P1, P2, P3 and P4 represents Proposition 1, Proposition 2, Proposition 3 and Proposition 4 in this paper.

level of sensegiving. Moreover, the current study involves multi-levels of team-member exchange: team-member exchange at the individual level and team-member exchange as a climate. Through closer examination of the nature of interaction quality with coworkers perceived by organisational members and the aggregate level of exchange relationship with other colleagues, this study attempts to provide a more thorough picture of team-member exchange as affecting the degree to which an individual engages in sensegiving. Furthermore, this paper also includes self-efficacy as a mediator of the relationship between team-member exchange and the level of an employee's sensegiving. Self-efficacy is found to be a profound factor in affecting an individual's intention to conduct knowledge sharing activities. Previous literature, however, has provided much information about the linkage between self-efficacy and the level of employees' sensegiving. The impact of self-efficacy in terms of an employee's sensegiving activity, therefore, requires further inspection. Overall, the present study focuses on bridging attitudinal variable (i.e., team-member exchange at the individual level), organisational context (i.e., team-member exchange as a climate) and the level of an employee's sensegiving. By considering self-efficacy as a mediator, this study hopes to provide an explanation to demonstrate how self-efficacy may mediate the relationship between team-member exchange and the level of an employee's sensegiving.

Very little literature targets the relationship between team-member exchange as a climate and the level of an employee's sensegiving. However, through other fields of research, such as those concerning knowledge sharing, OCB and self-training, the current study attempts to propose a model explaining why team-member exchange at the aggregate level can be taken as a trigger for sensegiving. In empirical research, organisational members, especially frontline employees, are those that have long been ignored by scholars in sense-making and sensegiving studies. Recent literature, however, has recognised the critical impacts those employees may possess on the construction of strategy and the decision-making process (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). In issue-selling studies, scholars have also pinpointed how employees may have an upward influence in affecting top management (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton & Ashford, 1993). The influence of organisational employees who do not belong to top management affects the formation of the sensemaking process and should also be powerful. In the field of knowledge-sharing studies, scholars have identified knowledge sharing as a critical activity that enables members in the organisation to exchange perspectives and information leading to the formation of innovative knowledge (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007; Flood et al., 2001). Organisational members' unwillingness to share, therefore, may cause negative outcomes and increase the challenges faced by top management.

Overall, the behaviour conducted by employees should possess great influence in organisational performance and the establishment of strategy. Taking organisational members as elemental stakeholders within the organisation, employee's involvement in sensegiving activities, therefore, should have a determinant impact on the formation of the organisational sensemaking process. Through discussion of factors triggering employees' sensegiving activities, the current study aims to depict a better picture of how employee's sensegiving may be influenced by team-member exchange at individual and aggregate level.

## Literature review

### *Sensemaking process and sensegiving activities*

Sensemaking has been defined as 'a process in which individuals or groups attempt to interpret novel and ambiguous situations' (Weick, 1995, cited in Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012:p.1232). When the issue or problem encountered has fallen beyond an individual's expectation and knowledge, he/she may be triggered to engage in the sensemaking process in order to better explain the situation or the problem. Through the sensemaking process, the individual is able to construct definitions and interpretation regarding unexpected issues, which further serves as the foundation of the individual's action to cope with the issue. Studies have shed light on the individual sensemaking process (Weick, 1988; Weick, 1995), the collective sensemaking process (Maitlis, 2005) and use of artifacts as the bridge connecting the individual sensemaking process and collective sensemaking process (Stevens, 2013; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). In the individual sensemaking process, scholars (e.g., Weick, 1988) emphasise the importance of how individuals make sense of the unexpected situations and the potential factors affecting their perception of the issue. Researchers in the collective sensemaking process focus more on how 'individuals exchange provisional understanding and try to agree on consensual interpretations and a course of action' (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012:p.1232). Since the collective perspective of the sensemaking process involves interaction between individuals, previous literature highlighted the importance of linguistic or material tools and techniques, such as the exchange of narratives and interpretations (Cornellisen, 2012; Maitlis, 2005) and artefacts (Stevens, 2013; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012), that could be applied to integrate multiple perspectives into a unitary account. Recently, researchers (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) have shifted their focus to the formation of patterns of the collective sensemaking process, which may be generated by disparate levels of interaction among individuals. According to Maitlis (2005), the level of

sensegiving carried out by stakeholders and organisational leaders constructs disparate forms of organisational sensemaking processes. The author further proposed that the outcomes in each pattern of the collective sensemaking process are likely to vary, due to the degree of contribution of individuals. Stigliani and Ravasi (2012) suggested that the exchange and promulgation of plausible accounts regarding the encountered issue contribute to the formation of the collective sensemaking process. Overall, empirical researches agreed on the formation of the collective sensemaking process as the output of collective contribution of perspectives exchanged through linguistic and material terms.

Based on previous literature (Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), sensegiving is with no doubt a critical component in the formation of the organisational sensemaking process. In order to better understand the collective sensemaking process, it may be necessary to look closer at how members in the organisation have been motivated to conduct perspective exchange and promulgation. Sensegiving can be referred to as a course of actions taken in order to provide 'a sense of merging interpretations' to relevant members (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012:p.1234). In other words, sensegiving involves an individual attempting to promulgate to other individuals his/her perspectives and definitions regarding the encountered issue. The high level of sensegiving contributes to the facilitation of information flow within the firm and forms the organizational highly animated sensemaking process. (Maitlis, 2005). However, some researchers (e.g., Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) have started to argue that since sensegiving activity is not free of effort and cost, the factors that influence individuals' decisions to carry out the sensegiving activity are critical for better understanding of the collective sensemaking process. The trigger of sensegiving, which refers to the factor that motivates or triggers individuals into conducting sensegiving, has not yet caught much attention in sensemaking and sensegiving studies. In the study, Maitlis (2005) has suggested that the trigger for sensegiving requires the attention of future research. Although Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) attempt to respond to the call for more studies focusing on triggers and enablers of sensegiving, the literature discussing how an individual can be motivated to engage in sensegiving remains largely unaddressed. Indeed, nevertheless, the contribution of Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) in pointing out the importance of stakeholders' perception of the importance of the issue and the incompetence of leadership is considerable to sensegiving literature. In their work, the authors have implied the importance of an individual's perception in affecting the individual's decision of whether or not to get involved in sensegiving activity. Phrased differently, an individual's perception should be critical when discussing the level of sensegiving conducted by individuals. It is worth noting, however, that

empirical literature regarding the trigger of sensegiving remains insufficient. Other factors that may affect the level of an individual's sensegiving require more study.

### ***Team-member exchange at the individual level and its impact on employees' sensegiving level***

In the present study, in order to illustrate the question of how team-member exchange may have a powerful impact on the level of employees' sensegiving, team-member exchange, as an organisational context, is discussed respectively in the next section. This section focuses on team-member exchange at the individual level.

Team-member exchange relationship is defined as an employee's perception of his/her relationships with other members within the group to which he/she considers he/she belongs (Seers, 1989). Liu et al. (2011:p.274) have identified team-member exchange as 'an individual's perception of exchange relationships with coworkers of the work group'. Team-member exchange is a concept deeply rooted in the social exchange theory originally proposed by Blau (1964). Social exchange theory suggests that when an individual perceives a high level of exchange relationship with other individual(s), he/she is more willing to help and benefit focal individuals in that favourable relationship (Srivastva & Singh, 2015). Team-member exchange, which is built between an individual and his/her peer group, therefore, is constructed on the basis of mutual reciprocity. Team-member exchange can be considered an indicator evaluating 'the reciprocity between a member and the peer group' (Seers, 1989:p.119). Phrased differently, the reciprocal behaviour between an individual and his/her peer, hence, serves as a foundation for team-member exchange. Since team-member exchange represents '*a way to access the reciprocity between a member and the peer group*' (Srivastva & Singh, 2015:p.569); through investigating the quality of team-member exchange, the reciprocal relationship between an employee and his/her colleagues could be better examined (Seers, 1989). The quality of interaction of one member with his/her colleagues, hence, may imply how an individual contributes to the group, including his/her involvement in knowledge sharing, idea expressing and helping other members. Furthermore, the quality of team-member exchange may also imply the degree of concern and obligation perceived by an individual in contributing mutual reciprocation with his/her colleagues (Farmer et al., 2005). That is, the quality of interaction may also affect how an individual receives feedback, evaluations and recognition from peers (Seers et al., 1995).

The impacts of team-member exchange have long caught researchers' attention. Previous literature suggests that team-member exchange yields a significant impact not only on



organisational outcomes, such as employees' performance (Liden et al., 2000; Seers, 1989), OCB (Srivastva & Singh, 2015) and organisational commitment (Liden et al., 2000) but also on employees' affective reaction, such as employees' work satisfaction (Seers, 1989), mental health and psychological empowerment (Srivastva & Singh, 2015). Targeting manufacturing workers, the results conducted by Seers et al. (1995) have demonstrated that when an individual experiences strong team-member exchange, he/she is more inclined to contribute to collaborative efforts and cultivate closely coupled behaviour with other members in the group, leading to the formation of a high level of identification. According to Seers et al. (1995), reciprocal behaviour facilitates the cooperation among organisational members and enhances the effectiveness of the group to which an organisational member perceives he/she belongs. The high quality of team-member exchange perceived by an employee, therefore, is more likely to motivate the employee to devote him/herself to collaborating with his/her colleagues. The social rewards, such as feedback and advice received from his/her colleagues, is also more likely to be intense.

Seers (1989) has also pinpointed the powerful influence of peers in the work settings in shaping employees' behaviour and attitudes. With strong team-member exchange, employees' perception of job satisfaction has been suggested to be higher than those firms with weak quality of team-member exchange. The high level of team-member exchange has also been identified to possess a positive relationship with the cultivation of a high level of identification. Team-member exchange has also been suggested to possess moderating effects mitigating negative influence of unmet expectations perceived by employees (Major et al., 1995). In the OCB study, researchers have also provided evidence to support the positive relationship between team-member exchange and the OCB behaviour conducted by organisational members (Srivastva & Singh, 2015). The high quality of team-member exchange perceived by an employee enhances his/her willingness to carry out help with OCB behaviour, which is an important predictor regarding the level of employees' actual helping OCB behaviour.

Together, different empirical literature has identified team-member exchange as an important predictor of organisational outcomes and organisational members' attitudes and perception. At the individual level, the concept of team-member exchange has been defined as an individual's perception of the relationship with his/her colleagues. Team-member exchange, therefore, possesses salient influence in shaping an individual's attitude and behaviour regarding knowledge sharing, assisting other members and appreciating feedback. Sensegiving activity requires an organisational member to utilise the resources and time he/

she has to promulgate his/her perspective. Since sensegiving may not be a work-related task, an employee who devotes him/herself to conducting sensegiving may be attributed to attitudinal factors, such as team-member exchange.

Hence, the present study proposed that an organisational employee's perception of his/her relationship with his/her colleague yields positive impacts on the level of sensegiving carried out by the employee. The rationale underlies in the notion of social exchange theory. According to the theory, when a high quality of team-member exchange is perceived by an individual, he/she tends to be more willing to 'act to benefit the other parties to those relationships' (Anand et al., 2010:p.973). The empirical theories, therefore, may have imply that when the employee perceives a favourable relationship with his/her peers, the willingness to exchange his/her perspectives with other organisational members who situate in the desirable relationship is likely to be enhanced. The willingness to share and exchange attributes to the actor's intention to benefit referent members. An employee carrying out sensegiving activities helps other organisational members better understand the ambiguous situation and uncertain issue. Sensegiving activities, hence, should be the kind of behaviour that an employee with high level of team-member exchange with his/her colleague will conduct. In other words, when an employee perceives high level of team-member exchange, he/she may develop a high level of sensegiving activities in order to assist his/her colleagues to make sense of the encountered issue through providing plausible definitions and interpretations regarding the issue. Moreover, since he/she perceives a favourable relationship with referent members, the employee who carries out a sensegiving activity may also be more confident that his/her perspectives can earn other colleagues' support than another employee who perceives a low level of team-member exchange. The sense of concern and responsibility generated from the high level of team-member exchange (Anderson & Williams, 1996), therefore, should motivate an individual to engage in intense sensegiving activities. An employee who perceives his/her exchanging relationship with the peer at a low level, on the other hand, should be less willing to carry out sensegiving, since his/her motivation to assist another member to better understand the encountered situation is low. In brief, the current study suggests that the relationship between team-member exchange and the level of employees' sensegiving is positively related.

(Proposition 1) The quality of team-member exchange at individual level serves as a trigger of sensegiving positively affecting the level of employee's sensegiving.

### ***Aggregate level of team-member exchange and its impact on employees' sense-giving level***

The trigger of sensegiving has been defined by Maitlis & Lawrence (2007:p.59) as 'the conditions that motivate organisational actors to attempt to engage in sensegiving'. When facing disparate conditions and organisational context, an individual may be affected and decide to carry out a disparate level of sensegiving. By applying the notion of team-member exchange at the aggregate level, it enables the impacts of the climate of team-member exchange by affecting an employee's performance, values and attitudes (e.g., commitment and intention to share) to be excavated (Liu et al., 2011). Originally, team-member exchange, which has been defined as an individual's perception of his/her relationship with other group members, represents a variable at the individual level (e.g., Seers, 1989). Recently, however, some researchers have started to propose that team-member exchange can also be viewed as a collective construct (Liu et al., 2011; Seers et al., 1995). A group with a high quality of team-member exchange at the aggregate level is more likely to demonstrate a high level of effectiveness (Seers et al., 1995), commitment (Liu et al., 2011), occurrence of helping OCB (Farmer et al., 2015) and willingness to share (Liu et al., 2011). The positive relationship between team-member exchange and the willingness to share and the occurrence of helping can be attributed to the high level of reciprocation derived from the aggregate level of a high quality of team-member exchange. When the team or the organisation prevails the climate of high team-member exchange, members may perceive a mutual sense of responsibility to benefit other members in the group. Team-member exchange as a climate, therefore, shapes the subjective norm of the individual and motivates the individual in the group to conduct reciprocal behaviour that has been expected by other members. In other words, team-member exchange as a climate should be considered a collective construct that represents the norms and beliefs commonly shared by the organization.

To set a bridge connecting team-member exchange as a climate and the level of sense-giving, the impacts of normative pressure and support on shaping employees' inclination requires further illustration. Since collective sensemaking has been regarded as a matter related to 'language, talk, and communication' (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012:p.1232), the quality of how organisational members interact with affect and how perspectives have been promulgated within the firm should matter to the formation of the collective sensemaking process. Guzzo and Shea (1992) recognised norms, shared beliefs and the inclination and preference appreciated by the group to which the individual belongs as the critical factors influencing the behaviour and response carried out by the individual. The authors further identify

organisational contexts as the elemental factor that affects how a group of people works by emphasising that 'much of this variation is due to the impact of the diverse organisational contexts in which groups work' (Guzzo & Shea, 1992:p.273). That is, the commonly shared norms and beliefs possess great influence in shaping an individual's behaviour and an individual's decision of whether or not to carry out certain activity. Jong et al. (2005) have supported the importance of organisational context in affecting effectiveness and group performance. Shared beliefs and norms, therefore, influence the behaviour conducted by members in the group through affecting an individual's perceived level of normative pressure (Cabrera et al., 2006). Normative beliefs, therefore, have been identified as a critical factor in affecting an individual's behaviour in a knowledge-sharing study (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2006), a self-training study (Leibowitz et al., 1983) and a creativity study (e.g., Amabile et al., 1996).

Regarding normative beliefs, support from peers and colleagues has been pinpointed to be a salient factor that influences an individual's inclination to carry out certain behaviours (Amabile et al., 1996; Leibowitz et al., 1983). Planned behaviour theory, which originated from Azjen and Fishbein (1980), has revealed that one of the factors affecting the inclination of activity carried out by the individual is the subjective norm of the individual. According to the authors, a subjective norm of the individual is generated from an individual's perception of the shared norms and beliefs and the motivation to achieve other focal members' expectations. That is how normative pressure comes into the picture. When the environment where the individual situates emphasises certain activity as desirable, an individual is more likely to carry out such activity, due to social pressure. In a group decision-making study, a normative model of decision making proposed by Vroom and Jago (1988) also demonstrates how the impact of situational factors, such as group support and team competence, may be at the level of employees' involvement in decision-making processes. Briefly speaking, previous literature has provided abundant evidence suggesting that an individual's behaviour or the inclination of an individual's behaviour could be significantly affected by normative and peer pressure.

Based on the implication of previous theories and studies (e.g., Azjen & Fishbein, 1980; Guzzo & Shea, 1992), the high level of employee's sensegiving should be related to his/her perceived level of normative pressure regarding sensegiving activity. The shared mental model derived from team-member exchange as a climate creates the normative pressure, which appreciates the mutual reciprocation among organisational members. The organisation's encouragement in establishing high quality of team-member exchange, therefore, may moti-

vate employees to carry out reciprocal behaviour in order to fulfill other focal members' expectations. When the organisation yields a high quality of team-member exchange at the aggregate level, normative pressure in exchanging information, resources, feedback and support, is enhanced. The normative pressure, or peer pressure, therefore, motivates employees into conducting reciprocal behaviour.

Since sensegiving activity involves exchanging and sharing perspectives among individuals, it is reasonable to suggest that team-member exchange as a climate should also yield a positive relationship with the level of employee's sensegiving. The normative pressure generated from team-member exchange as a climate provides an employee with the signal that he/she may have to bear intense peer pressure if he/she fails to be actively involved in sensegiving. On the other hand, an employee may be less willing to engage in sensegiving if he/she perceives little normative pressure and expectations regarding his/her involvement in sensegiving. Since sharing perspectives and helping other members have not been considered as desirable behaviours, the normative pressure favoring of sharing and exchanging opinions should be minor. The weakened motivation of an employee in carrying out sensegiving, therefore, may be attributed to the weak normative pressure on sensegiving derived from the low level of team-member exchange at the aggregate level.

The relationship between team-member exchange at the aggregate level and the level of an employee's sensegiving can also be explained by social exchange theory, proposed by Blau (1964). A high quality of team-member exchange at the aggregate level implies that the overall organisational members shares desirable level of exchanging relationship. An organisational member is more likely to carry out exchange activities when he/she perceives a high degree of confidence that his/her effort will be rewarded by social support (Liu et al., 2011). In the organisation encouraging employees establishing high level of team-member exchange, an organizational member's perceived cost of carrying out exchanging behaviour should be mitigated by the resources, information and feedback given by his/her colleagues. Empirical literature has provided evidence to support the significant positive relationship between team-member exchange and individuals' willingness to share (e.g., Liu et al., 2011). Taking team-member exchange at a group level, Liu and colleagues (2011) have taken team-member exchange as a collective work unit construct instead of an individual construct, emphasising the importance of examining the team as a whole. The result, based on the data of 84 technology-driven companies in Taiwan, suggests that, when the group as a whole demonstrates a strong team-member exchange, individuals within the team are highly motivated to be involved in reciprocal activities in order to exhibit their abilities and values in the

team and also to pay back the favours from other team members. Hence, when the employee believes that members in the group share the climate of appreciating discretionary activities and knowledge sharing, the climate enhances his/her inclination to carry out discretionary activities. Strong team-member exchange at the aggregate level, hence, increases individuals' intention to contribute their knowledge and information to the organisation. When most organisational employees perceived the organisational climate is not favored of team-member exchange, on the other hand, the individual in the organisation is prone to be less motivated to engage in sharing information or assisting other organisational members. The reason for less willingness to conduct reciprocal behaviour, therefore, can be explained by the employee's perception that his/her behaviour may not be rewarded or supported by the peers. Phrase differently, in the organisation where the climate encourages employees in building strong team-member exchange, an employee within such an organisation should demonstrate the high level of sensegiving, due to the high level of social pressure perceived by the employee. On the other hand, an employee situates in the organisational context with a low level of team-member exchange as a climate and, therefore, is more likely to prevent any reciprocal behaviour and more focus on self-interests instead of the welfare of both other colleagues and the organisation, because the normative pressure regarding sensegiving is minor.

(Proposition 2)

The quality of team-member exchange at aggregate level (team-member exchange as a climate) serves as a trigger of sensegiving positively affecting the level of employee's sensegiving.

### ***Self-efficacy as a mediator***

Gardner and Pierce (1998:p.50) defined the term 'self-efficacy' as 'a belief about the probability that one can successfully execute some future action or task or achieve some result'. 'An efficacy expectation', as Bandura (1978:p.141) indicated, 'is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes'. Bandura (1997:p.2) also maintained that self-efficacy is related to 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required in managing prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act'. Phrased differently, self-efficacy can be taken as a belief that influences people's motivation to conduct certain actions.

Applying the notion proposed by previous literature, team-member exchange at the individual level may be another factor that affects an employee's self-efficacy (Liden et al., 2000). In issue-selling literature, many scholars (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; Mowday, 1978) have pinpointed the quality of the relationship between the target and the influencer as a determining factor that affects organisational members' decisions to exercise their influence on peers or managers. Self-perception of power acts as one of the three types of motivation promoted by Mowday (1978), which may demonstrate salient impacts that affect an individual's decision to perform influence behaviour. Self-perception of power is an individual's perception of the extent of power he/she has to influence the target. As further indicated by the author, self-perception of power is engendered by the interactions among others. Supporting the notion that the relationship between the target and the influencer might be one of the salient factors that determines the extent of influence being exercised by individuals, Ashford et al. (1998) have provided evidence showing that the favourable relationship between the target and the influencer is positively related to the individual's perception of the probability of issue-selling success. When an individual considers him/herself to have great opportunities to successfully carry out certain behaviour, the issue seller, hence, is more likely to devote him/herself to issue-selling activities. The low level of an employee's perception of his/her capability to conduct issue selling, on the other hand, leads to an employee's weak interests in getting involved in issue selling activities. Liden et al. (2000) also proposed that team-member exchange yields a positive relationship with empowerment.

In aggregate, empirical literature in the issue-selling study (e.g., Ashford et al., 1998; Mowday, 1978) and the empowerment study (e.g. Liden et al., 2000; Singh & Srivastva, 2015, mentioned by Srivastva & Singh, 2015) has pinpointed the determining effect of self-efficacy perceived by employees, especially those who do not belong to top management, as influencing the employee's willingness and certain behaviour. Particularly for the discretionary behaviour which has not been included in an employee's work-related tasks is highly relevant to an employee's attitude and perception regarding carrying out discretionary behaviour. As Ashford et al. (1998) explained, the high quality of relationship between the target and the influencer enhances the influencer's perception regarding the safety to communicate with the target and the serious and fair treatment he/she may receive. When considering he/she has great opportunities to successfully carry out certain behaviour, the issue seller, hence, is more likely to devote him/herself to issue-selling activities. On the other hand, the low level of the employee's perception of his/her capability in conducting issue selling may lead to the low level of employee's issue selling.

Self-efficacy at individual level perceived by the employee has been proposed in the current study as a mediator affecting the relationship between team-member exchange at the aggregate level and the level of the employee's sensegiving. Recalling the four forces proposed by Bandura (1978), one of the forces, 'vicarious experience', refers to the sense of confidence an individual feels about his/her capability to conduct certain behaviour successfully when he/she sees other individuals accomplish the similar behaviour. When an individual knows conducting certain behaviour will not get him/her into trouble (e.g., get fired from the job, be criticised by peers), his/her perceived probability of conducting the behaviour is more likely to be enhanced. Team-member exchange, as a climate that emphasises the importance of the reciprocal relationship among members in the firm, serves as a collective construct shared by members in the organisation. The collective beliefs and norms that support perspective sharing and feedback exchanging, therefore, should also be influential to an employee's self-efficacy. Social support of information and perspective sharing, therefore, reinforces the employee's confidence that his/her involvement in providing his/her interpretations regarding the issue to other members may not get him/her into trouble. Phrased differently, the high level of team-member exchange at the aggregate level weakens the employee's perceived uncertainty regarding the consequence of his/her behaviour. Team-member exchange at the aggregate level, therefore, enhances the employee's perception of his/her capability of conducting the behaviour and the followed consequences.

In essence, the current paper proposes that the impact of the employee's perception of the quality of team-member exchange with colleagues (team-member exchange at the individual level) and team-member exchange as a climate on the level of the employee's sensegiving might both be mediated by the employee's perception of his/her capability of conducting sensegiving, which can also be referred to as the employee's self-efficacy regarding sensegiving. When an employee perceives a high quality of team-member exchange with other organisational members, he/she is inclined to consider that the interpretation he/she prefers yields great chances to be supported by the colleagues. Furthermore, applying the notion proposed by Bandura (1978) regarding the four forces with a powerful impact on self-efficacy, the author indicates that verbal suggestion can enhance one's self-efficacy. In the words of Bandura (1978:p.145), 'People are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past', since an employee who perceives a favourable team-member exchange relationship may also perceive him/herself as receiving a lot of suggestions and feedback from his/her colleagues. The abundance of suggestions and feedback the employee receives may further strengthen his/her self-efficacy.



Moreover, the climate that emphasises a mutual reciprocal relationship among organisational members as a whole also reinforces the employee's perceived capability to conduct sensegiving. Social support regarding perspective exchanging enhances the employee's self-efficacy to carry out sensegiving and to deal with the consequences that may be engendered. Team-member exchange, at both the individual and aggregate levels, ensures the employee to believe that he/she has the capability to engage in sensegiving. The high level of self-efficacy regarding sensegiving, therefore, triggers the employee into carrying out sensegiving. The employee's self-efficacy at individual level regarding sensegiving, in brief, serves as a mediator that affects how team-member exchange at the individual level may trigger the employee's sensegiving behaviour. Similarly, the level of team-member exchange at the aggregate level or the climate prevailed in the organisation also affects the employee's interpretation regarding social and organisational support for perspective exchanging and promulgating. In the organisational context where strong team-member exchange is not favored, the employee may interpret the organisational context as discouragement or intolerance of sensegiving. Since the employee may perceive his/her incapability to receive social support, his/her perceived capability would also be weakened. As a result, lacking team-member exchange as a climate discourages the employee from carrying out sensegiving through weakening his/her self-efficacy. Overall, it is proposed in the present paper that an employee's self-efficacy regarding sensegiving is a mediator for the relationship between team-member exchange, both at the individual level and the aggregate level, and the level of the employee's sensegiving.

(Proposition 3)

Employee's self-efficacy mediates the relationship between team-member exchange at individual level and the level of employee's sensegiving.

(Proposition 4)

Employee's self-efficacy mediates the relationship between team-member exchange at aggregate level and the level of employee's sensegiving.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### *Research implication*

The exchange relationship built between focal individuals has been suggested to yield

significant influence in individual's behaviour. Team-member exchange at individual level, which refers to the perceived quality of exchange relationship between an individual and his/her colleague, should also possess power in affecting the individual's involvement in sensegiving activity. It is worth noting that unlike LMX, team-member exchange has seldom been discussed in organisational behaviour study. The present study, therefore, aims to respond to the call for involving team-member exchange in organisational behaviour study. Furthermore, multiple level of team-member exchange has been taken into the picture in the current study. Instead of focus only on team-member exchange at individual level, team-member exchange as a climate, which represent the norms and shared understanding underlying in the organisational context values mutual reciprocation among members in the firm, has also be taken into consideration. Through examining both levels of team-member exchange, it is believed that the influence of team-member exchange may be better understood. In other words, by taking team-member exchange as a normative context, the level of team-member exchange may imply the shared belief underlying in organisational context. The commonly shared understanding regarding the preferred relationship an employee should establish with other colleague may therefore provide hint and signal for organisational members notifying them what is expected and what is not. The normative power plays a role affecting an individual's behaviour. Team-member exchange as a climate, hence, should not be excluded from organisational behaviour study. By involving team-member exchange at aggregate level in the present study, this paper aims to contribute to organisational behaviour study through pinpointing normative power underlying in team-member exchange at aggregate level in hindering or triggering an employee's sensegiving activity.

Moreover, it is not aware by the author of any research in sensegiving study that involves team-member exchange into sensemaking and sensegiving study. However, although team-member exchange has been proposed to be a potential factor affecting an individual's behaviour, its impact on sensegiving level requires further studied. The present study contributes to sensegiving study by pinpointing the powerful impact team-member exchange may be on triggering employee's sensegiving activity. Phrased differently, by considering team-member exchange at both aggregate and individual level as triggers of sensegiving, this paper enriches sensegiving and sensemaking study by providing clues of how organisational and normative context and individual's perception may possess significant influence in hindering or triggering sensegiving activity. Self-efficacy has also been involved in this paper as a mediator affecting the relationship between team-member exchange and employee's sensegiving level. Borrowing the insight from previous literatures in the arena of issue-sell-

ing and knowledge sharing, the current study indicates that employee's perception of his/her capability in carrying out sensegiving may be affected by his/her perceived relationship with other colleague and may also be affected by the organisational context he/she is situated. In other words, self-efficacy regarding sensegiving perceived by an employee may be affected by team-member exchange, both at individual and aggregate level. It is worth noting that the concept of issue selling has seldom been paralleled to that of employee's sensegiving activity. Although there is no aware of any previous research sheds light on the relationship among team-member exchange, self-efficacy and organisational member's sensegiving level, a glimpse of empirical study regarding issue selling may provide abundant insights regarding the role of self-efficacy in affecting individual's behaviour. Future study is needed, however, to examine whether the proposed relationship among team-member exchange, self-efficacy and employee's sensegiving level does exist. Further research should also attempt to identify if other types of exchanging relationship built between different focal members, such as the quality of relationship built between manager and subordinate and the quality of relationship build between customer and employee, may also be a potential factor in triggering sensegiving activity. It is worth noting, however, that the current study focuses only on the mediating effect of self-efficacy at individual level. The reason is to fulfill one of the aims of this research: identifying the mediating role of self-efficacy at individual level. Nevertheless, self-efficacy, similar to team-member exchange, should be considered in different dimension. The role of self-efficacy at aggregate level may possess different impact on the relationship between employee's sensegiving level and team-member exchange at individual / aggregate level. Future research may also need to clarify the role of self-efficacy at aggregate level on the level of employee's sensegiving.

### ***Practical implication***

This paper aims to identify potential triggers of sensegiving that can affect the level sensegiving conducted by employees who do not belong to top management. Previous researches conducted by Maitlis and the colleagues (e.g. Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) have implied that the pattern of organisational sensemaking process may affect the generation of strategy and may even further influence the consequence of the strategy. A better understanding regarding the factors affecting the formation of organisational sense-making process should be helpful for management to further foresee the potential outcomes derived from the strategy. According to previous literature, trigger of sensegiving affects the level of sensegiving engaged by an individual and thus may further influence the genera-

tion of organisational sensemaking process. In the present study, team-member exchange has been pinpointed as the potential triggers of employee's sensegiving. It is proposed in the current paper that an employee's perception regarding his/her exchanging relationship with other colleagues should affect the employee's decision of whether to carry out sensegiving activity. Phrased differently, an individual's perception of his/her reciprocal relationship with the peer affects his/her behaviour. Moreover, not only an individual's perception can be influential to sensegiving level, but the organisational context where the employee situated can also be powerful trigger affecting the employee's sensegiving behaviour. Management, therefore, should attempt to create organisational context that can encourage and facilitate sensegiving activity instead of hindering employee's willingness from carrying out sensegiving. That is, creating the favorable climate of team-member exchange, which emphasizes the importance of establishing favorable exchanging relationships with other employees, may further encourage employee to be devoted into sensegiving. Normative pressure should be powerful in triggering an employee into carrying out voluntary behaviour due to his/her unwillingness to fail other member's expectation. Through making a good use of normative pressure, management should be capable of directing employees into conducting the behaviour favored by management. Besides, when employee expects support to his/her behaviour will be given from the peer, he/she should feel more confident into carrying out such behaviour. In other words, based on expectancy theory proposed by Vroom, when an employee is deciding whether to conduct certain behaviour, the decision is likely to be affected by his/her expectation regarding the result of behaviour. In organisation with the favorable climate of team-member exchange, employee is more likely to expect that other colleagues will support his/her sensegiving behaviour. Since some part of the risk of conducting sensegiving may be mitigated by organisational context, the employee may perceive him/herself equipped with capability to deal with the consequence of his/her behaviour. Determined with his/her capability in sensegiving, hence, may trigger the employee into carrying out sensegiving activity. Establishing organisational environment that favors intensive reciprocal relationships among employees, therefore, should be able to encourage more employees in the firm to engage in sensegiving activity.

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