Dimensions for the Help-seeking Process Relevant in Organizations

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Abstract: In this survey study, we investigated dimensions relevant to the help-seeking process in organizations. A theoretical framework was developed including two issues: First, dimensions correlating with the help-seeking process including characteristics of the help-seeker, characteristics of the helper, organizational, contextual and technical characteristics; and second, the help-seeking process with four steps, namely decision, identification, interaction, and evaluation. Based on this model, a field survey study was conducted in order to detect correlations between them. Eighty employees of an international biotechnology company were asked to fill-in a questionnaire on these aspects. Means of all help-seeking dimensions were calculated and correlated with the four process steps. Results indicated that almost all dimensions were related with diverse steps of the help-seeking process. This study shows for the first time important correlations between theoretically relevant dimensions of help-seeking and the help-seeking process, which should be taken more into account to improve the workflow.

Key Words: Help-seeking, Organizational processes, Help-seeking dimensions
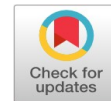
THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

During daily work diverse processes take place. One phenomenon which is very relevant to the workflow is the occurrence of problems. As soon as actual problems could not be solved by the employees themselves, they are hindered to continue their work successfully. Therefore, assistance is needed. One possibility of receiving assistance could be realized with colleagues or supervisors. But often it is not easy to decide on asking for help. There are several reasons for not asking, e.g., because of disturbing colleagues, admitting lacking competence or knowledge, or missing connections with adequate helpers. In the last case, the identification of a colleague or supervisor with adequate know-how to help the respective employee is necessary. If a helper is identified, both employees have to interact with each other. During this interaction, relevant ideas and information are exchanged to solve the problem successfully (Gretsch, 2015). Through assistance, knowledge gaps could be filled in, procedures reflected, different alternatives tested, and faults corrected (Van der Rijt et al., 2013). Such results of help-seeking are evaluated as last issue. All in all, this proactive interpersonal behavior for problem solving is named help-seeking.

Even though, the idea of interacting with colleagues in order to solve problems immediately is of great importance for the workflow, the question is whether employees seek help and which dimensions are essential for the help-seeking process. There are studies regarding attitudes towards help-seeking (Linseman, 2016) and concerning help-seeking behavior in schools (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). But there exist only few studies in the context of organizations (Bamberger, 2009; Van der Rijt et al., 2013) and no ones, which differentiate between single process steps in help-seeking. Therefore, to follow this research gap, we had a closer look on these two new issues in this study.

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Help-seeking

Help-seeking is relevant to the diverse divisions of psychology e.g., social psychology (Nadler, 1998) developmental psychology (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981) or school psychology (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011) as well as organizational psychology. Help-seeking combines the words help and seeking. Help means that someone needs assistance or support in order to solve a problem or a task, while seeking is the activity of searching for this necessary support. Thus, help-seeking is an action in which help-seekers ask other individuals for help, for guidance, support or information (Lee, 1997). It is a strategy which is used in order to solve work-relevant problems with own engagement asking a colleague or supervisor in such a way that he/she is able to solve the problem self-contained.

Help-seeking is a pro-active behavior as the help-seeker has to identify the problem on its own and based on this identification process search autonomously for an adequate person who could help him (Lee, 1997). Furthermore, the strategy of seeking help is interpersonal as there are at least two persons who interact with each other: One who seeks help and the other who gives help (Lee, 1997). This social exchange in help-seeking is a key factor for successful performance of staff members (Sandoval & Lee, 2006).

Theoretical framework for help-seeking

Help-seeking in organizations is a complex process depending on individual and situational factors (Bamberger, 2009). Bamberger (2009) introduced a theoretical model about help-seeking in organizations focusing on factors which have an influence on help-seeking like work unit characteristics, problem type and need severity as well as individual differences and personal factors, which he developed from studies that investigated single aspects of these factors. But there is no research that investigated more such dimensions in one study. Furthermore, the help-seeking process in organizations is not further differentiated into diverse steps. Thus, we developed a theoretical framework for this study, including relevant dimensions which may influence the help-seeking process and differentiating this process into the four steps i.e., decision, identification, interaction, and evaluation (see Figure 1). In the following, the theoretical framework is explained in more detail.
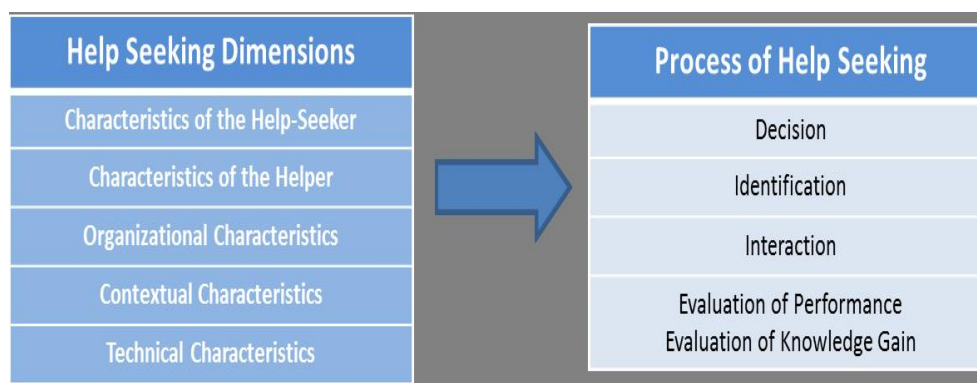

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of help-seeking at the workplace

Dimensions relevant to help-seeking

There are a lot of studies on single aspects influencing the help-seeking process. According to these studies, there are specifically five issues of main relevance: the help-seeker (Ryan & Shin, 2011), the helper (Nelson-Le Gall & Gumerman, 1984), the organization, the context (Shim, Kiefer, & Wang, 2013) as well as technical means which were used to receive help (Makitalo-Siegl, Kohnle, & Fischer, 2011).

Characteristics of the help-seeker

There are mainly three components relevant to characterizing the help-seeker: Self-efficacy regarding help-seeking, instrumental goal-orientation and executive goal orientation. Self-efficacy is a part of the self-concept that includes attitudes towards the person (Bandura, 1997). It comprises the expectation that a specific behavior leads to a valuable outcome in a certain situation. In estimating the chances of

achieving this outcome, the individual adapts behavior, effort, and persistence (Bandura, 1997). Also, the mastery of the respective behavior is of relevance. Based on this, it is assumed that the belief in one's self-efficacy (expectation regarding a successful outcome) is correlated with the expected results (Bandura, 1997).

Instrumental goal-orientation and executive goal-orientation are both relevant to help-seeking as they illustrate the motivation of individuals to solve problems. Instrumental goal-orientation supports learning, as individuals not only want to solve a problem, but also to gain knowledge. Thus, help-seeking is also a purpose of instrumental goal-orientation (Nelson-Le Gall, Gumerman, & Scott-Jones, 1983) as the help-seeker requests for adequate assistance to solve the problem alone (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Nadler, 1998). Due to this reason, it could be assumed that instrumental goal-orientation is connected to knowledge gain.

Help-seekers with executive goal-orientation want to solve the problem as fast as possible with the assistance of another person without the intention of gaining knowledge (Nelson-Le Gall et al., 1983). In contrast to executive help-seeking at school, at work, this attitude may have a positive impact on the help-seeking process as problems could be solved faster, processes and products improved and wrong decisions corrected.

Characteristics of the helper

One main characteristic of the assistant is the estimation of the assistants experience. Experience as an indicator of knowledge and competence is a main characteristic regarding the identification of adequate helpers, so that the perceived competence is related to the identification process (Nadler, Ellis, & Bar, 2003). Thus, expertise of the helper is the main criterion for the help-seeker to identify this person as adequate for providing support (Van de Wiel, Van den Bossche, Janssen, & Jossberger, 2011). Furthermore, experience of the assistant is also correlated with the decision and the evaluation of the quality of the help (Van de Wiel et al., 2011).

Organizational characteristics

The organization may also have an impact on the help-seeking process. One main issue is the time for help-seeking. Staff members could only ask for help, when there is enough time for them and free space to talk formally or informally with other persons in order to solve a problem or task. Specifically, the identification process in help-seeking is a time consuming activity (Lee, 1997; Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994).

Contextual characteristics

Regarding the context, two relevant antecedents for supporting the help-seeking process are the characteristics of the task and the kinds of problems. Characteristics of the task include aspects like task interdependency (Cleavenger, Gardner, & Mhatre, 2007) as well as novelty and severity of the task (Lee, 2002). Regarding task interdependency, research showed that the higher the interdependency between staff members, the more often individuals decide for help-seeking (Cleavenger et al., 2007). Looking at the novelty and severity of the task, research indicated that more routine tasks and more peripheral tasks were related to help-seeking; a finding against theoretical assumptions (Lee, 2002). Problems differ in organizations according to their context (kinds of problems). There are methodical, technical, information-deficit or client-specific problems. It is assumed that help-seeking may also be connected to the relevant context, in which this process takes place. Up to date, there is no research on this issue.

Technical characteristics

Regarding technique communication media are sometimes the only way for colleagues to interact with each other, when the distance between them is too big. Such media are e-mail, forum, blogs, Wikis, or videoconferencing. Specifically the interaction process and the evaluation process may be influenced by communication media. As communication via media is often more informal, the perceived threat could be reduced, and the informal way of help-seeking fostered (Keefer & Karabenick, 1998). Furthermore,

using diverse communication channels for discussions, more colleagues could pay attention to the need for help (Karabenick, 1998).

Process of help-seeking

Looking at the process of help-seeking, the most well-established theoretical model is from Nelson-Le Gall (1981) who developed it in school context. Help-seeking is here a cognitive process with five components: (1) awareness of need for help, (2) decision to seek help, (3) identification of potential helper(s), (4) employment of strategies to elicit help, and (5) reactions to help-seeking attempts (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). In our study, we simplified the model of Nelson-Le Gall (1981) and identified four steps: (1) decision, (2) identification, (3) interaction, and (4) evaluation.

Step 1: Decision

In the workplace, help-seeking is necessary when staff members realize that their resources are not sufficient to solve a task or problem (Keefer & Karabenick, 1998). As soon as staff members perceive their need for help (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981), they decide on whether they should ask for assistance. Research has shown that the decision whether seeking help or not is the most critical in the whole help-seeking process (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). This component could be influenced through individual (like self-efficacy) and organizational antecedents (like time for help-seeking).

Step 2: Identification

After deciding that help is needed, adequate assistants or helpers must be identified and chosen (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). This process is difficult as complex problems demand for experts. Therefore, often more than one trial is needed to find the respective expert in order to solve a complex problem successfully. Regarding the identification and choice of experts, the norm keep it local is of main importance meaning that individuals search helpers in their striking distance to guarantee social proximity (Zimmerman, 2008).

Step 3: Interaction

After identifying and choosing a potential assistant, the interaction between help-seeker and assistant starts (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). The help-seeker contacts the prospective helper and explains his job-relevant problem (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011). In this process, knowledge is exchanged, missing information explained or the problem discussed (Ehrlich, 2003). With the interpersonal exchange of knowledge, critical information stimulates new ideas and findings (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

Step 4: Evaluation of performance and knowledge gain

In the last step, the help-seeker evaluates the received assistance (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981) in order to see, whether this information was valuable for solving the problem (Schworm & Fischer, 2006). By applying the received knowledge (Newman, 1998) the help-seeker could improve his performance and gain new workplace relevant knowledge. Help-seeking is a goal-oriented activity and the most important outcome is the successful solving of problems (Nelson-Le Gall et al., 1983).

Research question

How far are relevant help-seeking dimensions correlated with the process of help-seeking, namely with decision, identification, interaction, and evaluation?

It is assumed that several dimensions regarding characteristics of the help-seeker, the helper, organizational characteristics, contextual characteristics and the used communication technique may correlate with the process of help-seeking. Regarding the decision process, we have the following hypotheses:
1. There may be positive correlations with the experience of the help seeker (Van de Wiel et al., 2011).
2. Contextual characteristics and herein the characteristics of the task may also show correlations with

the decision process. Particularly, novelty and severity of the task may be positively correlated (Lee, 2002).

In respect of the identification process, we assume that:

1. the experience of the helper may be correlated with the identification process (Nadler et al., 2003): The more competent an assistant is evaluated, the easier it is to identify him/her as adequate helper (Van de Wiel et al., 2011).

2. time for help-seeking as organizational characteristic (Lee, 1997) is also relevant to this context, because time is needed for identifying relevant employees.

Looking at interaction, we hypothesize that:

1. it may be connected with time as receiving help is a time consuming activity (Lee, 1997).

2. it also may be related to communication media like technical characteristics (Karabenick, 1998; Keefer & Karabenick, 1998) as employees in international organizations are separated all over the world.

Having a closer look at the evaluation process we assume that:

1. it is interrelated with self-efficacy regarding help-seeking (Ryan & Shin, 2011), instrumental goal-orientation (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991) and executive goal-orientation (Nelson-Le Gall et al., 1983) on the individual side.

2. Furthermore, the experience of the helper (Van de Wiel et al., 2011) may correlate positively with evaluation, meaning that the more competent the helper is rated, the better the performance is evaluated.

Further correlations between the above mentioned dimensions and the diversified help-seeking process are not investigated yet in organizations. Thus, we could not formulate specific hypotheses. Even though, it is assumed that there may be some correlations.

METHODS

Object of investigation

The study was conducted in an international biotechnology organization between July and August 2012 with a survey using online-questionnaires realized with an open-source-survey-tool named Limesurvey on an internal server of the organization. All interviewed persons received a short introduction regarding the topic and the objective of the survey. All participants were individually invited via e-mail. Time to answer the questions took between 5 and 10 minutes. All answers were analyzed anonymously and confidentially.

Sample

The study was conducted with 80 employees. Seventy-two members answered the whole questionnaire. From these individuals, 37 (52.4%) were female and 35 (48.6%) male. The whole sample was internationally composed.

Data sources

A questionnaire was developed including criteria which were theoretically relevant to help-seeking. These criteria correspond to the research model that was introduced in this study which had two main components: (1) components that represent the relevant help-seeking dimensions and (2) components which represent the process of help-seeking.

Components representing relevant help-seeking dimensions which were asked in the questionnaire included characteristics of the help-seeker with self-efficacy, instrumental goal-orientation, and executive goal orientation, the characteristics of the helper, organizational characteristics, contextual characteristics with characteristics of the task (novelty and severity of the task) and kinds of problems (technical, methodical, information-deficient, and client-oriented problem) as well as technical characteristics (communication via e-mail, telephone, personal meetings) (see Table 1). Components including the process of help-seeking included decision, identification, interaction, and evaluation of the performance and evaluation of the knowledge gain (see Table 2).

Table 1: Dimensions relevant for the help seeking process in our research model

Dimension	Cronbach's α	Items	Example
Characteristics of the help-seeker			
Self-efficacy	.68	4	It is easy for me to ask colleagues for help.
Instrumental goal-orientation	.81	3	I expect to gain knowledge in the problem area.
Executive goal-orientation	.68	4	I expect to improve an actual project.
Characteristics of the Helper			
Experience	.71	2	The colleagues from whom I seek help have rather more professional experience than me.
Organizational characteristics			
Time for help seeking	-	1	I need more time to ask colleagues for help.
Contextual characteristics			When did these problems occur?
Novelty of the task	-	1	New tasks
			What kind of problems were they about?
Centrality of the task	-	1	Central tasks
Methodical problems	-	1	Methodical problems
Technical problems	-	1	Technical problems
Information-deficit problems	-	1	Problems regarding missing information
Client-related problems	-	1	Client-related problems.
Technical characteristics			Which medium do you typically use to communicate with colleagues in order to seek help?
Communication via e-mail	-	1	E-mail
Communication via telephone	-	1	Telephone
Personal meetings	-	1	Personal meetings

Table 2: Process steps of the help seeking process

Process Step	Cronbach's α	Items	Example
Decision	-	1	How often did you have workflow related problems which made it necessary to seek help from colleagues?
Identification	.71	3	I have often problems to identify an adequate helper.
Interaction	.81	3	The interaction with the helper is mostly productive.
Evaluation of performance	.81	2	Using support, I could improve my performance.
Evaluation of knowledge gain	.92	2	Using support, I improve my understanding of the underlying problem.

To fill-in the questionnaire we used a five-point Likert Scale from 1 "do not agree at all" to 5 "totally agree", respectively from 1 "never" to 5 "always". Regarding Cronbachs Alpha, the reliability coefficients were sufficient (De Vellis, 2016). As a lot of items could only be measured with one item due to limitations of the organization, content-validity is assumed to be adequate. As answering the questionnaire was anonymous, internal validity may be high.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed with SPSS. We tested whether the interval scaled variables were normally distributed. The Kolmogroff-Smirnov-Test showed significant deviations from the normal curve of distribution. Thus, non-parametric procedures were used. First, all dimensions of the questionnaire were descriptively analyzed to calculate means and standard deviations (see Table 3).

Table 3: Number, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Median of the help seeking dimensions

Dimensions	n	M	SD	Mdn
Characteristics of the help-seeker				
b) Self-efficacy regarding help seeking	74	3.98	.58	4.00
c) Instrumental goal-orientation	77	3.76	.78	4.00
d) Executive goal-orientation	77	3.47	.72	3.50
Characteristics of the helper				
e) Experience	73	3.36	.77	3.00
Organizational characteristics				
f) Time for help seeking	77	3.17	1.01	3.00
Contextual characteristics				
g) Characteristics of the task				
Novelty of the task	74	3.58	.89	4.00
Centrality of the task	65	2.92	.87	3.00
h) Kinds of problems				
Methodical problems	74	2.77	.99	3.00
Technical problems	73	3.30	1.17	3.00
Information-deficit problems	75	3.75	.92	4.00
Client-oriented problems	72	3.24	1.08	3.00
Technical characteristics				
i) Communication media				
Communication via e-mail	76	3.79	.91	4.00
Communication via telephone	76	3.90	.71	4.00
Communication via personal meetings	76	3.46	1.03	4.00
Help-seeking process				
Decision[a]	75	10.53	8.12	10.00
Identification	74	3.03	0.77	3.00
Interaction	75	4.00	0.46	4.00
Evaluation: Performance	75	4.15	0.49	4.00
Evaluation: Knowledge Gain	75	4.20	0.64	4.00

[a]Frequencies of asking for help

Afterwards, for testing the hypotheses, correlations were calculated between the independent variables of the relevant dimensions and the dependent variables of the help-seeking process with Spearmans Rho. The values for correlations were interpreted according to Cohen (1992) with low correlations ($r <$ 0.2), medium correlations ($0.2 < r < 0.4$), high correlations ($0.4 < r < 0.8$) and very high correlations ($0.8 < r < 1.0$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Decision process

In order to answer our research question, how far diverse help-seeking dimensions are correlated with the process step decision, we used correlation analyses. We identified three significant correlations: One medium correlation between executive goal-orientation and decision (r (74) = .31**), one between methodical problems and decision (r (74) = .32**) and again one between technical problems and decision (r (74) = .26*) (see Table 4). The chance to decide to ask for support is higher, when there are methodical or technical problems.

Table 4: Results of correlations (Spearman-rho) between relevant help seeking dimensions and the help seeking process decision

Dimensions	Decision[a]
Characteristics of the help-seeker	
b) Self-efficacy regarding help seeking[c]	.01
c) Instrumental goal-orientation[c]	.01
d) Executive goal-orientation[c]	.31**
Characteristics of the assistant	
e) Experience[b]	-.13
Organizational characteristics	
f) Time for help seeking[c]	-.22
Contextual characteristics	
g) Characteristics of the task	
Novelty of the task[b]	.18
Centrality of the task[b]	.12
h) Kinds of problems	
Methodical problems[c]	.32**
Technical problems[c]	.26*
Information-deficit problems[c]	.12
Client-oriented problems[c]	-.00
Technical characteristics	
i) Communication Media	
Communication via e-mail[c]	.03
Communication via telephone[c]	.16
Communication via personal meetings[c]	-.14

[a]$n = 74$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. [b]one-sided; [c]two-sided

Our hypotheses could only be partly confirmed. In contrast to correlations between the evaluation of the experience of the help-seeker and characteristics of the task, we found interrelationships with executive goal-orientation and the kinds of problems. Employees with high executive goal-orientation who are mainly interested in improving work results and projects which are relevant to their daily practice decide more often to seek help. Even though, not the tasks are relevant to the decision as assumed (Lee, 2002), but the kinds of problems that occur, why employees decide for help-seeking. Both are contextual characteristics which are relevant to take into account to decide for help-seeking.

Identification process

Correlation analyses showed several significant correlations with the process identification (see Table 5). There is a medium negative correlation between executive goal-orientation and the identification process (r (74) = -.28**). Furthermore, time is positively interrelated with identification (r (74) = .35**). Regarding contextual characteristics, the novelty of the task (r (74) = -.21*) as well as methodical (r (74) = -.30*) and information-deficit problems (r (74) = -.24*) are negatively correlated with the identification process. The assumptions that helper's experience and time for help-seeking are correlated with this process step are partly confirmed. While evaluation of experience was not confirmed, time for help seeking was positively correlated. This result confirms previous studies (Lee, 1997; Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994) showing that identifying adequate persons for initiating the help-seeking process needs time which is highly positively related. Furthermore, executive goal-orientation of the help-seeker showed negative correlations with identifying adequate helpers.

Table 5: Results of correlations (Spearman-rho) between relevant help seeking dimensions and the help seeking process identification

Dimensions	Identification[a]
Characteristics of the help-seeker	
b) Self-efficacy regarding help seeking[c]	-.02
c) Instrumental goal-orientation[c]	.02
d) Executive goal-orientation[c]	-.28**
Characteristics of the helper	
e) Experience[b]	-.18
Organizational characteristics	
f) Time for help seeking[b]	-.35**
Contextual characteristics	
g) Characteristics of the task	
Novelty of the task[b/c]	-.21*
Centrality of the task[c]	-.03
h) Kinds of problems	
Methodical problems[c]	-.30*
Technical problems[c]	-.10
Information-deficit problems[c]	-.24*
Client-oriented problems[c]	-.13
Technical characteristics	
i) Communication Media	
Communication via e-mail[c]	-.19
Communication via telephone[c]	.16
Communication via personal meetings[c]	.15

[a] $n = 74$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. [b]one-sided; [c]two-sided

The fewer employees were interested in a fast problem solving, the less problems did occur in identifying adequate helpers. Against our previous assumptions, we found three more correlations, which were negative, respectively novelty of the task, methodical problems and information-deficit problems. When task is new, it is more difficult to find someone for help. This is also true for methodical and information-deficient problems indicating the difficulties for identifying relevant persons for such problems. This new finding indicates the importance of task characteristics and the kinds of problems the help-seeker is confronted with. Eventually, employees are overtaxed as the task is new and the employees do not know which method they should choose and which information they need-a very demanding situation.

Interaction process
Looking at correlation analyses, there was only one significant interrelation of medium effect size (r (74) = .28*) between self-efficacy regarding help-seeking and the interaction process (see Table 6).

Thus, hypotheses could not be confirmed. Not time (Lee, 1997) and communication media were of relevance (Karabenick, 1998), but self-efficacy regarding help-seeking. The more help-seekers are convinced that they will be successful in their activity of seeking help, the better they evaluate the interaction with the helpers in order to solve the problem.

Table 6: Results of correlations (Spearman-rho) between relevant help seeking dimensions and the help seeking process interaction

Dimensions	Interaction[a]
Characteristics of the help-seeker	
b) Self-efficacy regarding help seeking[b]	.28**
c) Instrumental goal-orientation[c]	.07
d) Executive goal-orientation[c]	.06
Characteristics of the helper	
e) Experience[c]	.13
Organizational characteristics	
f) Time for help seeking[c]	.09
Contextual characteristics	
g) Characteristics of the task	
Novelty of the task[b/c]	.02
Centrality of the task[c]	-.06
h) Kinds of problems	
Methodical problems[c]	-.11
Technical problems[c]	-.08
Information deficit problems[c]	-.04
Client-oriented problems[c]	-.10
Technical characteristics	
i) Communication Media	
Communication via e-mail[c]	-.03
Communication via telephone[c]	-.17
Communication via personal meetings[c]	.00

[a] $n = 74$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. [b]one-sided; [c]two-sided

Evaluation process

Correlation analyses showed several significant results with the evaluation process. Looking at the evaluation of performance in more detail, there are four correlations: First, there is a small correlation between instrumental goal-orientation and performance (r (74) = .20*). Second, executive goal-orientation shows high correlations with performance (r (74) = .42**). Third, novelty of the task is related to performance (r (74) = .23*) as well as severity of the task (r (74) = .25*) (see Table 7). Furthermore, significant connections to knowledge gain showed instrumental goal-orientation (r (74) = .44**), communication via e-mail (r (74) = .23*) and communication via telephone (r (74) = .29*).

Two of four assumptions could be confirmed with our data in respect of the process step evaluation: High instrumental goal-orientation and high executive goal-orientation are interrelated with evaluation in a positive way (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Nelson-Le Gall et al., 1983). Furthermore, performance was also connected to both task characteristics meaning that the newer and more severe the task was, the better performance was rated indicating that help is effective for new and severe tasks to improve performance.

There were no assumptions for evaluation of knowledge gain. There were correlations with instrumental goal-orientation, as well as with communication media of e-mail and telephone. As instrumental goal-orientation is focused on understanding the problem and gaining more knowledge in a specific problem domain, this research confirms theory (Bandura, 1997) in a different context than school. Interestingly, the kind of communication also influences the evaluation of knowledge gain. E-mail and telephone are both almost equally successful for knowledge gain in contrast to personal meetings. Maybe, individuals are very much concentrated on task-related issues which are relevant to solving the problem, when writing e-mails or talking via telephone. There may be fewer distractions than in personal meetings which lastly lead to a higher knowledge gain.

Table 7: Results of correlations (Spearman-rho) between relevant help seeking dimensions and the help seeking process "evaluation"

Dimensions	Evaluation	
	Evaluation of performance[a]	Evaluation knowledge gain[a]
Characteristics of the help-seeker		
b) Self-efficacy regarding help seeking[b]	.03	-.09
c) Instrumental goal-orientation[b]	.20*	.44**
d) Executive goal-orientation[b]	.42**	.09
Characteristics of the helper		
e) Experience[b]	-.05	.06
Organizational characteristics		
f) Time for help seeking[c]	-.08	.02
Contextual characteristics		
g) Characteristics of the task		
Novelty of the task[c]	.23*	.10
Centrality of the task[c]	.25*	.03
h) Kinds of problems		
Methodical problems[c]	.16	.03
Technical problems[c]	.19	.18
Information-deficit problems[c]	.17	.17
Client-oriented problems[c]	.15	.13
Technical characteristic[c]		
i) Communication Media		
Communication via e-mail[c]	.11	.23*
Communication via telephone[c]	.10	.29**
Communication via personal meetings[c]	-.01	-.11

[a] $n = 74$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$. [b]one-sided; [c]two-sided.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Looking at our research question how far relevant help seeking dimensions are correlated with the four process steps of help seeking, results indicate that there are some main correlations between relevant help-seeking dimensions and the help-seeking process. This confirms in the first step our theoretical framework which comprises a differentiated model on relevant help-seeking dimensions and on the help-seeking process steps i.e., decision, identification, interaction, and evaluation. Thus, all in all, this study showed for the first time in a coherent and diversified way that there are important dimensions which are connected with diverse steps of the help-seeking process. Besides the experience of the helper, all relevant dimensions showed some correlations with the help-seeking process.

For sure, this theoretical framework must be empirically verified in further studies with a more elaborated questionnaire including more relevant issues to increase reliability, with more employees, and multiple regression analyses. As the organization limited the dimensions of the questionnaire because of time and works committee restrictions, not all theoretically and empirically interesting issues could be asked for. A bigger sample would allow multiple regression analyses which are helpful in order to get data about causal correlations. Furthermore, to get a more differentiated picture on the help-seeking process and its relevant dimensions, diverse data sources may be necessary including qualitative and objective data.

On a practical dimension, the study gives first indications how to improve the help-seeking process. As individual characteristics could hardly be changed, organizations have the chance to influence organizational and technical characteristics. Regarding the organizational level, time would be of immense importance for help-seeking as it plays a crucial role for the identification process (Lee, 1997). In combination with this, technical characteristics specifically communication media should be provided by the organization (Makitalo-Siegl et al., 2011). As contextual characteristics are also related to help-seeking, it would be interesting to get further information about the characteristics of the tasks and the kinds of problems which trigger help-seeking.

Even though, this survey study is only a starting point in this area, it showed some interesting results regarding correlations between help-seeking dimensions and the help-seeking process in organizations. It gives a first indication that characteristics of the help-seeker as well as organizational, contextual, and technical characteristics are relevant for a diversified help-seeking process.

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