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Implementing an Organization-sponsored Sharing Platform to Build Employee Engagement

Organization-sponsored sharing platforms are a new class of IT that facilitates collaborative consumption within a private social network restricted to organizational members. As such, they leverage and integrate employees' roles as consumers and providers ("prosumers") in working environments and therefore offer a new way to build employee engagement, which is strategically important to all types of organizations. By studying organizations using the Zimride ridesharing platform, we have identified the ways in which organization-sponsored sharing platforms build prosumer engagement and provide recommendations for adopting these platforms and enhancing their impact.^{1,2}

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The Importance of Building Employee Engagement

Employee engagement indicates the degree to which individuals are motivated by their work and workplace culture to perform in a manner that goes beyond their job descriptions.³ Engaged employees are psychologically present and focused because they are able to express their whole selves while performing tasks and connecting to others at work. When employees are able to apply more of themselves—physically, cognitively and emotionally—in the performance of their work roles, organizational outcomes improve, team performance accelerates, employee retention and citizenship behavior increase, and staff absenteeism decreases.⁴

Building employee engagement has become a key management priority in organizations because an *"employee's willingness to apply discretionary effort toward meeting the company's*



¹ Iris Junglas, Hope Koch and Ping Wang are the accepting senior editors for this article.

² The authors thank the accepting senior editors and anonymous MISQE reviewers, as well as Arun Sundararajan and participants of the 2016 SIM-MISQE Pre-ICIS workshop on the sharing economy, for their constructive feedback on earlier versions of this article.

³ Employee engagement was first defined in Kahn, W. A. "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work," *Academy of Management Journal* (33:4), December 1990.

⁴ See Glavas, A. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Engagement: Enabling Employees to Employ More of Their Whole Selves at Work," *Frontiers in Psychology* (7:796), May 31, 2016. This paper draws on prior literature to highlight the benefits of employee engagement.

goals and to do more than merely meet job requirements and customer needs”⁵ creates competitive advantage.⁶ Unfortunately, according to a Gallup survey, 87% of employees worldwide are not engaged, costing their employers billions of dollars in lost productivity and staff turnover each year.⁷ In the U.S. alone, active employee disengagement costs between \$483 billion and \$605 billion in lost productivity each year.⁸

Employees become engaged when they feel valued rather than taken for granted by their co-workers and organization.⁹ Employees who find their work and working environment meaningful are more likely to feel gratitude and have a sense of obligation, which causes them to exhibit organizational citizenship behavior and reciprocity toward each other.¹⁰ Employees’ “prosocial”¹¹ actions signal “a relationship of shared sociality”¹² that builds co-worker camaraderie and community in the workplace. As a consequence, employee engagement has been positively linked to organizational commitment and individual wellbeing.

Organizations have traditionally held occasional social events to promote co-worker camaraderie and facilitate social bonding among colleagues. Sometimes organizations allow employees to bring their children and significant others to these social events, which

further engages employees because it helps them integrate their work and family roles.¹³ More recently, however, organizations have started implementing enterprise social networking platforms to help co-workers connect and make work more meaningful.¹⁴ They are also investing in new technologies to survey employees more frequently about their work and workplace culture.¹⁵ However, simply measuring employee engagement does not create or improve it.

Role of Organization-sponsored Sharing Platforms in Building Employee Engagement

Organization-sponsored sharing platforms are a new class of IT that holds considerable promise for engaging employees. These platforms facilitate collaborative consumption—the peer-to-peer (P2P) exchange of goods and/or services via virtual marketplaces¹⁶—among members of an organization. In other words, organization-sponsored sharing platforms engage employees by helping them integrate their work and their personal consumption of goods and services. By engaging employees as a community of “prosumers,”¹⁷ these platforms promote co-worker camaraderie and facilitate social bonding among employees. Prosumer engagement is, therefore, a new form of employee engagement that leverages and integrates employees’ roles as consumers and providers in work organizations. Similar to the social events and enterprise social networking platforms sponsored by organizations, prosumer engagement is built on an understanding that having friends at work is

5 Davies, J. “Sustainability and Employee Engagement: The State of the Art,” *GreenBiz*, September 2014, p.3, available at <https://www.greenbiz.com/research/report/2014/09/08/sustainability-employee-engagement>.

6 Sorenson, S. “How Employee Engagement Drives Growth,” *Gallup Business Journal*, June 20, 2013, available at <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/163130/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>.

7 Mann, A. and Harter, J. “The Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis,” *Gallup Business Journal*, January 7, 2016, available at <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/188033/worldwide-employee-engagement-crisis.aspx>.

8 *State of the American Workplace*, Gallup Interactive Report, 2013, available at <http://news.gallup.com/reports/199961/state-american-workplace-report-2017.aspx>.

9 See Saks, A. and Gruman, J. “What Do We Really Know About Employee Engagement?,” *Human Resource Development Quarterly* (25:2), Summer 2014, pp. 155-182. This paper summarizes the academic literature on employee engagement.

10 To understand the organizational effects of reciprocity, see Baker, W. and Bulkley, N. “Paying it Forward vs. Rewarding Reputation: Mechanisms of Generalized Reciprocity,” *Organization Science* (25:5), June 2014, pp. 1493-1510.

11 Prosocial behavior is positive, helpful and intended to promote social acceptance and friendship.

12 Arnould, E. J. and Rose, A. S. “Mutuality: Critique and substitute for Belk’s ‘sharing,’” *Marketing Theory* (16:1), March 2015, pp. 2.

13 See, for example, Dumas, T. L., Phillips, K. W. and Rothbard, N. P. “Getting Closer at the Company Party: Integration Experiences, Racial Dissimilarity, and Workplace Relationships,” *Organization Science*, (24:5), February 2013.

14 Leidner, L., Koch, H. and Gonzalez, E. “Assimilating Generation Y IT New Hires into USAA’s Workforce: The Role of an Enterprise 2.0 System,” *MIS Quarterly Executive* (9:4), December 2010, pp. 229-242.

15 Markey, R. “Engage Employees Using Customer Service Tactics,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 10, 2011, available at <https://hbr.org/2011/10/engage-employees-using-customer-service-tactics>.

16 For an example of organization-sponsored sharing platforms, see Botsman, R. and Rogers, R. “Beyond Zipcar: Collaborative Consumption,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 2010, available at <https://hbr.org/2010/10/beyond-zipcar-collaborative-consumption>.

17 The term prosumer is a combination of “provider” and “consumer,” highlighting the conflation of these roles in P2P business models.

"a scientifically salient ingredient in obtaining a number of business-relevant outcomes."¹⁸

Supporting multiple communities of prosumers while limiting participation in each to a defined set of employees differentiates organization-sponsored sharing platforms from their better-known sharing economy counterparts (e.g., Uber and Airbnb). Another important difference is that the sponsoring organization (rather than individual prosumers) pays subscription fees to the platform provider. Thus, employees in a sponsoring organization do not incur any subscription or transaction fees when sharing goods and/or services via the platform. Furthermore, their P2P exchanges collectively represent a more continuous and crowdsourced method for building employee engagement than occasional, company-organized social events. In this way, sponsoring organizations create shared value with their employees by subsidizing them to consume collaboratively via a sharing platform that encourages them to live more communally and sustainably.¹⁹

Our Research into How Organization-sponsored Sharing Platforms Build Employee Engagement

To uncover critical insights about how this emergent IT solution generates employee engagement, we conducted an empirical investigation of Zimride, an organization-sponsored platform for ridesharing. At present, ridesharing is one of the most pervasive forms of collaborative consumption.²⁰ Our findings suggest that organization-sponsored sharing platforms have both constraints and affordances in the development of prosumer engagement. Affordances are the possibilities for goal-oriented action enabled by a given technology for a specific

group of users.²¹ In contrast, constraints are restrictions that the technology sets on such goal-oriented action. To leverage organization-sponsored sharing platforms for engaging employees, IT executives need to ensure that the technology's constraints are mitigated.

In this article, we discuss how three technology features of organization-sponsored sharing platforms—*restricted network access*, *limited reputation management* and *off-platform coordination*—generate both affordances and constraints for engaging employees and building a more meaningful workplace. Our analysis focuses on these features not only because they are related to the private prosumer communities that are essential to the development of co-worker relationships, but also because they distinguish organization-sponsored sharing platforms from their better-known sharing economy counterparts. We do not focus on common technology features, such as ride-matching algorithms, which are not significant for building prosumer communities in organizations. Our main objective is to provide managers in organizations that sponsor sharing platforms with empirically grounded recommendations for leveraging these IT solutions to engage employees at work.

Specifically, over two years, we studied the private ridesharing communities of 25 organizations that had adopted the Zimride by Enterprise® platform,²² of which 22 were universities with both employee and student prosumers. The 25 organizations represented an experienced set of Zimride customers that had collectively logged an estimated 86,617,092 ridesharing miles on the platform at the commencement of our study (the Appendix describes our research timescale and method). Each of these organizations sponsored a private ridesharing network on the Zimride platform because they perceived it as: 1) a way to build community within their organization, 2) a

18 Wagner, R. and Harter, J. "The Tenth Element of Great Managing," *Gallup Business Journal*, February 14, 2008, available at <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/104197/Tenth-Element-Great-Managing.aspx>.

19 For arguments on why organizations should do this, see *Engaging Tomorrow's Consumer*, World Economic Forum (in collaboration with Accenture), January 2013.

20 For a comprehensive historical analysis of ridesharing, see Chan, N. D. and Shaheen, S. A. "Ridesharing in North America: Past, Present, and Future," *Transport Reviews* (32:1), January 2012, pp. 93-112.

21 While there is considerable research on the concept of affordance in IS research, a succinct definition is provided in Markus, M. L. and Silver, M. S. "A Foundation for the Study of IT Effects: A New Look at DeSanctis and Poole's Concepts of Structural Features and Spirit," *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* (9:10), 2008.

22 For a historical perspective on Zimride, see Lawler, R. "Lyft-Off: Zimride's Long Road To Overnight Success," *TechCrunch*, August 29, 2014, available at <http://techcrunch.com/2014/08/29/6000-words-about-a-pink-mustache/>.

symbol of their organizational commitment to environmental sustainability and 3) a safe and low-cost alternative transportation option for their community members.

Overview of the Zimride Platform

For each customer organization, the Zimride platform hosts a private ridesharing community with exclusive online access for its members via single sign-on authentication. Participating members have to create a user name (first name plus first initial of last name) and user profile. They can then post offers and requests for shared rides. They can also search for rides using several criteria (e.g., starting location, destination, date and time). Posted rides range from daily commutes to one-off, long-distance trips. Other platform features include the automatic matching of posted rides, calculation of a suggested amount for riders to pay drivers to cover the costs of a given ride, the ability to make payments online and communication options for working out the details of a shared ride (e.g., pickup location and time).

Within their private Zimride community, organizational members coordinate and share resources with each other to satisfy their respective transportation needs. Drivers offset their cost of car ownership/rental by providing transportation for a nominal payment to riders who are either unable or unwilling to buy/rent their own car. Since most riders pay in cash and are not required to update the platform after completing shared rides, the platform's ability to record actual ridesharing activity is limited. As a result, Zimride estimates the total shared miles and reduced carbon emissions facilitated by its platform by assuming that 20% of posted rides are actually completed. Site coordinators in customer organizations can access data (via an

online client dashboard) and run reports about their members' platform usage and reduced carbon emissions.

During the two years of our study, there was a fairly high level of turnover of Zimride customer organizations in our sample (36%), which suggests there is room for improving the ridesharing platform's technology features. The organizations that discontinued their Zimride service during our study were newer customers with lower estimated numbers of riders and drivers than those that continued to subscribe to Zimride. Table 1 summarizes the turnover data for the Zimride customer organizations in our study sample.

Some organizations felt that their Zimride sponsorship enhanced both public and member perceptions of their organizational commitment to sustainability, whereas others wanted to see improvements in transportation-related outcomes such as traffic congestion and parking complaints. All, however, were looking to increase the number of members actively participating in their sponsored ridesharing communities.

Affordances and Constraints of Zimride's Technology Features

We analyzed the three Zimride technology features that are central to sustaining a prosumer community within the confines of an organizational network—restricted network access, limited reputation management and off-platform coordination. We identified how each feature affords and constrains prosumer engagement and enables employees to leverage and integrate their roles at work and as consumers and providers. Our findings are summarized in Figure 1 and described in detail below.

Table 1: Turnover Data for Zimride Customer Organizations in Study Sample

	Year 1 (2015-2016)		Year 2 (2016-2017)	
	Discontinued	Continued	Discontinued	Continued
Zimride Service				
No. of Customer Organizations	6	19	3	16
Average Tenure as Customer	4.2 years	4.5 years	2.7 years	6.0 years
Average Estimated Miles Shared	2.8 million	3.7 million	0.59 million	5.1 million

Restricted Network Access

Restricting network access to organizational members is fundamental to prosumers feeling safe when sharing in a community. Zimride implements this technology feature through the use of a customer organization's single sign-on authentication infrastructure. For each private prosumer community, Zimride creates a unique online access page with the community's ridesharing statistics. This page also has the sponsoring customer's logo and is linked directly to its organizational website.

We identified two affordances and one constraint of Zimride's restricted network access.

Affordance: Restricted Network Access Facilitates Communal Identification. By co-branding each private prosumer community on its platform, Zimride creates tight coupling between its ridesharing platform and customer organizations. Co-branding enables prosumers to identify with other members of their organization-sponsored Zimride community and to feel comfortable with arranging ridesharing via the platform. Although community members are ridesharing with strangers, there is an underlying assumption that all participants ascribe to similar values given their common organizational

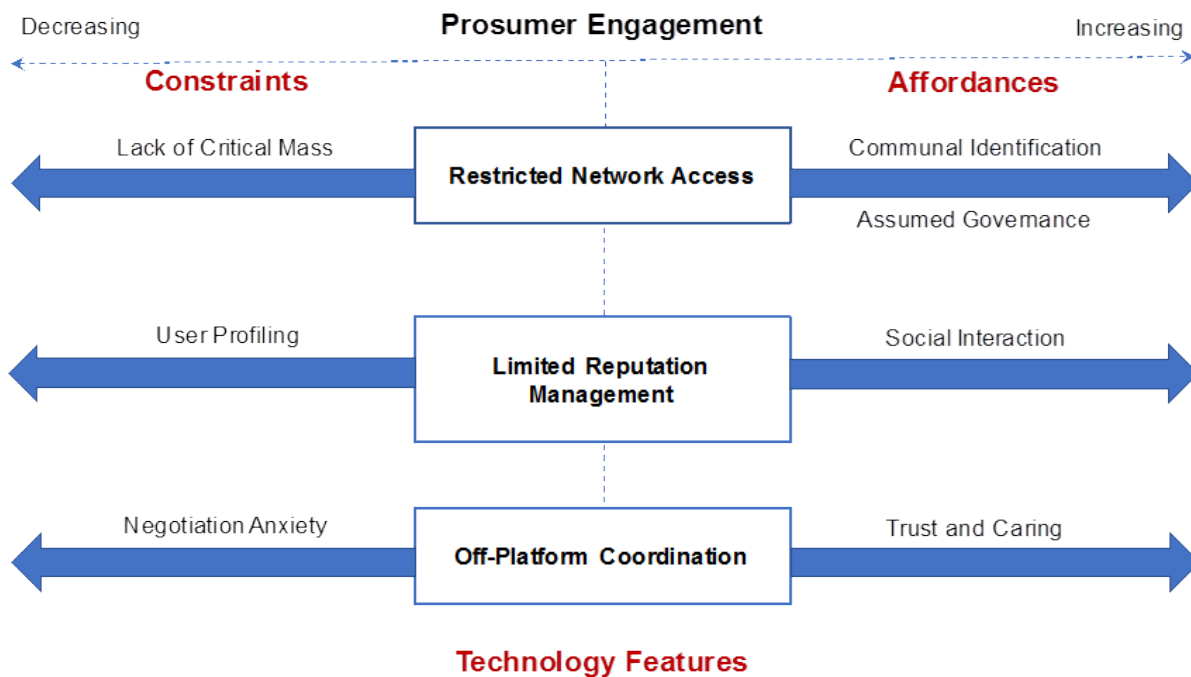
membership. This creates "swift trust"²³ among them and the perception that sharing a Zimride-brokered ride with a stranger is safe. These feelings of trust and safety motivate prosumers to engage in their organization-sponsored community on the platform:

"Just the vibe that you get on campus being a Wildcat [the name of the university's mascot] has led to a lot of trust. A Wildcat wouldn't screw another Wildcat over. The fact that we all feel like we're a part of that community ... it makes you more comfortable [using Zimride]." Zimride student user

Affordance: Restricted Network Access Creates Assumption of Organizational Governance. Given the use of single sign-on authentication to restrict network access, prosumers also assume that a Zimride customer organization will monitor and govern its community members' behavior on the platform.

23 Swift trust is the situation where co-workers implicitly trust each other at the beginning and only reassess their trust beliefs later. For more information, see Meyerson, D., Weick, K. E. and Kramer, R. M. "Swift Trust and Temporary Groups," in *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research*, Sage Publications, 1996.

Figure 1: Zimride's Technology Affordances and Constraints for Prosumer Engagement



For example, users believe that if a rider refused to give them the agreed payment, they would report this incident to their organization so that this individual could be sanctioned in some way. This assumption of organizational governance further enhances prosumers' sense of safety and motivates them to engage in their organization-sponsored Zimride community.

Importantly, however, none of the Zimride customer organizations in our sample reported having such governance mechanisms in place. Although many feel a sense of responsibility for ensuring that their Zimride community members are safe, their organizational policies in the event of accidental property damage or physical injury during ridesharing are ambiguous at best:

"Even if we're giving [Zimride] money and it's like a service that we're contracting for, heaven forbid something bad were to happen, then whose liability is that? ... We do have on our website caveats just saying ... 'when you're going through a sort of meeting space you're going to be needing a sort of awareness that it might not be a good idea to get a ride with this person and give a ride to that person.' It's just kind of trying to absolve ourselves ...[So], if heaven forbid something bad were to happen, then it wouldn't be part of our liability. But I think it's still a concern." Zimride site coordinator

Nevertheless, prosumers' assumption of organizational governance is reassuring to them and motivates them to engage in a sponsored Zimride ridesharing community.

Constraint: Restricted Network Access Makes It Harder to Achieve Critical Mass. The supply and demand of shared rides in a sponsored prosumer community on the Zimride platform is constrained by the platform's restricted network access. Even in large organizations with more than 50,000 eligible members, prosumers complain about Zimride's inability to broker rides because there isn't a critical mass of active users. This creates the negative perception that Zimride is an unreliable transportation option, reducing it to a fallback option at best. The lack of a critical mass also sets in motion a vicious circle where users whose ridesharing offers and requests go unmatched

stop posting available or needed rides. This, in turn, further constrains the supply and demand of shared rides in the community and limits Zimride's ability to effectively broker ridesharing.

Limited Reputation Management

Unlike other sharing platforms, Zimride does not support reciprocal ratings of riders and drivers. This design choice takes into account that platform prosumers are embedded within an organization, know other community members and may encounter each other in the workplace. In other words, what happens on Zimride does not stay on Zimride and can permeate into other organizational contexts. The lack of performance ratings therefore gives community members some control over how they present themselves to platform users and more broadly within their organization.

Community members also control how their personal information is presented via their Zimride profiles. Some leave their profile page completely blank, disclosing only their first name and the first initial of their last name. Others include a profile image, a description about themselves (e.g., job title and work location) and their personal preferences (e.g., music and hobbies), and/or a link to their personal Facebook pages. This means the amount of information that prosumers have about each other prior to ridesharing may be limited and asymmetrical, motivating them to use other interpersonal modes of communication such as emails, phone calls or text messages to negotiate a shared ride.

We identified one affordance and one constraint of Zimride's limited reputation management.

Affordance: Limited Reputation Management Promotes Social Interaction. Zimride's limited reputation management engages community members by first connecting them online but then pushing them off the platform to interact socially. The lack of performance ratings ensures that sharing exchanges are not reduced to arm's-length transactions. Having to also interact outside of a scripted platform interface creates the opportunity for prosumers to learn more about each other and their specific ridesharing needs. In this way, the limited reputation management

creates many opportunities for developing camaraderie and social connections among platform users, which further motivates them to engage in their Zimride community.

Constraint: Limited Reputation Management Increases User Profiling. Given the limited nature of Zimride user profiles, many prosumers want to find out more about potential ridesharing partners before interacting with them. Some find it difficult to withdraw from a ridesharing negotiation after interacting personally with a community member because their sense of social obligation increases as the negotiation progresses. However, relying on a member's Zimride profile and Facebook page, if linked, does not provide sufficient information about potential ridesharing partners. Although it is possible to glean considerable amounts of personal information about prosumers from their social media accounts (e.g., list of friends and posted photos), it is difficult to translate this information into qualities relevant to ridesharing (e.g., punctuality or aggressive driving). Furthermore, screening users' Facebook pages is inefficient:

"[If] I see ... five or 10 different drivers going to [where I want to go], I'm not going to spend the time to look up every single one of them to see what their family is like or something. The point in [using] Zimride is that it's convenient, and it saves time from having to search around all these forums to get a ride. If I had to investigate every driver, then that would be a pain in the ass."
Zimride student user

Screening is akin to user profiling, which entails predicting personality and behavior by drawing on narratives, stereotypes and generalizations. For example, drawing on gender stereotypes about aggression and physical strength, many women share rides exclusively with women, unless the community member is a man they already know and trust. Such profiling not only creates the conditions for discrimination but it also constrains critical mass by reducing the pool of potential ride matches. Furthermore, profiling sows suspicion and uncertainty rather than trust, which hinders prosumer engagement on the platform.

Off-platform Coordination

As noted previously, community members' interactions take place entirely off the Zimride platform once they have been matched as potential ridesharing partners. The negotiations via text messages, phone calls and emails usually revolve around the scheduling of shared rides and fare payments. For each posted ride, Zimride suggests a fare based on the calculated trip distance. Prosumers have the flexibility to adjust the starting or ending location of their route and negotiate an adjusted fare. For example, a negotiated pickup or drop-off location that increases the calculated trip distance usually results in an increased fare.

Both drivers and riders are also able to adjust the suggested fare for their posted rides on the Zimride platform. Drivers can lower the price of a shared ride while riders can increase their offers to make their bids more attractive to potential ride providers. During these interpersonal negotiations, the two ridesharing partners must also decide when and how fares will be paid. Riders can make these payments online or in cash.

We identified one affordance and one constraint of Zimride's off-platform coordination.

Affordance: Off-platform Coordination Promotes Trust and Caring. The interpersonal coordination of scheduling and payment details requires that Zimride community members trust each other to fulfill their negotiated arrangements. By not actively mediating and brokering their negotiations, Zimride requires a social exchange between prosumers:

"When I was [setting up a ride through Zimride], I didn't think of myself as using this service. I just thought of myself as getting a ride. ... I felt like a buddy who [the driver] was giving a hand to." Zimride student user

Indeed, many drivers perceive ridesharing to be an act of caring. Their primary motivation for using the Zimride platform is to help members of their organization. By perceiving ridesharing as an act of caring, these drivers feel valued and experience meaningfulness when engaging in their Zimride community.

Constraint: Off-platform Coordination Creates Negotiation Anxiety. Seeking financial compensation is at odds with the social act of sharing when the latter reflects organizational commitment and a genuine desire to help others:

"To have to choose a dollar amount, to me, comes across as [distasteful] ... It's too early in the process. If the idea is about connecting us together and allowing us to share rides, then ... that dollar amount ... can set a sour taste even at the beginning of the conversation." Zimride employee user

As such, many Zimride community members feel anxious about negotiating fares for their shared rides. Most opt to let the Zimride platform play the role of an objective broker that equitably calculates a suggested fare. Fare manipulations, therefore, are rare, giving rise to impression-management concerns:

"[When I posted the fare that I was willing to offer], it really just started going through my head, 'are they going to think I'm a cheapskate because I'm choosing this dollar amount, or are they going to be okay with it because I chose it [rather than the system].' It raises questions, and it makes you wonder, 'what are they thinking at their end?'" Zimride employee user

Nevertheless, Zimride prosumers must negotiate when and how fares are paid. Although riders prefer to pay fares in cash at the end of a ride to protect against last-minute cancellations and no-shows, drivers prefer pre-paid fares:

"I [mostly] did the transaction online through the website, so no one was paying me cash. I didn't have to worry about [non-payment]. ... [The] one time I [took] cash ... was because I felt confident that I was going to get my money from this person ... I didn't feel like I wouldn't get my money from an 18-year-old kid, and a female." Zimride student user

As the above quotes suggest, arranging the financial aspects of a shared ride creates anxiety and suspicion rather than trust in the benevolence of community members, which undermines engagement in an organization-sponsored sharing platform.

Recommendations for CIOs and Business Managers

Collectively, our study respondents provided critical insights on how an organization-sponsored sharing platform can engage employees as a community of prosumers. By helping community members express more of themselves and integrate their multiple roles through collaborative consumption, these platforms connect employees and facilitate social bonding among them. This continuous and crowdsourced method for building employee engagement can, therefore, serve as a complement to occasional company-organized social events.

Our study of Zimride's ridesharing platform—an exemplar of this new class of IT—identified the affordances and constraints of three key technology features, which can both facilitate and hinder the development of prosumer engagement. Our findings raise the question of whether the Zimride platform can sustain vibrant prosumer communities. The interviews with site coordinators and users suggest that they are enamored with "the idea" of an organization-sponsored sharing platform even though Zimride brokers shared rides infrequently. As a result, employee engagement in Zimride ridesharing communities appears to be low and not widespread. But despite its suboptimal performance, many customer organizations in our study sample continue to sponsor Zimride because they see it as an alternative transportation solution.

There is a general belief that Zimride *can* help organizations engage employees, generate cost savings and promote sustainable consumption—have a positive impact on their triple bottom line.²⁴ It is important to note that organization-sponsored sharing platforms represent the "sharing economy ideal" because they integrate the social benefits of belonging to a community with the economic benefits of accessing goods

²⁴ The phrase "triple bottom line" was first coined in 1994 by John Elkington. He argued that companies should prepare three different (and quite separate) bottom lines: 1) the traditional bottom line of corporate profit and loss, 2) a bottom line of the company's "people account"—a measure of how socially responsible the company has been throughout its operations and (3) a bottom line of the company's "planet" account—a measure of how environmentally responsible it has been. The triple bottom line thus consists of three Ps: profit, people and planet.

and services via a P2P platform.²⁵ Therefore, we now offer recommendations that business managers and IT executives can use for mitigating the identified technology constraints of organization-sponsored sharing platforms to increase community members' engagement as prosumers.

Recommendations for Enhancing Reputation Management

1. Collect Reciprocal User Ratings.

Organizations should contract with platform providers that collect reciprocal user ratings at the completion of each sharing exchange in their private prosumer communities. The performance ratings for community members should only be displayed in an aggregate and anonymous format. This approach will ensure that employees evaluate exchange partners²⁶ candidly and without fear of individual reprisal or reputational harm within their organization. Reciprocal user ratings should also be combined with system-generated data to bolster their reliability. For example, system-generated data about employees' ridesharing behavior (e.g., number of shared rides) could be combined with prosumer ratings such as punctuality (e.g., on-time pickup) and general etiquette (e.g., eating in vehicle).

2. Award Badges for Desirable Behavior.

Behavioral ratings generated by the system and from platform users will give members relevant information about potential exchange partners in their sponsored sharing community. In addition to including these ratings in community

members' profiles, badges for desirable behavior can be awarded.²⁷ For example, a female employee would feel more comfortable ridesharing with a male co-worker who has earned a "safe driver" badge based on his historical performance within their sponsored ridesharing community. Displaying such badges on members' profiles provides an effective way of signaling their standing in a sharing community. The ability to filter requests by such badges would also make searches for potential exchange partners more efficient.

Impact of These Recommendations.

Applying the two above recommendations to enhance the reputation management technology feature balances community members' need for information about potential exchange partners with the reputational harm that may result from platform-specific performance ratings (e.g., on-time pickup, aggressive driving) spilling over into other organizational contexts. Prosumers will still have to interact personally outside of a scripted platform interface to learn more about each other and build communal bonds, but these social interactions will motivate them to consume collaboratively. They will also have a reduced need to profile other users, which should therefore increase employee engagement and reduce discrimination in sponsored sharing communities.

Recommendations for Instituting Organizational Governance

1. Monitor Community Members' Behavior.

Preventing discrimination that results from user profiling is unlikely to be accomplished through technological means alone. Organizations should, therefore, ensure that their site coordinators can monitor community members' behavior and socialize employees on the norms and expectations for collaborative consumption facilitated by their sponsored sharing platforms. Site coordinators should also develop and communicate organizational policies (separate from the platform provider's terms of use) for responding

25 For a conceptual framework for comparing and contrasting the many different platforms and initiatives that make up the sharing economy, see Acquier, A., Daudigeos, T. and Pinkse, J. "Promises and paradoxes of the sharing economy: An organizing framework," *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* (125), December 2017, pp 1-10. See also Constantiou, I., Marton, A. and Tuunainen, V. K. "Four Models of Sharing Economy Platforms," *MIS Quarterly Executive* (16:4), December 2017, pp. 231-251. The Gardener model in this article is somewhat similar to Acquier et al.'s "sharing economy ideal."

26 We use the term "exchange partners" to signify that the relationship between community members is about a sharing exchange and not some other work or personal relationship. It also emphasizes that sharing in this context is a social exchange rather than a market transaction between employees.

27 Airbnb awards a "Superhost" badge to high-performing providers.

to deviant user behavior; accidental property damage or physical injury that may arise from platform-brokered sharing among employees. These policies should specify official channels for reporting and resolving such issues, especially in emergencies, which will reassure employees that sharing in their organization-sponsored community is safe.

2. **Require Employees to Fully Document Platform-brokered Sharing.** To ensure effective governance, employees should be required to fully document their platform-brokered sharing exchanges. For example, Zimride should require drivers and riders to record their pickup and drop-off times and locations, as well as the fares paid. These user-generated records will facilitate organizational tracking and monitoring of sharing exchanges in a sponsored platform community, putting into effect what community members assume already exists.

Impact of These Recommendations.

Instituting the above organizational governance recommendations will not only increase employee engagement in a sponsored sharing community, but also the reliability of platform data. If employees accurately and consistently document their platform-brokered sharing exchanges, site coordinators will have more accurate data to assess the technology's performance and their organization's return on investment. In this way, rational decision making, rather than a fascination with "the idea" of achieving the sharing economy's ideal, is made possible.

Recommendations for Increasing Critical Mass

1. **Grow the Supply of Shared Resources.** To further increase employee engagement in their sponsored sharing community, organizations need to grow the supply of community resources on their platforms to ensure that they are aligned with the demand for them. Supply-side employees (providers) are less dependent on demand-side employees (consumers) because they control the supply of goods

and services irrespective of whether these are used by the community. Organizations, therefore, need to first mobilize employees on the supply side of their sponsored sharing community because cross-side network effects will attract employees on the demand side.²⁸

2. **Provide Incentives for Supply-side Employees to Join the Platform Community.** Supply-side employees represent the "subsidy side" of an organization's two-sided prosumer community and, therefore, need incentives to join it. Although the technology affordances of an organization-sponsored sharing platform provide social incentives to providers (e.g., co-worker camaraderie and gratitude), offering them additional employee benefits should help organizations build critical mass and employee engagement in their private sharing community. With Zimride, for example, a free car wash could be awarded to drivers when they share their first ride. Competitions could also be used to further motivate employees to join the supply side of the community. For example, Zimride drivers could be entered into a competition for special parking privileges that are awarded monthly to those with the highest number of shared rides. These types of incentives—which are ideally aligned with the providers' preferences—should motivate employees to share their underused resources via their organization's platform community.

Having a steady supply of resources available for sharing also increases the confidence of demand-side employees that they can rely on their organization's prosumer community to fulfill their consumption needs. Demand-side employees could also be included in monthly competitions for special rewards to further

28 For a description of how either the money or subsidy side of a two-sided market must be mobilized to attract the other side, see Eisenmann, T. R., Parker, G. G. and Van Alstyne, M. W. "Strategies for Two-Sided Markets," *Harvard Business Review*, October 2006. In the case of Zimride, the providers represent the subsidy side that needs to be built to generate the required cross-side network effects that make these platforms successful.

motivate collaborative consumption and employee engagement.

Recommendation for Reducing Negotiation Anxiety

1. Consider Eliminating Financial Transactions Between Employees.

Providing organizational incentives for employees to use a sponsored sharing platform should help to reduce the significance of financial transactions between employees and the related negotiation anxiety. However, the best way of eradicating employees' negotiation anxiety is to eliminate financial transactions altogether.

Impact of This Recommendation. Doing this would mean that demand-side employees have access to communally shared resources for free, enabling all organizational prosumers to experience sharing in the platform community as an act of caring that is rewarded with gratitude. The perceived generosity of this organizational gift would engender feelings of gratitude and the experience of meaningfulness at work. In turn, this would help to maintain and grow both the necessary critical mass and prosumer engagement on the platform because employees who benefit from their co-workers' shared resources are obligated to reciprocate by sharing their own resources with community members, in effect paying forward²⁹ what they receive.

Concluding Comments

Our objective in this article was to introduce and investigate a new class of IT—organization-sponsored sharing platforms—for engaging employees as a community of prosumers. We have identified this technology's affordances and constraints for prosumer engagement, which stem from the distinguishing features of a sharing platform bounded within an organizational context. We believe that the benefits of engaging employees with these platforms far exceed the costs of optimizing their use within an organization. Employee engagement is a leading indicator of company growth. One study found that a 5% improvement in employee engagement

yielded 3% in sales growth.³⁰ The investment needed to implement our recommendations for managing this technology should therefore be evaluated against the organizational value of increased employee engagement.

We have highlighted how managers can engage employees using an organization-sponsored sharing platform to create a more meaningful workplace where employees feel valued and useful. Given the importance of building co-worker camaraderie in contemporary organizations, coupled with the ongoing search for efficiencies through technology enablement, we believe these platforms will become increasingly important for employee engagement. IT executives can, therefore, play an important role in achieving the strategic organizational outcome of employee engagement through the effective procurement and management of these platforms. If implemented successfully, this emerging class of IT can help to build employee engagement in a continuous and crowdsourced manner.

However, the definitive forms that organization-sponsored sharing platforms will take are yet to be determined. In addition to ridesharing platforms such as the one described in this article, there are now organization-sponsored sharing platforms that facilitate the collaborative consumption of household goods and home services.³¹ Moreover, popular sharing platforms such as Airbnb are actively seeking to enter the enterprise market and offer their services to organizations.³² Our findings and recommendations from the current study will forearm CIOs and business managers with critical insights that will help them navigate this emergent and organizationally embedded incarnation of the sharing economy.

Appendix: Research Method

Our study was conducted over a two-year period, from June 2015 to May 2017. In summer

²⁹ For an understanding of paying forward, see op. cit., Baker, W. and Bulkley, N., June 2014.

³⁰ 2015 Trends in Global Employee Engagement, Aon Hewitt, 2015, available at <http://www.aon.com/attachments/human-capital-consulting/2015-Trends-in-Global-Employee-Engagement-Report.pdf>.

³¹ One example is Sharing Tribes (<http://sharingtribes.com/>).

³² See Sundararajan, A. *The Sharing Economy: The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism*, MIT Press, 2016.

2015, we downloaded the list of 114 Zimride customer organizations from Zimride's website (<https://zimride.com>). By cross-referencing this list with customer organizations' publicly available information about their Zimride platforms, we compiled a database of contact information for 108 Zimride site coordinators at these organizations and emailed invitations to them to participate in our study. We then conducted semi-structured phone interviews in fall 2015 with the 25 site coordinators who responded. Based on information collected via a screening questionnaire, our interview sample included 22 universities, two government organizations and one corporation. Most site coordinators were located in departments of transportation and/or parking. Others were in IT departments or offices of student affairs and sustainability. All the interviews were transcribed from audio recordings of our phone conversations. We offered each interviewee a \$10 gift card to thank them for their participation.

In fall 2016, we conducted additional interviews with Zimride users at one university in our original sample. We obtained the email addresses of all 4,520 registered users of this university's sponsored ridesharing community on the Zimride platform dating back to its launch in spring 2012. We emailed all of them, inviting them to participate in an hour-long phone interview about their experience of using the Zimride platform. Fifty-eight expressed interest in participating in our study by completing a screening questionnaire. By selecting those who had been recently active on the platform (e.g., posted a ride) and prioritizing those who had actually completed a shared ride, we interviewed 16 Zimride users (11 students and 5 staff members). These semi-structured phone interviews lasted 35 minutes, on average. We once again offered each interviewee a \$10 gift card to thank them for their participation.

We used interpretive methods to classify interviewee statements into generic activities (which we called "practice themes"). These methods involved multiple sequences of reading interview transcripts and moving between assertions made by individuals and an emerging sense of the whole. For Zimride users, practice themes included compiling a profile, posting and searching for a shared ride, assessing potential

ridesharing partners and coordinating shared rides, including negotiating payment. For the Zimride site coordinators, practice themes included securing funding and organizational support for sponsoring a private ridesharing community, marketing the prosumer community to organizational members and determining its success.

From these practice themes, particularly the related benefits and challenges identified by interviewees, we were able to identify technology features of the Zimride platform that were significant to its use and usefulness in organizations. We then categorized interview statements by these platform features and highlighted quotes that helped explain the features' affordances and constraints for employee engagement in sponsored ridesharing communities. We also noted interviewees' recommendations for redesigning the Zimride platform to augment benefits and resolve challenges that they had experienced.

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