

# Leveraging Social Capital to Enhance Knowledge Sharing in Mature Enterprises

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**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to examine the role of social capital in the knowledge sharing (KS) process in an enterprise, with particular emphasis on its three dimensions: structural (SSC), relational (RSC) and cognitive (CSC). The paper analyses how these three dimensions of social capital contribute to the adoption of KS behaviours, which in consequence can lead to increased innovation, competitiveness and efficiency of the enterprise. Understanding the role of social capital in the knowledge sharing process provides valuable information for practitioners and decision-makers, helping them to create favorable conditions for cooperation and innovation. The contribution to science and the novelty of the current research are based on an empirical approach that focuses on mature enterprises. Analyzing social capital in the context of those organizations that have an established position on the market will allow for the discovery of unique dynamics and challenges related to KS. This research fills a research gap in the literature, focusing on mature enterprises, which are often omitted in knowledge management research. Hence, the empirical part of the article was prepared based on a questionnaire survey among 280 mature enterprises in Poland. In the study of the impact of social capital dimensions on KS, a regression model was used, which allowed us to determine the extent to which each of the dimensions of social capital affects the KS process in a mature enterprise. The regression model confirmed that among the three predictors of social capital, SSC and CSC (had significant positive effects on KS, however, RSC was not statistically significant, suggesting it does not contribute meaningfully to the prediction of KS. The assessment of the strength and direction of these relationships provides valuable information for practitioners in the field of knowledge and social capital management strategies. The current research approach also creates the possibility of continuing the research, by expanding it to include factors mediating this relationship. The research limitation is primarily the simplification in the form of defining mature enterprises only by the period of operation on the market, which should be clarified in future studies.

**Keywords:** Knowledge sharing, Knowledge management, Social capital, Mature enterprises

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the rapidly changing economic environment and globalization, companies must constantly fight to maintain a competitive advantage. Currently, the condition for this is to have an effective knowledge management strategy and systems, which will become essential to increase the ability of companies to continuously create, transfer and use knowledge. Knowledge is considered the life force of organizations and has been identified as a key element of organizational survival and allows companies to differentiate themselves from competitors (Tran Pham, 2024). From this perspective, knowledge sharing (KS) is one of the most significant knowledge-related activities since it serves as the link between individual knowledge and organizational information, so successfully improving the ability to absorb and innovate (Lin & Huang, 2023). The process of KS is determined by many internal and external factors, among which researchers very often analyze social capital, both as a holistic construct and its three dimensions: structural, relational, and cognitive.

Although the relationship between social capital and knowledge sharing in organizations has been the subject of much empirical research, there are still many areas and aspects that have not been sufficiently explored. The novelty of the study results from focusing on the identification of the impact of social capital, as a multidimensional construct, on knowledge sharing in mature enterprises. So, the contribution of the paper creates a reference to mature companies and their KS behaviour. Mature enterprises are characterized by more formalized and optimized intra-organizational processes that ensure operational stability and efficiency. They have clearly defined management structures, decision-making hierarchies, and operational procedures, which promote predictability and risk minimization. At the same time, despite their stability, mature companies must maintain flexibility and the ability to adapt to the changing market environment, which is often achieved through innovation, automation, and development of employee competencies. Thus, the aim of this article is to examine the role of social capital in the knowledge sharing (KS) process in an enterprise, with particular emphasis on its three dimensions: structural (SSC), relational (RSC) and cognitive (CSC).

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction in Section 1, the author presents a literature review in Section 2. Section 3 discusses the research methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical results. The author concludes in Section 5 by highlighting the limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Knowledge Sharing**

Knowledge sharing encompasses the behavior of individuals to share their information or knowledge with others (Berraies, Lajili & Chtioui, 2020), which enhances both individual and organizational performance. According to Wang and Noe (2010), KS is a group of actions that include exchanging social and task-related knowledge with others and cooperating to resolve problems, create new ideas, or execute organizational procedures. Knowledge is regarded as the essential foundation of a business, recognized as a vital component for its existence and enabling firms to differentiate themselves from competitors. Knowledge is socially produced, and its worth increases when disseminated, and this is why KS is one of the most fundamental activities in organizational operations (Tran Pham, 2024).

KS is problematic and controversial because it is handled by individuals who are sometimes reluctant to share knowledge that they perceive as valuable and important, which makes KS difficult to implement as a process in an organization (Alajmi & Al-Qallaf, 2022). KS behavior is not only influenced by personal motivation but also by KS opportunities. It refers to the knowledge transfer across individuals and organizations, storage in and retrieval from a knowledge base, and the process of behaviors becoming the routine and practices of organizations (Hassan et al., 2016). In addition, KS is one of the most important behaviors in knowledge-related behaviors. As a necessary link for the transformation of individual knowledge into organizational knowledge, it can effectively enhance the ability to absorb and innovate. It is also a prerequisite for knowledge creation and plays a key and indispensable role in the application and integration of organizational knowledge (Ritala & Stefan, 2021).

Previous studies have emphasized the benefits of knowledge sharing, including cost reduction, increased customer satisfaction, improving individual skills, nurturing the intellectual capital of the organization, and improving innovation and performance capabilities (Wang & Noe, 2010).

### **2.2 Social Capital**

Many fields have examined social capital, including sociology, politics, economics, and management. Companies in the knowledge-based economy have realized how crucial social capital is to their success (Tran Pham, 2024). As Bourdieu (1985) stated, social capital implies resources accumulated through social relationships. Human relationships and interactions gave rise to the idea of social capital, which has since been associated with both people and societal institutions (Dageid & Gronlie, 2015). It is characterized by social organization features, including networks, conventions, and trust that promote action and collaboration for the advantage of both parties (Putnam, 1995). According to Donate et al. (2020), social capital is the collection of resources individuals possess and have accumulated from their networks. In turn, Ganguly, Talukdar and Chatterjee (2019) stated that social capital is the total of the real and potential resources that are a part of, derived from, or accessible through relational networks.

For organizations, social capital enhances interorganizational relations and organizational reputation and also helps them with strategic and advantageous positions for new ideas or risk protection (Oh et al., 2023). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), it refers to the resources that either individuals or organizations may mobilize or access through long-lasting relationships and networks. Social capital relationships represent the quality of the connection between individuals, including the degree of mutual trust or cooperation in the relationship (Lin & Huang, 2023). Through social connections, it makes it more feasible for individuals to obtain information and resources, creating value through useful and consoling interactions. It additionally assists in their strategic positioning in the market by utilizing networks to identify opportunities, reduce risks, and negotiate challenging situations (Coleman, 1990). Strong social ties give individuals and companies access to important information, resources, and opportunities that boost productivity, creativity, and competitive advantage in the rapidly changing environment of today (Han, Oh & Kang, 2022). According to Allameh (2018), social capital fosters the development of a social foundation that stimulates collective intelligence and fosters a sense of solidarity, which in turn strengthens an organization's knowledge base and enables individuals to execute their jobs effectively and possess important information. According to social capital theory, social networks can be strengthened through network links and are significant resources for people or social entities. At the same time, a large portion of information gain comes from social interactions. Accordingly, social capital encompasses both the resources and expertise found in networks as well as how they are applied in interactions (Lee & Han, 2024).

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) perceived social capital as a triangle that could be broken into three sections: structural, relational, and cognitive capital in order to assess its type and quality. Structural capital is the overall

design of social networks that give members the chance for interaction with other individuals. Such elements as respect, trust, norms, and cooperation are all components of relational capital, which reflects the essence of interpersonal relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). According to Zhang et al. (2017), cognitive social capital is the shared knowledge of social actors through similar objectives, visions, cultures, or languages. Individuals are encouraged to act collectively and share information by these dimensions, which also foster understandings, interactions, and collaboration (Polyviou, Croxton & Knemeyer, 2019).

### **2.3 Hypotheses Development**

Many previous studies have confirmed the relationship between social capital and KS in organizations (Peng, 2022). Liu and Meyer (2020) indicated that social capital should even be treated as a driving force of KS. Since the structure of social capital indicates the strength of the relationship or the frequency of interactions between an individual and other stakeholders (Sheng & Hartmann, 2019), a higher level of social capital in an organization means that interactions between employees will be more frequent, creating an environment conducive to KS, including when members directly contact and exchange explicit knowledge, as well as when there is an opportunity to share tacit knowledge (Foss & Pedersen, 2019). Therefore, the structure of social interactions can encourage individuals to KS in a cost-effective way and improve the intensity, breadth, and frequency of knowledge sharing (Chowdhury et al., 2020). Considering the dimensions of social capital, Hau et al. (2013) indicated that social capital at the structural, relational, or cognitive level has a positive impact on individuals' KS behavior. Similarly, Peng's (2022) research confirmed that employees' social capital has a positive impact on employees' KS behavior, and a strong correlation is seen between all dimensions of social capital and KS.

The structural dimension of social capital refers to informal and formal meetings among team members (Lin, Liu & Chan, 2022) and reflects the pattern of structural connections or ties among members of a work team (Tsai et al., 2014). People in a team who have a high level of social interactions or interpersonal relationships can obtain emotional support and positive experiences, which helps reduce emotional conflicts and develop positive feelings in a collective way, facilitating knowledge sharing as a consequence (Lin & Huang, 2023). The relational dimension of social capital refers to the trust and willingness of team members to increase mutual reliance on each other within the team (Baruch & Lin, 2012). Trust helps to shape a rich, positive emotional space with enduring social and affective resources (Jahanshahi, Maghsoudi & Nawaser, 2020), in which employees are likely to exhibit better work mood and positive feelings of participation in team activities and thus be more willing to share knowledge with each other (Lin & Huang, 2023). The cognitive dimension of social capital refers to a shared vision, which is a set of beliefs and assumptions about team goals and processes that are widely accepted by team members (Tsai et al., 2014). A shared understanding of values and purpose through frequent communication events is likely to elicit a positive affective tone to a large extent, ultimately increasing knowledge sharing (Baruch & Lin, 2012).

Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses were developed:

*H1: SSC has a positive effect on the KS in mature enterprises.*

*H2: RSC has a positive effect on the KS in mature enterprises.*

*H3: CSC has a positive effect on the KS in mature enterprises.*

### **3. Methods**

To test the research hypotheses, data was collected from a sample of 280 mature enterprises in Poland. Mature enterprises were considered to be those operating on the market for more than 5 years. In this group, 24.7% of companies had been operating on the market for 6-10 years, 28.9% for 11-20 years, and 46.4% for more than 20 years. The selection of the research group was random. The respondents expressed their opinions using a 5-point Likert scale. All variables were prepared as the average (arithmetic mean) of their component items.

The questionnaire survey was prepared based on a literature review. The items of structural (SSC), relational (RSC) and cognitive (CSC) social capital were prepared based on previous research (Hau & Kang, 2016; Chow & Chan, 2008; Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006) as a variable consisting of 4 to 5 items. The seven items that make up the KS variable were developed from the literature (Luu, 2021; Stock et al., 2021; Imam & Zaheer, 2021). The following tools were used for statistical analysis of the primary data: descriptive statistics, Kendall's Tau correlation coefficient (as a coefficient used for nonparametric variables) and multiple regression to examine the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable.

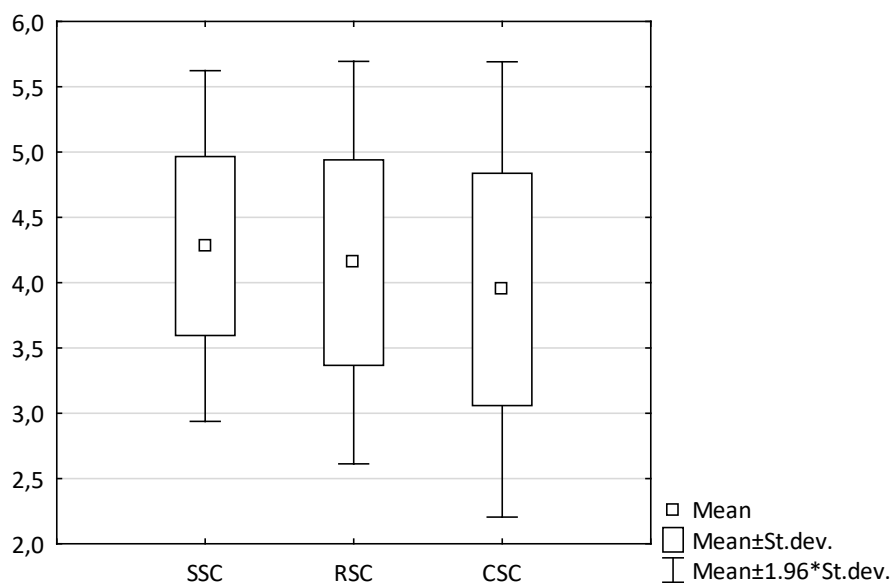
The reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha indicates a high level of internal consistency for all variables (Tab. 1). RSC ( $\alpha = 0.926$ ) and CSC ( $\alpha = 0.921$ ) demonstrate excellent reliability, suggesting strong internal coherence among their items. SSC ( $\alpha = 0.848$ ) shows good reliability, though slightly lower than the others, but still well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. KS ( $\alpha = 0.902$ ) also exhibits excellent reliability, indicating that the scale effectively measures a consistent construct. Overall, the results confirm that all scales used in the study are highly reliable, ensuring consistency in the measurement of the constructs.

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha reliability test**

SSC	RSC	CSC	KS
0.848	0.926	0.921	0.902

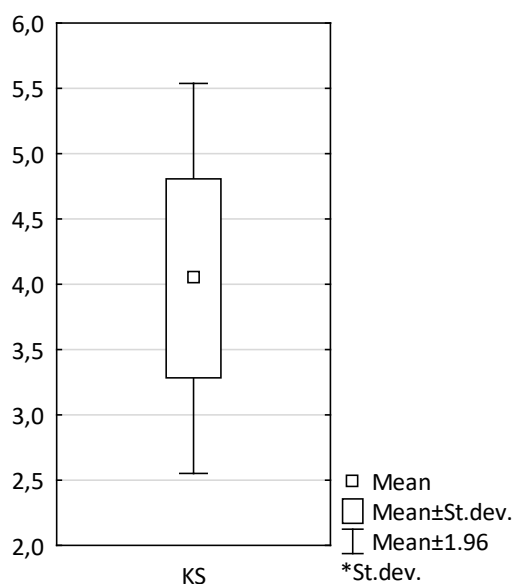
#### 4. Results

First, descriptive statistics for each variable were provided in order to diagnose the disparities in respondents' views in established businesses. The social capital variable, consisting of three sub-variables, was rated relatively high by the respondents, as the overall mean of the response was 4.13, however, referring to the individual dimensions of social capital, there are significant differences. The descriptive statistics for SSC, RSC, CSC indicate that all variables have relatively high mean values, with SSC (4.280) being the highest, followed by RSC (4.154) and CSC (3.948). It is visible that the structural dimension was rated the highest, and the relational dimension slightly lower. The cognitive dimension received the lowest mean response, i.e. below the value of 4.0 on a 5-point Likert scale (Fig. 1). It should be noticed that all variables exhibit negative skewness, meaning responses tend to be skewed toward higher values, with SSC (skew = -1.176, kurtosis = 2.021) and RSC (skew = -1.139, kurtosis = 1.795) displaying sharper peaks and more extreme values, suggesting a more leptokurtic distribution. In contrast, CSC (skew = -0.863, kurtosis = 0.806) has distributions closer to normal.



**Figure 2: Box plot for the structural, relational and cognitive social capital variables**

Descriptive statistics for the KS variable are presented graphically in Fig. 2. The mean value for the KS variable is 4.045, with a standard deviation of 0.76. KS variable exhibits negative skewness (skew = -0.735, kurtosis = 0.397), which suggests distribution closer to normal.



**Figure 2: Box plot for the knowledge sharing variable**

For all variables, medians are close to the means, suggesting relatively symmetrical distributions (Tab. 2). In terms of variability, CSC (SD=0.890) shows the highest dispersion, while SSC (SD=0.685) has the lowest, indicating more consistent responses. Overall, the results indicate that participants generally provided high ratings, with SSC and RSC showing strong internal consistency, while CSC exhibited more response variability.

The correlations between variables were calculated using the Kendall Tau correlation coefficient. The test results show a statistically significant correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the moderate strength and positive direction.

**Table 2: Correlation analysis (n=280;  $p < 0.05$ )**

	Mean	Median	S.D.	SSC	RSC	CSC	KS
SSC	4.280	4.500	0.685	1.000			
RSC	4.154	4.200	0.786	0.560	1.000		
CSC	3.948	4.000	0.890	0.569	0.656	1.000	
KS	4.045	4.000	0.762	0.481	0.437	0.433	1.000

The multiple regression analysis examined the impact of SSC, RSC, and CSC on the dependent variable KS. The model was statistically significant ( $F(3,276) = 73.856, p < 0.000$ ) and explained 44.5% of the variance in KS indicating a strong relationship. Among the predictors, SSC and CSC had significant positive effects on KS, with SSC being the strongest predictor. However, RSC was not statistically significant, suggesting it does not contribute meaningfully to the prediction of KS. The model's standard error of the estimate was 0.5704, indicating a reasonable level of prediction accuracy.

**Table 3: Summary of Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable KS**

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-statistic (df = 3,276)	p-value (F-test)	Standard Error of Estimate
0.667	0.445	0.439	73.856	<0.000	0.5704

Variable	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Unstandardized Coefficient (b)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	–	0.971	0.222	4.364	<0.001
SSC	0.390	0.434	0.074	5.861	<0.001
RSC	0.091	0.088	0.071	1.233	0.219
CSC	0.252	0.216	0.064	3.380	0.001

Overall, the results of regression analysis suggest that SSC and CSC play important roles in influencing KS, while RSC does not have a meaningful impact as the p-value is 0.219.

## 5. Conclusion

Many researchers have studied inter-organizational knowledge sharing from the perspective of social capital due to its social nature and resources embedded in relationships. An appropriate level of social capital creates an appropriate context for knowledge sharing among co-workers, which, in the case of high-quality social ties, employees are more willing to share their knowledge with other employees (Lee & Han, 2024).

The contribution of the present research is visible in the confirmation of the impact of the social capital, as a multidimensional construct, on KS level in mature organizations. The regression analysis confirmed that structural and cognitive dimensions of social capital have an impact on KS of mature firms. Therefore, it was possible to confirm hypotheses H1 and H3. At the same time, it was not possible to confirm the influence of the relational dimension of social capital on KS, which necessitated the rejection of hypothesis H2.

Within the research process, several limitations could be identified. First, we used a simplification in the form of defining mature enterprises only by the period of operation on the market, which should be clarified in future studies. Moreover, the use of the Likert scale in the study raises problems with the interpretation of questions and the bias of respondents, which can lead to ambiguous results. In addition, respondents often tend to choose extreme values, which can distort the actual attitudes.

Research on the impact of social capital on knowledge sharing in mature companies can provide management practitioners with important information on how to optimize internal processes. In the context of mature organizations, which often struggle with stagnation and limited innovation, the results of this research can indicate how strengthening relationships between employees and promoting open communication contribute to effective knowledge transfer. Practitioners can apply these findings to implementing strategies that encourage cooperation between departments, creating interdisciplinary teams, and developing mentoring programs. In addition, the research can highlight the importance of an organizational culture that is conducive to knowledge sharing, which allows mature companies to better leverage the experience and skills of their employees. As a result, these companies can become more flexible and adaptable in a dynamically changing market environment, which is crucial for their long-term success.

**AI declaration:** I confirm that no AI tools were used to the creation of this paper.

**Ethics declaration:** I declare that ethical clearance was not required for the research.

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