The Impact of Vertical Trust on Knowledge Sharing Practices in Innovation Sector Companies

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Abstract: Modern enterprises functioning in conditions of international competition seek factors that support the increase in their market value. One of these is knowledge, which may be shared or exchanged in various forms by employees, managers or employee teams in an organization. Sharing necessary information and professional experience in an organization is essential in order to resolve problems with the aim of achieving innovative solutions. A factor which supports this process of sharing knowledge is that of trust, which has an influence on tightening interpersonal cooperation within employee groups and organizations with the aim of realizing common interests. The most significant entity creating trust in an organization is that of a manager who undertakes actions on behalf of building trust between employees and their superior. The acceptance of the assumption that a manager has an impact on the level of organizational trust facilitated the formulation of the aim of this paper, which is the identification of trust between employees and their head, while also its impact on the practice of sharing knowledge in enterprises of the innovative sector. The assumed aim was executed thanks to the application of the phone survey method with the CATI technique (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview). On the basis of the method of random sampling, a sample was created consisting of 575 employees in enterprises of the innovative sector. As a result of the research conducted, a statistically significant dependency was discovered between the indicators of vertical trust and sharing knowledge, while also experience on the part of employees in the analysed enterprises. The positive impact of trust on the process of accumulating knowledge and the frequency of sharing it have been indicated.

Keywords: Organizational trust, Vertical trust, Knowledge, Sharing knowledge

1. Introduction

In the 21st century economy, innovation and knowledge are key to achieving competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Knowledge is the most valuable resource because it embodies intangible assets, routines and creative processes that are difficult to imitate. In the process of developing new technologies and products, knowledge sharing (KS) is essential. Through knowledge sharing, employees' knowledge base increases and the chance for innovative ideas to emerge increases (Kmieciak, 2020). A key question is what makes individuals effective in sharing knowledge with others in organisations. Trust is considered to be one of the factors behind the decision to share one's knowledge. It can be defined as "the extent to which a [party] is confident in and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another" (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). Trust in an organisation includes mutual respect and understanding, which promote opportunities for effective pooling and use of knowledge resources (Kamaşak, Bulutlar, 2010). In the knowledge sharing process, the relationship between the manager and the other team members is important. These relationships are often built on a foundation of trust. One can speak in this case of vertical trust, i.e. between a manager and their subordinates. This trust must be nurtured by managers in order to achieve positive results (Afsar, Masood, 2018). It seems interesting to explore the relationship between these subjects of trust. However, little empirical research has been conducted on the correlation between vertical trust and knowledge sharing (e.g. Le, Lei, 2018). Therefore, explaining how vertical trust influences knowledge sharing and reduces reluctance to share knowledge will bring valuable insights into new pathways to organisational knowledge building. To fill the theoretical gap discussed above, four research questions were formulated:

RQ1: To what extent is there trust between manager and employees in innovation sector companies?

RQ2.: What relationships are there between vertical trust attributes and knowledge sharing indicators?

RQ3.: What attributes of a manager conducive to trust have an impact on knowledge sharing?

RQ4.: To what extent do vertical trust attributes minimise employees' reluctance to share knowledge?

2. Theoretical Background

In companies operating in innovative sectors, knowledge is seen as a critical resource for achieving competitive advantage. It is one of the key resources for the success of both individuals and organisations (Pereira, Mohiya, 2021). Sharing knowledge refers to activities in which knowledge is shared or exchanged in various forms by employees, groups or organisations (Meyer 2023). Knowledge is information that has been analyzed and organized in such a way that it can be understood and used to solve problems and make decisions (Cao et al., 2024). The creation of new knowledge is a key activity of organisations, requiring careful management. One important aspect of knowledge management is to encourage individuals in the organisation to share knowledge with other members of the organisation. Knowledge sharing is the mutual transmission of information and experience from one actor to another. It involves sharing the necessary information and work experience within a team to solve problems to achieve innovative solutions. The process of knowledge sharing between individuals involves the transformation of knowledge held by an individual into a form that can be understood, assimilated and used by other individuals (Pangil et al., 2014). In the context of team collaboration, knowledge sharing enables team members to achieve synergy by reusing, modifying and applying collective wisdom to solve new problems (García-Sánchez, 2019).

Trust is an important driver of knowledge sharing. People will be more inclined to share knowledge with others who can be trusted than with those whom they distrust. In the case of organisations, one can speak of organisational trust, which is defined as the perceived trustworthiness of the organisation as estimated by the dimensions of transparency, honesty, competence, benevolence and reliability, and based on personal experience and identification (Pirson, 2008). In an organisation, the subject of trust can be an individual employee, colleague, supervisor or subordinate (Shah et al., 2024), an employee team (de Jong et al., 2021), management (Dirks, de Jong, 2022) or the organisation (Bai et al., 2024). Tam and Lim(2009) suggested that organisational trust can be considered at two levels: trust between co-workers (horizontal trust) and trust in superiors (vertical trust). Trust in coworkers is defined as "the willingness of a person to be vulnerable to the actions of fellow coworkers whose behaviour and actions that person cannot control" (Tan Lim, 2009, p. 46). It can be conceptualised as an implicit construct based on an individual's own tendency to trust others and the perceived trustworthiness of other team members, which in turn leads to collaborative and monitoring behaviour between team members (Costa, Anderson, 2011). In contrast, Tan and Lim (2009, p. 46) defined vertical trust as "an employee's willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of the organization, whose behavior and actions he or she cannot control". This trust refers to the complementary trust experienced or expressed by subordinates and superiors towards each other at any given time. Vertical trust as a variable in the supervisor-subordinate relationship works reciprocally and includes both the trust of a subordinate in his or her supervisor and vice versa (Özyilmaz, 2010). In other words, employees' trust in their superiors tends to be related to their trust in management in general (Weibel et al, 2016). Empirical research confirms the relationship between trust and knowledge sharing. Afsar et al. (2018), noted that trust motivates employees to collaborate and support their ideas through reciprocity and knowledge sharing. Hsu and Chang (2014), found a positive relationship between interpersonal trust and knowledge sharing. Employees who trust their leader and co-workers are more likely to submit to their leader's guidance and opinions without questioning their credibility, leading to more innovative behaviour (Zafar et al., 2024). According to Kmieciak (2020), vertical trust is positively related to the generation and implementation of innovative ideas. Trust in supervisors enhances identification with the organisation, job performance (strongest level of positive correlation), job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Rahayuningsih, 2019). Trust in the manager increases knowledge sharing by reducing the fear of losing one's unique value and improving the willingness to document knowledge (Renzl, 2006).

In sum, the cited studies allow a conclusion that trust in an organisation, and in particular vertical trust, is a significant variable that is useful for explaining knowledge sharing processes in an organisation.

3. Methods and Sample

In Poland, research on the impact of vertical trust on knowledge sharing in companies of innovative industries is relatively rarely undertaken. The Author's intention is to fill this research gap by analysing the impact of vertical trust attributes on knowledge sharing and on the reduction of reluctance to share knowledge among employees working in innovative industries companies. Therefore, an empirical study was conducted among employees in innovative sectors in which a one-time survey method was used on an unweighted sample. The research tool was a standardised survey questionnaire. The survey design was based on a five-point Likert scale. The survey was conducted using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) telephone survey. The sampling frame was innovative industry enterprises employing more than 50 people. Based on the random selection method, a research sample was constructed consisting of 575 individuals employed in companies in innovative industries, i.e. pharmacy (25.2%), energy (23.3%), automotive (26.4%) and IT (25%). The surveyed employees were white-collar (97.2%) and blue-collar (2.8%) workers, with work experience of 4–8 years (10.3%), 9–13 years (23.8%), 14–18 years (33.7%) and 19 or more years (32.2%). Due to random sampling, the survey was performed on a representative sample using the following parameters: margin of error α 4%, confidence interval: 95%.

4. Findings

A factor influencing knowledge sharing among employees is organisational trust, in particular trust between a manager and his or her subordinates. To identify this relationship, a research construct was developed consisting of statements exploring aspects of vertical trust in detail, based on, among others, the scale proposed by Krot and Lewicka (2016). In the study of employees of companies in innovative industries, vertical trust was identified at a higher than average level ($\bar{x}$= 4.12, SD=0.840) (Table 1). According to the respondents, subordinates' trust in their superiors is mainly inspired by managers keeping their promises to subordinates, evaluating employees fairly, being open to talking to employees about their concerns and is also reflected in being loyal to the manager.

Arithmetic averages identified differences in the degree to which vertical trust attributes were present in different sized companies. A Kruskal–Wallis rank-sum ANOVA test was performed to identify these differences. Statistically significant differences were found for the attributes: VT1- H =15.87554; p =.0072; VT4- H =15.97103 p =.0069; VT7 - H =16.60897 p =.0053. No differences were observed for the other attributes.

Table 3: Measures of central tendency and dispersion of vertical trust attribute (VT) scores

ITEM	$\bar{x}$	SD	Me	Mo	Min	Max
VT1 I have confidence in the manager	4,12	0,840	4	4	2	5
VT2 In the company, employee motivation is high because supervisors trust them	4,03	0,895	4	4	2	5
VT3 In the company, superiors primarily act as advisors and intellectual partners to subordinates	4,08	0,874	4	4	2	5
VT4 In my company there is an atmosphere of genuine mutual trust between employees and superiors	4,05	0,859	4	4	2	5
VT5 I believe that my boss makes good decisions	4,07	0,872	4	5	2	5
VT6 If I had trouble with anything regarding work, I could safely discuss my concerns with my supervisor	4,10	0,851	4	5	2	5
VT7 I am loyal to my boss	4,11	0,880	4	5	2	5
VT8 I believe that my supervisor evaluates employees fairly	4,11	0,867	4	5	2	5
VT9 My boss is interested in my needs if they arise	4,04	0,852	4	4	2	5
VT10 I believe my supervisor makes good decisions	3,98	0,894	4	4	2	5
VT11 Generally in the company, managers keep their promises	4,12	0,834	4	5	2	5
VT12 I believe that my boss's motives and intentions are good	4,02	0,835	4	4	2	5

Source: Author's own elaboration

Rating scale: 1 — I strongly disagree, 2 — I disagree, 3 — I neither agree nor disagree, 4 — I agree, 5 — I strongly agree

Legend: $\bar{x}$ — mean, SD — standard deviation, Me — median, Mo — mode, Min — minimum, Max — maximum

The level of vertical trust in an organisation is significantly influenced by the manager, who can stimulate trust-based behaviour in their subordinates. In a study of employees of innovative industry companies, the characteristics of managers were analysed, recognising that they have a strong influence on building trust in relations with subordinates and employees of other work teams. Transparency in decision-making (FM1) ($\bar{x}$=4.28, SD=0.760 on a scale where 1 — very low, 2 — low, 3 — medium, 4 — high, 5 — very high) was considered to be the most important trait of a manager enhancing subordinates' trust in him/her. The next most important characteristics of a manager are compassion and empathy (FM2) ($\bar{x}$=4.19, SD=0.803), consistency in decision-making (FM3) ($\bar{x}$=4.19, SD=0.753), attitude of partnership and understanding (FM4) ($\bar{x}$=4.18, SD=0.725) and showing reliability in actions (FM5) ($\bar{x}$=4.18 SD=0.831). Slightly lower scores were given for attitude of acceptance of others and open mindedness (FM6) ($\bar{x}$=4.16, SD=0.826), manager's skills and competence (FM7) ($\bar{x}$=4.13, SD=0.831), manager's timbre of voice and appropriate communication (verbal, non-verbal, written and visual) (FM8) ($\bar{x}$=4.11, SD=785), honesty and observance of rules (FM9) ($\bar{x}$=4.09, SD=0.850) and displaying integrity and ethics (FM10) ($\bar{x}$=4.08, SD=0.839). Thus, the ideal manager who gains trust of his or her subordinates should have qualities that are conducive to creating space for the development, collaboration, inclusion and involvement of employees in achieving the organisation's goals.

An analysis of the characteristics of managers that foster vertical trust building provides interesting insights. Spearman's rank correlation analysis between traits of managers and attributes of trust revealed relationships of varying strength (Table 2). The most positive statistical relationships occurred between the manager's timbre of voice and appropriate communication (verbal, non-verbal, written and visual) (FM3) and VT1, VT2, VT6, VT7, VT8, VT9, VT10, VT11 and VT12, with limited strength. Stronger correlations were found between compassion and empathy demonstrated by the manager (FM2) and VT1, VT6, VT7, VT8, VT9, VT10, VT11 and VT12, and transparency in the manager's behaviour (FM10) and VT1, VT3, VT7, VT8, VT9, VT10, VT11 and VT12. Besides, correlations were observed between the manager's displaying integrity and ethics (FM6) and VT1, VT7, VT8, VT9, VT10, VT11 and VT12, and the manager's showing reliability in actions (FM9) and VT1, VT7, VT8, VT9, VT10, VT11 and VT12.

Table 2: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between manager characteristics supporting trust building (FM) and vertical trust (VT) attributes

	FM1	FM2	FM3	FM4	FM5	FM6	FM7	FM8	FM9	FM10
VT1	0,589*	0,491*	0,439*	0,486*	0,506*	0,056**	0,135*	0,106*	0,079**	0,046
VT2	0,063**	0,052**	0,008	0,020	0,061**	0,058**	0,046	0,082*	0,045	0,047
VT3	0,094*	0,037	0,045	0,034	0,076**	0,029	0,042	0,078**	0,036	0,046
VT4	0,041	0,021	0,054**	0,026	0,008	0,045	0,030	0,045	0,061**	0,046
VT5	0,040	0,045	0,051**	0,014	0,018	0,086*	0,025	0,017	0,109*	0,087*
VT6	0,056**	0,092*	0,061**	0,041	0,044	0,052**	0,001	0,092*	0,088*	0,016
VT7	0,619*	0,610*	0,496*	0,546*	0,496*	0,038	0,098*	0,128*	0,070**	0,043
VT8	0,648*	0,653*	0,441*	0,599*	0,565*	0,007	0,110*	0,101*	0,025	0,008
VT9	0,613*	0,471*	0,360*	0,470*	0,551*	0,007	0,087*	0,109*	0,014	0,008
VT10	0,598*	0,419*	0,470*	0,458*	0,566*	0,055**	0,082*	0,087*	0,106*	0,046
VT11	0,125*	0,115*	0,115*	0,056**	0,118*	0,026	0,063**	0,090*	0,048	0,012
VT12	0,097*	0,088*	0,079**	0,051**	0,086*	0,034	0,069**	0,098*	0,060**	0,009

*p<0,001, **p<0,005

In the process of creating innovative solutions, the sharing of knowledge by employees with their colleagues as well as with employees from other teams in the company plays an important role. An analysis of Table 3 shows that respondents rate knowledge sharing below average ($\bar{x}$=2.31, SD=0.963). The statement "Lack of knowledge accumulation is a major problem in my company" was rated highest, indicating a significant barrier to knowledge sharing. Slightly lower rated were the statements: "Employees find time to share knowledge with both colleagues and employees from other teams". "Employees are willing to share knowledge that someone asks for", "People with expert knowledge are always ready to help colleagues" and "Employees have opportunities to pass on knowledge and experience to other employees". The lowest rating was given to the company's openness to knowledge sharing and embedding knowledge sharing in daily working practices. Thus, a significant barrier to the creation of new knowledge is a company's lack of openness to knowledge sharing and the lack of knowledge accumulation within an organisation, which hinders the development of innovation in the surveyed economic sectors.

Table 3: Measures of central tendency and dispersion of knowledge sharing (KS) indicator scores

Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD		Me	Mo	Min	Max
KS1 Employees in my team are willing to share knowledge that someone asks for	2,34	0,998		3	3	1	5
KS2 Employees in my team find time to share knowledge with colleagues	2,41	0,938		3	3	1	5
KS3 Employees in my company are willing to share knowledge that someone asks for	2,34	0,925		3	3	1	5
KS4 Employees in my company find time to share knowledge with other employees	2,41	0,875		3	3	1	5

Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD		Me	Mo	Min	Max
KS5 Employees in my company have opportunities to pass on knowledge and experience to other employees	2,29	0,866		2	3	1	4
KS6 My company is open to sharing knowledge among employees	2,12	0,949		2	3	1	5
KS7 In my company, knowledge sharing is embedded in daily working practices	2,24	0,881		2	3	1	4
KS8 In my company, people with expert knowledge are always ready to help colleagues	2,31	0,951		2	3	1	5
KS9 My colleagues routinely share knowledge during work	2,20	0,935		2	3	1	5
KS10 Lack of knowledge accumulation is a major problem in my company	2,48	1,113		2	3	1	5

Source: Author's own elaboration

Rating scale: 1 — I strongly disagree, 2 — I disagree, 3 — I neither agree nor disagree, 4 — I agree, 5 — I strongly agree

Legend: $\bar{x}$ — mean, SD — standard deviation, Me — median, Mo — mode, Min — minimum, Max — maximum.

The study assumed that there were significant correlations between vertical trust attributes and knowledge sharing indicators (Table 4). Spearman's r correlation coefficient analysis was used to diagnose these relationships. The most significant correlations between vertical trust and knowledge sharing indicators occurred for the attribute "superiors primarily act as advisors and intellectual partners to subordinates" (VT3) and KS1, KS2, KS3, KS4, KS6, KS7, KS8, KS9, KS10. These correlations were negative. Further, statistical relationships were identified between evaluating employees fairly (VT8) and KS2, KS3, KS4, KS6 and KS10; being loyal to the manager (VT7) and KS4, KS5, KS6, KS10; and the manager's interest in employees' needs (VT9) and KS5, KS6, KS9, KS10. All correlation coefficients were negative.

Table 4: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between the attributes of vertical trust (VT) and indicators of knowledge sharing (KS)

	SK1	SK2	SK3	SK4	SK5	SK6	SK7	SK8	SK9	SK10
VT1	-0,009	-0,037	-0,185*	-0,011	-0,026	-0,215*	-0.007	0,021	-0,182*	0,002
VT2	-0,205*	-0,068**	-0,055**	-0,214*	-0,057**	-0,231*	-0,045	-0,031	-0,069**	-0,057**
VT3	-0,233*	-0,187*	-0,215*	-0,212*	-0,007	-0,270*	-0,094*	-0,061*	-0,200*	-0,056**
VT4	-0,199*	-0,040	-0,062**	-0,053	-0,060**	-0,211*	-0,082*	-0,014	-0,072**	0,002
SVT 5	-0,058**	-0,039	-0,027	-0,052	-0,006	0,007	-0,022	-0,002	-0,020	0,079**
VT6	-0,043	-0,017	-0,024	-0,008	-0,026	-0,003	-0,023	-0,022	-0,068**	0,026
VT7	-0,052**	-0,068**	-0,066**	-0,206*	-0,190*	-0,198*	-0,077**	-0,013	-0,074**	-0,187*
VT8	-0,016	-0,193*	-0,181*	-0,194*	-0,064**	-0,210*	-0,036	-0,011	-0,068**	-0,213*
VT9	-0,012	-0,064**	-0,067**	0,006	-0,194*	-0,202*	-0,012	0,021	-0,205*	-0,226*
VT1 0	-0,019	-0,042	-0,082**	-0,011	-0,204*	-0,215*	-0,030	0,001	-0,048	-0,067**
VT1 1	0,003	-0,011	-0,011	-0,012	-0,024	-0,186*	-0,050	0,002	-0,027	-0,028
VT1 2	0,037	-0,018	-0,037	-0,002	-0,048	-0,041	-0,025	0,042	-0.019	-0,052**

*p<0,001,**p<0,005

The manager is the central actor of vertical trust. It can be assumed that a manager's attributes are conducive to knowledge sharing among employees (Table 5). The study found that the strongest statistical relationships occurred between emphasising reliability and ethicality (FM10) and openness to knowledge sharing by employees (KS6) and embedding knowledge sharing in daily working practices (KS7). Another characteristic with multiple associations with knowledge sharing indicators is the manager's skills and competences (FM7), which mainly influences the indicators: employees have opportunities to transfer knowledge and experience to other employees (KS5) and the company's openness to knowledge sharing by employees (KS6). On the other hand, an attitude of acceptance of others and an open mind (FM6) mainly influences the willingness to share knowledge that someone asks for (KS3), the openness of employees to share knowledge (KS6) and the creation of opportunities to transfer knowledge and experience to other employees (KS5).

Table 5: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between manager characteristics supporting trust building (FM) and knowledge sharing (KS) indicators

	SK1	SK2	SK3	SK4	SK5	SK6	SK7	SK8	SK9	SK10
FM1	-0,015	-0,041	-0,028	-0,034	-0,053**	-0,010	-0,025	-0,017	-0,161*	-0,048
FM2	-0,027	-0,030	-0,155*	-0,166*	-0,036	-0,186*	-0,203*	-0,035	-0,047	-0,034
FM3	0,004	-0,172*	-0,027	-0,029	-0,040	-0,163*	-0,033	-0,014	-0,033	-0,172*
FM4	0,037	-0,017	-0,052**	-0,041	-0,023	-0,049	-0,025	-0,155*	-0,005	-0,019
FM5	0,015	-0,027	-0,176*	-0,028	-0,041	-0,197*	-0.183*	-0,017	-0,019	0,004
FM6	-0,023	-0,042	-0,196*	-0,172*	-0,177*	-0,179*	-0,160*	-0,034	-0,166*	-0,045
FM7	-0,030	-0,001	-0,171*	-0,047	-0,209*	-0,261*	-0,052**	-0,164*	-0,052**	-0,08
FM8	0,006	-0,032	-0,039	-0,026	-0,181*	-0,049	-0,156*	-0,161*	-0,163*	0,005
FM9	-0,020	-0,039	-0,165*	-0,046	-0,030	-0,223*	-0,203*	-0,012	-0,165*	-0,181*
FM10	0,008	-0,188*	-0,188*	-0,155*	-0,047	-0,243*	-0,201*	-0,038	0,181*	-0.186*

*p<0,001,**p<0,005

The knowledge sharing process in companies faces numerous barriers. One of them is the reluctance of employees to share it. Research shows that the main reason for reluctance to share knowledge (RSK) is the belief that the people they work with should not access their workspace (RSK5) ($\bar{x}$=3.24, SD=0.937). Besides, employees' reluctance to share knowledge is due to not sharing useful information with others (RSK3) ($\bar{x}$=3.14, SD=1.148), protecting their ideas from being used by others in the company (RSK4) ($\bar{x}$=3,09, SD=0.990), reluctance to transform personal knowledge and experience into organisational knowledge (RSK1) ($\bar{x}$=3.07, SD=1.030) and failure to share innovative achievements with other employees (RSK2) ($\bar{x}$=2.93, SD=1.271).

Vertical trust can reduce employees' reluctance to share knowledge with other employees. Analysis of Table 6 confirms the potential of trust attributes to reduce employees' reluctance and fear of knowledge sharing, This is especially true for the attribute Employees' motivation is high because supervisors trust them (VT2), which reduces most of the examined reasons for reluctance to share knowledge, i.e. RSK1, RSK2, RSK3, RSK4 and RSK5. Also, the attribute of acting as advisors and intellectual partners to subordinates (VT3) reduces most of the reasons for reluctance to share knowledge, i.e. RSK1, RSK2, RSK4 and RSK5. The remaining attributes of trust reduce the causes of reluctance only to a small extent. In conclusion, vertical trust is a factor that reduces employees' reluctance to share knowledge. In particular, it reduces concerns about unauthorised use of ideas by other employees in the company and employee reluctance to share knowledge due to not sharing useful information with others.

Table 6: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between attributes of vertical trust (VT) and reasons for reluctance to share knowledge (RSK)

	RSK1	RSK2	RSK3	RSK4	RSK5
VT1	-0,040	-0,032	-0,029	-0,165*	-0,025
VT2	-0,183*	-0,202*	-0,170*	-0,180*	-0,159*
VT3	-0,159*	-0,168*	-0,019	-0,176*	0,051**
VT4	-0,001	-0,011	-0,001	-0,164*	0,030
SVT5	-0,016	-0,012	0,004	-0.042	-0,168*
VT6	-0,027	-0,034	-0,015	0,155*	-0,172*

	RSK1	RSK2	RSK3	RSK4	RSK5
VT7	-0,043	-0,054**	-0,031	-0,197*	-0,019
VT8	-0,035	-0,036	-0,032	-0,180*	-0,022
VT9	-0,176*	-0,156*	-0,050**	-0,195*	-0,036
VT10	-0,016	-0,005	-0,032	-0,192*	-0,029
VT11	-0,018	0,018	-0,174*	-0,158*	-0,026
VT12	-0,030	-0,045	-0,198*	-0,037	-0,003

*p<0,001,**p<0,005

5. Conclusions

Trust is a factor that improves a company's competitiveness in the market, as it allows the effective use of employee potential to create innovation. The study on the mediating role of vertical trust in knowledge sharing processes made it possible to answer the research questions posed. The analysis of the research results indicates the above-average level of vertical trust, with the highest value achieved by the attributes: keeping promises made to subordinates by the manager, evaluating employees fairly, being open to talking to employees about their concerns and being loyal to the manager. They create an environment conducive to knowledge sharing within the company. When vertical trust is high, employees feel secure and are more likely to act creatively (Zafar et al., 2024). Important in building vertical trust are the manager's qualities such as compassion and empathy demonstrated towards employees, transparency in decision-making, consistency in decision-making, an attitude of partnership and understanding, showing reliability in actions, showing interest in employees' needs, which foster trust between subordinates and the manager.

Vertical trust positively influences knowledge sharing. The study has shown that trust in both leaders and colleagues has a substantial impact on team knowledge sharing, with higher levels of trust positively affecting knowledge sharing behaviours (Liang et al., 2024). Also, the Author found that vertical trust attributes are important moderators of knowledge sharing, in particular, the company's openness to knowledge sharing by employees, employees' willingness to share knowledge with other employees that someone asks them to share, routinely sharing knowledge during work and finding time to share knowledge with other employees.

The manager plays an important role in the knowledge sharing process. The study has shown that his/her qualities: exhibiting integrity and ethics, leadership skills and competences, and displaying an attitude of acceptance of others and having an open mind significantly enhance the knowledge sharing process of employees.

There are numerous barriers to knowledge sharing processes. Knowledge sharing can be hindered by several factors, such as lack of trust or fear of loss of power or status, cultural barriers and lack of incentives (Usmanova et al., 2020). A common obstacle is knowledge concealment, whereby an individual withholds knowledge requested by another person (Anand et al, 2022). The Author's research identified the reasons for reluctance to share knowledge, which are primarily related to the fear of it being used by other employees for their own purposes.

In the study, it was interesting to look for correlations between attributes of vertical trust and reluctance to share knowledge. Vertical trust attributes such as employees' motivation being high because superiors trust them, superiors' acting as advisors and intellectual partners to subordinates and being interested in the needs, if any, of subordinates reduce most of the reasons for reluctance to share knowledge.

In conclusion, the results of the conducted research fairly unambiguously indicate the importance of vertical trust in knowledge sharing processes aimed at creating innovations by employees of companies in innovative industries. However, they are insufficient to make a clear statement about the strength of the impact of trust on the creation of new knowledge and innovation. The results of this study can help practitioners and managers to create an organisational environment that encourages employees to share their knowledge, leading to increased innovation, productivity, and effective decision-making.

The Author of this article would like to point out the limitations of using the results of the research on the role of managers versus stimulating innovation in enterprises in Poland. The study was conducted using the survey method, which was intended to outline the complex issue of the influence of trust between a superior and a subordinate and to provide a starting point for broader research into its role in knowledge sharing processes.

Further research into the determinants of the impact of vertical trust on knowledge sharing in organisations is worth undertaking. A suggestion for future research is to go beyond knowledge sharing and link the discoveries made to employee innovation. The correlation of vertical trust and knowledge sharing with innovation has rarely been addressed in recent literature.

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