

# Trust and Knowledge Sharing in Temporary Project Teams: A Literature Review

Geraldine Hamill

Technological University of Dublin, Ireland

[Geraldine.hamill@tudublin.ie](mailto:Geraldine.hamill@tudublin.ie)

**Abstract:** Knowledge has become a pivotal organisational asset, with its value realised primarily through effective sharing. This is especially critical in project-based organisations (PBOs), where temporary teams operate in dynamic environments. Trust is a key enabler influencing knowledge sharing within these teams. This paper reviews literature on the relationship between trust and knowledge sharing in project teams, focusing on how trust facilitates or impedes knowledge flow. It examines mechanisms for trust development in temporary, team-based organisational structures and explores the concept of swift trust as a model for rapid trust formation. The review identifies gaps in understanding how traditional trust models apply to temporary teams and highlights unique challenges in PBOs, where trust must often be established quickly among members without prior relationships. Findings suggest that while trust remains essential for effective knowledge sharing, its development in temporary teams relies on different mechanisms than in long-term teams. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for early trust-building strategies in temporary teams and calls for further research on trust dynamics in these contexts.

**Keywords:** Knowledge sharing, Trust, Swift trust, Tacit and explicit knowledge

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## 1. Introduction

In today's dynamic business environment organisations are confronted by challenges arising from economic uncertainty, technological innovation, and growing environmental responsibilities. This volatile context necessitates organisational agility and adaptability to ensure both survival and long term success. Drucker (1993) identified knowledge as the most important productive asset, a view widely supported as a key driver of competitive advantage (Azeem *et al.*, 2021). However, this potential is only realised when knowledge is embedded in a supportive and enabling environment (Davenport and Prusak, 2005). While knowledge originates at the individual level (Grant, 1996), its value grows when shared collectively, enhancing team capability and organisational learning.

Knowledge sharing has therefore become central for both practitioners and scholars (Nonaka, 1994; Anwar *et al.*, 2019). Within organisations, it is especially prioritised at the team level, where collaboration, performance, and overall success are directly influenced by how effectively knowledge is shared. This sharing of knowledge promotes better team outcomes (Lee *et al.*, 2015), supports innovation (Rahmi and Indarti, 2019), and stimulates creativity among employees (Zeb *et al.*, 2019). It also contributes to organisational learning and strengthens commitment (Curado and Vieira, 2019), facilitates change initiatives (Park and Kim, 2015), and enhances organisational effectiveness by leveraging shared expertise (Mueller, 2014).

The emphasis on knowledge sharing is particularly significant in project-based organisations (PBOs), such as those in engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) (Hobday, 2000). In these settings, tasks often require multidisciplinary collaboration, making knowledge sharing vital for successful project delivery. Furthermore, projects in PBOs are inherently varied (Project Management Body of Knowledge, 2021), each one presents opportunities for learning through shared experiences. However, despite its value consistent knowledge sharing remains a challenge (Mueller, 2014) with barriers that can hinder innovation, and overall organisational viability (Rutten *et al.*, 2016).

Among the various factors influencing knowledge sharing, trust stands out as a critical enabler (Kipkosgei *et al.*, 2020; Rutten *et al.*, 2016). Researchers have increasingly explored the interplay between trust and knowledge sharing (Anwar *et al.*, 2019), often highlighting its central role in facilitating open communication and collaboration within teams (Rutten *et al.*, 2016), which ultimately enhances organisational outcomes (Mueller, 2014).

Recent empirical research details the pivotal role of prior ties and familiarity in facilitating early trust formation within temporary project teams, particularly in complex and interdisciplinary settings such as construction (Buvik and Rolfsen, 2015; Buvik, 2019). The temporary nature of project-based teams often preclude the luxury of building trust through extended interactions, challenging traditional trust models that assume gradual trust develops over time. This gap highlights the need for alternative mechanisms, such as swift trust, to explain trust

dynamics in temporary teams (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996), yet the conditions under which swift trust transitions into more resilient trust remain insufficiently understood (McLaren and Loosemore, 2019).

Having established the importance and complexity of knowledge sharing in project teams, this review employs a structured methodology to gather and synthesise existing research, as detailed below.

## 2. Methods

This literature review was conducted using a rigorous approach to identify, select, and synthesise relevant studies on knowledge sharing and trust within project-based organisational contexts.

A comprehensive search was performed across multiple academic databases including IEEE Xplore, Emerald Insights, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as “knowledge sharing,” “knowledge transfer,” “trust,” “project teams,” “project-based organisations,” and “virtual teams” were combined using Boolean operators to capture a broad yet focused set of publications.

Inclusion criteria were applied to select peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and authoritative reports published primarily between 2011 and 2025 to ensure relevance. Studies were included if they addressed factors influencing knowledge sharing, trust, within teams and project-based settings. Both empirical and theoretical works were considered to provide a comprehensive understanding. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by full-text reviews. Key data extracted included research objectives, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and findings related to enablers and inhibitors of knowledge sharing and trust development. Thematic synthesis was employed to organise findings into coherent themes, such as trust as a critical enabler, and challenges in temporary teams.

This review concentrates on the role of trust in shaping knowledge sharing practices among project teams in PBOs. It begins with a conceptual overview of knowledge sharing, then examines the nature of knowledge itself. The review then considers both the enablers and inhibitors of knowledge sharing, before focusing in detail on trust as a central factor influencing the sharing of knowledge in project teams.

## 3. Conceptualising Knowledge Sharing

The literature presents various interpretations of knowledge sharing. Generally, it is seen as a behaviour initiated by individuals who voluntarily share insights and expertise (Swart *et al.*, 2014). Knowledge sharing involves making one’s knowledge accessible to others often through the sharing of skills, experiences, and insights (Caruso, 2017), and through effective communication (Xue *et al.*, 2011). This exchange not only enhances the receiver’s understanding (Davenport and Prusak, 2005) but also supports the development of individual and collective capabilities.

Swart *et al.* (2014) define knowledge sharing in teams as exchanging task relevant ideas that reshape existing knowledge, enhancing decision making through diverse perspectives. According to Lee *et al.* (2015, p. 3), “members of a team share knowledge with one another when they have access to other team members through which they can garner and integrate knowledge and can anticipate value through sharing”. Nonaka (1994) also noted the crucial role of team interaction in effective knowledge sharing. Ultimately, these exchanges foster a learning culture and support stronger organisational commitment (Curado and Vieira, 2019).

## 4. Understanding the Nature of Knowledge in Knowledge Sharing

To understand knowledge sharing fully, it is important to first understand what knowledge entails. Knowledge is often classified into two main categories: explicit and tacit (Polanyi, 1966). Explicit knowledge is codified and easily documented, taking the form of manuals, procedures, blueprints, and other tangible resources (Maravilhas and Martins, 2019). It is easily articulated and widely shared (Grant, 1996). Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is embedded in personal experience and is harder to communicate (Nonaka, 1994). It consists of insights, routines, beliefs, and intuitions (Maravilhas and Martins, 2019), and is shaped by values, emotions, and lived experience (Nonaka, 1994). Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is subjective, fluid, and deeply tied to context. Its complexity often prevents individuals from expressing it easily, because it is difficult to articulate (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Additionally, tacit knowledge evolves over time and adapts through continuous interaction with the environment, making it dynamic and experiential in nature (Davenport and Prusak, 2005). For this reason, effective knowledge sharing strategies must account for both the explicit and tacit dimensions of knowledge. Understanding these two dimensions is essential for identifying the factors that enable and inhibit knowledge sharing, particularly within project-based teams, where both explicit and tacit knowledge sharing is essential.

## 5. Enablers and Inhibitors of Knowledge Sharing

Sharing knowledge is a fragile and complex process, which is dependent on an understanding of the enablers as well as the potential inhibitors which influence the practice.

### 5.1 Enablers of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing enablers are factors at the individual, team, and/or organisational level which improve the knowledge holder's willingness to share knowledge. Such factors, if implemented correctly, will significantly contribute to the knowledge sharing process. Table 1 below summarises the enablers of knowledge sharing identified within the literature.

**Table 1: Knowledge sharing enablers**

Enablers of Knowledge Sharing	Description	Author/Year
<b>Trust</b>	Builds psychological safety and openness to share knowledge	Meyerson <i>et al.</i> (1996), Rosendaal and Biilsma-Frankema (2013), Rutten <i>et al.</i> (2016), Olaisen and Revang (2017), Ouakouak and Ouedraogo, (2018), Zeb <i>et al.</i> (2019)
<b>Team leader attributes</b>	Leadership that encourages open communication	Xue <i>et al.</i> (2011), Zeb <i>et al.</i> (2019)
<b>Relationships</b>	Strong bond among team members	Olaisen and Revang (2017), Wei, Y., Miraglia, S. (2017)
<b>Cognitive diversity</b>	Different thinking styles enhances the variety of perspective shared	Rahmi and Indarti (2019)
<b>Knowledge heterogeneity</b>	Differences in background knowledge	Pinjani and Palvia (2013), Wu <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<b>Team identification</b>	Strong identification with a team	Rosendaal and Biilsma-Frankema (2013)

Among the numerous enablers, trust consistently emerges as the most influential factor in facilitating knowledge sharing. Not only is it significant in its own right, but trust also underpins several other concepts that contribute to effective knowledge sharing (Ouakouak and Ouedraogo, 2018; Anwar *et al.*, 2019). Empirical studies have demonstrated that higher levels of trust among colleagues correlate with a greater willingness to share knowledge (Rutten *et al.*, 2016) and can even accelerate the pace at which knowledge is exchanged (Zeb *et al.*, 2019). Trust is particularly vital when individuals are concerned about how their shared knowledge might be used. Rosendaal and Biilsma-Frankema (2013) argue that knowledge sharing is more likely to occur when the provider trusts that recipients will not exploit the knowledge for personal gain. This is especially pertinent in distributed or remote teams, where virtual interactions amplify the importance of trust in shaping collaborative behaviours (Olaisen and Revang, 2017).

The collective findings suggest that trust plays a central role in cultivating environments where knowledge is freely exchanged. However, despite the significance of trust as a facilitator, knowledge sharing is often impeded by a range of organisational and individual inhibitors. These inhibitors must also be considered to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that shape knowledge sharing.

### 5.2 Inhibitors of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing inhibitors are factors which restrict or prevent the knowledge holder's willingness to share knowledge and, therefore, may prevent the organisation from reaching its full potential. Table 2 below summarises the main inhibitors of knowledge sharing.

**Table 2: Knowledge sharing inhibitors**

Inhibitors of Knowledge Sharing	Description	Author/Year
<b>Hoarding knowledge:</b>	Fear of losing value or power	Muqadas <i>et al.</i> (2016), Jugdev and Wishart (2014)

Inhibitors of Knowledge Sharing	Description	Author/Year
Poor leadership	Fails to support knowledge sharing	Boies <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Lack of trust/distrust	Inhibits willingness to share.	Rutten <i>et al.</i> (2016)
Time constraints	Sharing seen as time consuming	Cleveland and Ellis (2015),
Organisational culture	May discourage sharing	Wei and Miraglia (2017)
Poor communication skills	Prevents effective sharing	Cleveland and Ellis (2015)

Key inhibitors include knowledge hoarding, poor leadership, and lack of trust. Hoarding often stems from fear of losing one’s unique value and power (Muqadas *et al.*, 2016). Bureaucratic leadership styles further discourage sharing, particularly when leaders fail to promote openness and collaboration. Among these factors trust is the most crucial. Low levels of trust reduce willingness to share and often lead to knowledge hiding (Rutten *et al.*, 2016). When team members fear exploitation or misuse of shared information, they become reluctant to contribute, impeding team performance. Trust not only enables sharing but also mitigates the risk of knowledge being withheld (Anwar *et al.*, 2019).

Given the importance of trust, in knowledge sharing, it warrants a deeper exploration. The next section trust will be examined how trust is conceptualised, the enablers and inhibitors of trust, and its specific influence in knowledge sharing in teams.

## 6. The Conceptualisation of Trust

Trust has been widely studied across disciplines, industries, and sectors, with consensus that it is multifaceted (Mayer *et al.*, 1995), involving a dyadic relationship and evolving over time through an individual’s repeated positive experience with another. Mayer *et al.* (1995) characterised trust as a risk-taking action reflecting “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712). The authors also proposed that trustworthiness is assessed through three dimensions: integrity, ability, and benevolence. Integrity refers to a set of principles the trustee adheres to, and the trustor finds acceptable. Ability refers to the skill set and competence one displays. Benevolence implies a connection between team members with the understanding that each member wants to do good (Mayer, *et al.*, 1995).

Similarly, Lewicki and Bunker (1996) proposed a three stage sequential model of trust: calculus-based trust, knowledge-based trust, and identification-based trust. Calculus-based trust is based on the integrity of the team member. Knowledge-based trust is based on familiarity through interactions of team members, which develops over time. This is followed by identification-based trust, which takes place when team members acknowledge that one member can act on behalf of another. These stages align closely with Mayer *et al.*’s (1995) trust dimensions. Specifically, Integrity and ability compares to the earlier stages of calculus and knowledge-based trust, which typically develops early in a working relationship. Benevolence-based trust aligns with identification-based trust, which tends to emerge later as deeper relationships form (Buvik and Rolfsen, 2015). Therefore, it can be ascertained that trust develops over time based on an individual’s repeated positive behaviour through professional working relationships (Buvik and Rolfsen, 2015).

Meyerson *et al.* (1996) asserted that a unique form of trust – that is not behaviour and time dependent – exists within a temporary team environment, where team members still experience the advantage of trust through the development of swift trust. Meyerson and colleagues argued that swift trust has two requirements in order for it to occur: (a) team composition, which consists of limited working history, prospects of working together again, team size, and diverse talent; and (b) team tasking, which consists of complex tasks, that are non-routine, and time bound. Swift trust is an individual’s initial trust perception (Robert *et al.*, 2009) which is developed through a category-based process built on a team members’ characteristics, such as title, expertise, and specialised roles, where individuals subconsciously place team members into a category and assume trust based on that category (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996). Category-based processing develops out of a long-term association predominantly from past experience (Robert *et al.*, 2009).

Barrett (2025) conducted a systematic review which synthesizes current knowledge on swift trust in temporary teams, emphasising that while swift trust facilitates rapid collaboration, its formation and sustainability are influenced by team composition, task complexity, and communication patterns. McLaren and Loosemore’s (2019) research found that reputation and clear roles foster swift trust in temporary project teams. Swift trust has been recognised as essential in virtual teams, where trust must be assumed immediately to meet objectives (Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013). In such settings doubts are set aside for the sake of collaboration (Germain, 2011). Robert *et al.* (2009) provided empirical evidence showing that swift trust can develop into knowledge-based (ability, benevolence, and integrity) trust. Similarly, Zakaria and Yusof (2020) findings suggest that swift trust can develop and deteriorate quickly and, depending on the right conditions, maybe replaced by a resilient longer lasting trust.

**6.1 Enablers and Inhibitors of Trust in a Team**

Studies suggest there are a number of enablers of trust. Table 3 below summarises the enablers of trust within a team identified from the literature.

**Table 3: Enablers of trust in teams**

Enablers of Trust	Description	Author/Year
<b>Shared vision</b>	Comon beliefs and values shared among team members	Rios-Ballesteros and Fuerst, (2022).
<b>Communication</b>	Effective sharing of information within teams	Germain (2011)
<b>Intellectual ability and agreeableness</b>	Team members cognitive abilities and competence.	Naber <i>et al.</i> (2018)
<b>Prior positive relationships</b>	Previous good working experience among team members	Buvik and Rolfsen (2015)
<b>Co-operative behaviour</b>	Engaging collaboratively to achieve common goals	Naber <i>et al.</i> (2018)
<b>Leadership</b>	Influence of leaders in fostering trust	Phung <i>et al.</i> (2019), Islam, <i>et al.</i> (2021), Legood <i>et al.</i> (2020).

Trust in teams is fostered by shared vision, effective communication, intellectual ability, prior positive relationships, cooperative behaviour, and supportive leadership (Rios-Ballesteros and Fuerst, 2022; Germain, 2011; Naber *et al.*, 2018; Buvik and Rolfsen, 2015; Legood *et al.*, 2020). These factors collectively enhance trust development by promoting alignment, familiarity, and collaboration.

**6.2 Inhibitors of Trust in a Team**

Similarly, studies suggest there are a number of inhibitors of trust. Table 4 below summarises the inhibitors of trust within a team identified from the literature.

**Table 4: Inhibitors of trust in teams**

Inhibitors of Trust	Description	Author/Year
<b>Language barrier</b>	Lack of common language impeding communication	Tenzer <i>et al.</i> (2014)
<b>Control systems</b>	Organisational controls limiting trust developing	Jørgensen and Åsgård (2019)
<b>Deep level diversity</b>	Differences in attitudes and values	Pinjani and Palvia (2013)
<b>Intellectual ability, co-operative behaviour</b>	Lower cognitive ability reducing trust	Naber <i>et al.</i> (2018)
<b>Knowledge sharing</b>	Lack of sharing knowledge	Rutten <i>et al.</i> (2016)

Trust is inhibited by language barriers, controlling organisational mechanisms, low intellectual ability, deep-level diversity, and poor knowledge sharing (Tenzer *et al.*, 2014; Jørgensen and Åsgård, 2019; Pinjani and Palvia, 2013; Rutten *et al.*, 2016). Such inhibitors disrupt communication and reduce interpersonal trust, undermining team cohesion.

### 6.3 The Role of Trust in Knowledge Sharing in Teams

Trust influences knowledge sharing within teams (Rutten *et al.*, 2016) and contributes improved team and task performance (Boies *et al.*, 2015), team and organisational commitment (Curado and Vieira, 2019). Trust engenders team identification, and collective thinking (Rosendaal and Biilsma-Frankema, 2013). While trust is widely recognised as important to the functioning of teams, it is especially necessary for enabling knowledge sharing. Trust improves team cohesion and relationships (Zand, 1971), this enhances team members' willingness to help each other; which enhances knowledge sharing (Xue *et al.*, 2011, Rutten *et al.* 2016). Individuals are more likely to share knowledge with those they trust. While trust has been research in teams, few have focused on temporary project teams, such as PBOs, where this literature review interests lie.

## 7. Project-Based Organisations

Project-based organisations (PBOs) rely on temporary teams, requiring high levels of interdependence among members (Buvik and Rolfsen, 2015). This structure creates both a need and a vulnerability as team members must share knowledge to perform effectively, yet the temporary nature of these teams can make it difficult to build the trust that facilitates such sharing.

Unlike traditional organisations, PBOs are structured around individual projects as the primary unit of work, with the organisational structure adapting to each project's specific needs (Hobday, 2000). This often involves bringing in specialised external contractors who may be unfamiliar to the core team. These temporary contributors provide essential expertise but may leave at project completion, taking with them valuable knowledge that could benefit future initiatives. The changing nature of such teams hinder the development of strong interpersonal relationships, which are typically needed for trust to emerge (Mueller, 2014).

Traditional theories propose that trust is built gradually through repeated positive interactions (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Lewicki and Bunker, 1996) and cannot be imposed. In temporary teams, however, these conditions are rarely met, suggesting that initial trust levels may be low and, consequently, that knowledge sharing may be limited (Rutten *et al.*, 2016). While PBOs are often successful at delivering individual projects, they are frequently criticised for lacking the formal or informal mechanisms to capture and share knowledge between projects (Hobday, 2000; Davidavičienė, 2020). This raises concerns about long-term organisational learning and performance.

Research challenges the assumption that trust must always develop slowly. In temporary project environments, teams often demonstrate swift trust, where trust is formed rapidly based on perceived roles, competence, or credentials rather than past experience (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996; McLaren and Loosemore, 2019). Swift trust appears particularly relevant in fast-paced project settings, where members with diverse skills and backgrounds must collaborate quickly to meet deadlines. This concept offers a potential alternative model of trust that may better suit the realities of PBOs.

## 8. Contribution to Academic Debate

This literature review contributes to the academic debate by synthesising the intersection of trust and knowledge sharing specifically within temporary project teams in project-based organisations (PBOs), highlighting that traditional trust models may not fully apply in these transient, multidisciplinary settings. It emphasizes the critical role of swift trust in enabling rapid trust formation while identifying gaps in understanding how swift trust evolves and transitions into more enduring forms. Furthermore, it bridges theory and practice by outlining how trust-building strategies tailored to temporary teams where early trust development and perceived competence are vital due to limited prior relationships. Finally, the review sets a clear agenda for future research, calling for studies on trust dynamics, empirical validation of swift trust across diverse contexts, and development of integrative models linking trust, knowledge sharing, and project outcomes, thereby advancing both theoretical understanding and practical management of knowledge in dynamic organisational environments.

## 9. Conclusion

This paper presents a comprehensive literature review on knowledge sharing within teams, with a specific focus on the role of trust as a critical influencing factor. Despite the wealth of research on knowledge sharing, there is a noticeable gap in the exploration of knowledge sharing dynamics within project teams of a temporary nature. Furthermore, while there is extensive literature on trust development among team members, there is a scarcity of research specifically addressing trust development in temporary project teams. The literature review

emphasises the significance of trust development in temporary teams, particularly in project-based teams where knowledge sharing is paramount. Notably, there is a need for more research on swift trust, suggesting trust can be rapidly established in temporary teams. Investigating swift trust can offer valuable insights for practitioners, raising awareness of trust development and its significance in fostering knowledge sharing. This, in turn, contributes to advancing the theoretical understanding of knowledge sharing practices.

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**AI declaration:** AI tools were not used in the development of this paper.

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