

A Model Integrating Organizational Culture into Knowledge Sharing and Employee Development

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Abstract: While knowledge sharing and employee development are recognized as important drivers of performance of an organization, existing research often examines organizational culture, structure, and knowledge processes separately. Currently there is an emerging need for integrated frameworks explaining how these organizational dimensions create conditions for effective knowledge sharing and continuous learning. This paper aims to create an integrated conceptual model linking organizational culture, management practices, organizational structure, knowledge sharing, and employee development. Drawing from literature oriented towards knowledge management (KM) and human resource management (HRM), the study proposes a framework that explains how characteristics of an organization, including trust, collaboration, communication openness, and learning, together with leadership approaches and structural arrangements shape knowledge related behaviors and learning opportunities for employees. The proposed model is primarily built to emphasize the interconnected nature of cultural and structural factors in enabling and improving knowledge flows within an organization. To evaluate the relevance and applicability of the proposed model, it is examined through empirical research conducted in selected organizations. This phase aims to explore the relationships between the key characteristics and to provide an initial evaluation of the model's utility in practice. The study offers an integrated perspective that bridges organizational culture, structure, and management with knowledge sharing and employee development, addressing a gap in current KM and HRM research. By demonstrating how these factors interact, the model supports the streamlining of knowledge management processes. It is useful for managers and HR professionals who are trying to create or improve organizational environments that are more supportive of knowledge sharing and continuous employee learning. A comprehensive view of the factors that shape a knowledge-oriented work environment is a starting point for academic discussion and for further verification of the identified influences in business practice.

Keywords: Organizational culture, Knowledge sharing, Employee development, Knowledge management, Human resource management

1. Introduction

Knowledge is recognized as a strategic organizational resource that contributes to competitiveness, innovation, and long-term performance (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). However, its value depends not only on the fact that it exists, but also on the extent to which it is shared and applied in practice. For this reason, knowledge sharing is viewed as a central process of knowledge management, connecting individual expertise with organizational outcomes (Raziq et al., 2024).

But knowledge sharing does not occur in isolation. The organization as a whole shapes it. It influences its employees through certain dimensions and that leads to their willingness and ability to exchange information (Ng, 2022). These conditions are relevant to developing the employees, as knowledge exchange may support parts of their professional life such as professional growth, competence, skill acquisition and other (Kozhakhmet et al., 2020; Kwon et al., 2024).

Although these dimensions have been previously examined, they are often addressed separately. The goal of this paper is to propose an integrated conceptual model linking the organizational dimensions with knowledge sharing and employee development, and to subject this model to an initial empirical examination through qualitative research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge management (KM) is commonly understood as a set of organizational processes related to the creation, storage, transfer, and application of knowledge. Within this framework, knowledge sharing represents one of the most important mechanisms through which knowledge can be used across the whole organization (Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Raziq et al., 2024). Literature differentiates between a knowledge-sharing tendency and knowledge-sharing behaviour. Knowledge-sharing tendency is described as individual willingness to share, and behaviour refers to the actual act of exchanging knowledge. Both factors are

important because positive attitude alone does not guarantee that knowledge will be transferred in practice (Raziq et al., 2024).

Research also shows that the nature of knowledge affects how it can be shared. Tacit knowledge, that is rooted in individual experience and skills, is more effectively transferred through direct interaction, informal communication, and collaborative work. Explicit knowledge on the other hand is transferred through formal documentation or information systems. Organizations accordingly rely on formal mechanisms, such as training, and informal channels, including discussion groups and personal networks, to support knowledge flows (Alavi and Leidner, 2001).

A range of organizational enablers has been identified, including information systems, trust-building activities, teamwork and support from leadership. Transformational and supportive leadership approaches are particularly associated with stronger knowledge sharing because they foster trust within their respective organizations (Mokhchy, 2025). At the same time, barriers such as low trust, weak interpersonal ties or rigid hierarchy may limit voluntary knowledge exchange (Gajda, 2019; Al-Tarawhneh and Al-Adaileh, 2021). Existing studies further show that effective knowledge sharing contributes to employee performance, which includes innovation and organizational competitiveness, highlighting its role in both KM and employee development (Azeem, 2021).

2.2 Organizational Culture in Knowledge Management

Organizational culture refers to the system of shared values, norms and assumptions that guide behaviour within organizations and shape how employees interact with and perform their work (Daft, 2005). In the context of knowledge management, culture is identified as one of the key factors influencing whether employees are willing to exchange knowledge, collaborate, and engage in learning activities. Organizational culture creates conditions that can either support or hinder knowledge processes by shaping relationships, communication or attitudes toward cooperation (Alavi and Leidner, 2001).

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to conceptualize organizational culture in research. One of the most applied approaches is the Competing Values Framework developed by Cameron and Quinn (1983), which includes four orientations: clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, and market cultures. Clan cultures show collaboration and trust, adhocracy focuses on innovation and flexibility, hierarchy prioritizes stability and formal procedures, and market emphasizes competitiveness and performance. Another influential perspective is provided by Schein (2010), in which he identifies three components: visible artifacts (visible, audible, observable elements), espoused values (beliefs and norms of an organization), and underlying assumptions (unconscious and deeply rooted).

Empirical research suggests that cultural characteristics significantly influence knowledge sharing behaviour. Cultures that are collaborative and trust-oriented tend to encourage their employees to share knowledge and support learning, while cultures that are primarily hierarchical may limit knowledge exchange (Ng, 2022). Other cultural elements such as respect for colleagues and job stability have also been shown to help knowledge sharing practices. These findings indicate that organizational culture represents an important mechanism through which knowledge can be shared within organizations (Rahman et al., 2022).

2.3 Management Practices and Organizational Structure

Management practices and organizational structure represent important conditions shaping how knowledge is shared and applied in practice. The term management practices is used to refer to activities like leadership, strategic planning, HRM, performance appraisal, training, and knowledge management processes themselves (Daft, 2005).

Organizational structure is also identified as a relevant factor influencing knowledge flows within an organization. Most commonly separated into two categories. Mechanistic structures, characterized by centralized hierarchy, and organic structures, focusing on flexibility through open communication and decentralization (Al Koliby et al., 2025). Evidence suggests that organic structures increase knowledge sharing, while rigid hierarchical arrangements may create barriers to communication and reduce passing of knowledge. These structural effects rarely operate in isolation. Structural impact is often moderated by leadership, culture, and management practices, suggesting that knowledge processes are shaped by the interaction of multiple dimensions rather than a single factor (Al Koliby et al., 2025).

2.4 Employee Development

Employee development is closely connected with learning processes and with conditions that help employees acquire and apply knowledge in the workplace. Development is not only shaped by formal training activities, but also knowledge sharing and collaborative work in a learning-oriented environment. Learning orientation, trust and primarily commitment are identified as mechanisms through which cultural and knowledge-sharing conditions are translated into outcomes (Rahman et al., 2022).

Research indicates that training and development activities can strengthen employees' tendency to share knowledge and can reinforce relationships in team-oriented work environments. This suggests that employee development and knowledge sharing are processes that support each other rather than work separately (Ng, 2022). Commitment and trust also play an important role as mediators of relationships between organizational culture and knowledge sharing. Employees are more willing to exchange their knowledge when they feel attached to the organization and perceive interpersonal relationships in it as supportive and trustworthy (Ng, 2022).

Human resource management (HRM) practices further contribute to this relationship. Innovation and learning are positively influenced by performance evaluation, career development and training support, although some studies report that these effects are indirect rather than immediate (Lee et al., 2023). Evidence also suggests that sharing of knowledge contributes to professional competence and career progression (Ng, 2022; He, 2025). In addition, generational differences may shape employees' motivations for knowledge sharing, indicating that initiatives for development may need to be adapted to the expectations of different employee groups (Gajda, 2019). Overall, literature supports the view that knowledge sharing is an important pathway through which employee development can be increased.

2.5 Model Inspiration

The proposed model builds on several established knowledge management frameworks that explain knowledge as an organizational resource shaped by both social and structural conditions. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model emphasizes the conversion of tacit and explicit knowledge through socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization, highlighting the importance of interaction and shared experience in knowledge creation. Dalkir's (2011) integrated knowledge management cycle extends this perspective by structuring knowledge processes into creation, sharing, and application, showing that knowledge must not only be created, but also transferred and used in practice. Similarly, Wiig's (1993) model stresses the progression from building and holding knowledge to pooling and finally applying it, while Bukowitz and Williams' (1999) KM life cycle focuses on the strategic management of knowledge through processes like acquiring, using, learning, contributing, and sustaining knowledge resources.

Further inspiration comes from McElroy's (2003) knowledge life cycle and Choo's (2006) knowing organization model, both of which broaden KM beyond simple transfer. McElroy highlights knowledge production and integration as part of an ongoing organizational learning process, whereas Choo connects sensemaking, knowledge creation and decision making to organizational action. Meyer and Zack (1996) also contribute a process-oriented view by presenting knowledge as a resource that must be acquired, refined, stored, distributed, and presented for use. Together, these models suggest that knowledge management should be understood as an integrated organizational process influenced by context and directed toward practical outcomes. On this basis, the proposed model links organizational culture, structure, and management practices with knowledge sharing and employee development.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to develop an integrated conceptual model linking organizational culture, structure, management practices, knowledge sharing, and employee development

- RQ1: Which organizational conditions are perceived as most important for knowledge sharing?
- RQ2: Which management practices support or hinder knowledge sharing and employee development?
- RQ3: How is employee development related to knowledge sharing in the examined organizations?
- RQ4: To what extent does the proposed model reflect organizational reality, and which relationships appear strongest or weakest in practice?

The study uses a qualitative research methodology aimed at providing an initial empirical examination of the proposed conceptual model. The methodological approach combines literature-based development of the model with a pilot empirical study. The qualitative approach allows a deeper understanding of how the individual constructs are perceived in practice and how they interact within a real organizational context.

3.2 Research Design

The study proceeded in two phases. First, a conceptual model was developed on the basis of reviewed literature. Second, the relevance and applicability of this model were assessed through interviews conducted with managers. Through the interviews, connections between the main parts of the model were reviewed and decision about their linkage was made.

3.3 Data Collection

The empirical part of the study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with four managers from two selected organizations. Company A is a multinational agrochemical company whose activities are strongly connected with sales representatives. Company B is a holding company bringing together multiple firms operating in building, civil engineering and infrastructure projects. Respondents with direct managerial experience and insight into their organizations were chosen for the interviews. The sample included one middle-level and one upper-level manager from Company A and two upper-level managers from Company B.

The interview guide was developed directly from the proposed conceptual model. Questions were structured around the models' main constructs (culture, structure, management, knowledge sharing, and employee development). Exploration of whether the relationships suggested by the literature are also reflected in managerial perceptions is made possible by this practice.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview responses were reviewed and coded according to recurring themes related to the main relationships and constructs of the proposed model. Attention was given to whether managers perceived the organizational layer of the model as factors influencing knowledge sharing, and whether knowledge sharing was viewed as contributing to employee development.

The purpose of the analysis is not to validate the model statistically, but to provide an initial qualitative assessment of its relevance and applicability in practice. The empirical findings were used to identify areas of support, possible refinement, and selected contextual differences across the settings of selected organizations.

4. Proposed Conceptual Model

4.1 Reasoning for the Model

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study proposes an integrated conceptual model linking aforementioned dimensions. The rationale for the model stems from the observation that existing research has frequently examined these constructs separately, while fewer studies have addressed them within a single analytical framework. The literature reviewed in this paper suggests that knowledge sharing is shaped by a combination of cultural, managerial, and also structural conditions and that it also plays an important role in supporting employee development. The proposed model treats knowledge sharing as the central process through which key organizational conditions are translated into developmental outcomes for employees.

The model is designed as a conceptual framework for the pilot empirical phase of the study. Its purpose is not to claim universal validity, but to provide a theoretically grounded structure for examining how the selected organizational dimensions interact in practice.

4.2 Constructs and Dimensions of the Model

4.2.1 Organizational culture

Based on the reviewed literature, organizational culture is represented in the proposed model through *trust*, *communication openness*, *collaboration*, and *learning orientation*. These dimensions were selected as they are the most recurring relevant cultural conditions shaping knowledge-related behaviour. Trust reduces the perceived risk of sharing and supports psychological safety, making employees more willing to exchange both tacit and explicit knowledge (Rohim and Budhiasa, 2019). Communication openness facilitates the flow of information across vertical and horizontal relationships and lowers barriers associated with status differences

or fear of negative evaluation. Collaboration helps knowledge exchange in everyday work, sharing a routine practice rather than occasional activity (De Long and Fahey, 2000). Learning orientation reflects the extent to which the organization values continuous improvement and the acquisition of new knowledge, linking culture not only to knowledge sharing but also to employee development directly to some degree (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). Together, these dimensions capture the aspects of culture that are most directly connected to knowledge processes.

4.2.2 Management practices

In the proposed model, management practices are represented through *leadership support, training and development support, and rewards and recognition*. These elements were chosen because the literature consistently identifies them as key managerial actions for promoting knowledge-related behaviour. Leadership support is important for signaling that knowledge sharing is strategically valued and provides employees with the resources and encouragement needed to exchange their knowledge (Khan and Mishra, 2023). Training and development strengthen employees' capacity to acquire, articulate, and apply knowledge, while promoting a learning-oriented environment in which sharing becomes more meaningful and useful (Kozhakhmet et al., 2020). Rewards and recognition provide an additional mechanism for motivating employees by reinforcing the value of contributing knowledge, although its effectiveness depends on perceived fairness and broader cultural context (Rohim and Budhiasa, 2019). Taken together, these practices capture the ways in which management translates its values into concrete behavioural expectations for knowledge sharing and employee development.

4.2.3 Organizational structure

Organizational structure is represented in the model through *decentralization, flexibility and reduced hierarchy*. These dimensions were included because it is repeatedly shown that structural arrangements influence how easily knowledge can move within organizations. Decentralization gives employees greater autonomy and places decision-making closer to the point where knowledge is created and applied, which can accelerate knowledge use and employee learning. Flexibility, often connected to organic structures within organizations, enables informal communication of employees, which supports the exchange of ideas despite organizational boundaries. Reduced hierarchy lowers barriers caused by bureaucracy, leading to shorter communication pathways (Al Koliby et al., 2025). These dimensions capture the degree of which the structure of an organization enables knowledge flows and creates favourable conditions for employee learning and development.

4.2.4 Knowledge sharing

Sharing of knowledge is conceptualized in the model through *willingness to share, knowledge sharing behaviour, and formal and informal exchange*. Willingness to share refers to an employee's intention to make knowledge available to others and is shaped by factors such as trust and support (De Long and Fahey, 2000). Knowledge sharing behaviour refers to the actual enactment of sharing (Kozhakhmet et al., 2020). Formal and informal exchange are included because organizations rely on both structured mechanisms (training sessions, scheduled meetings, etc.), and informal mechanisms (peer interaction, mentoring, spontaneous problem-solving conversations (De Long and Fahey, 2000; Alavi and Leidner, 2001). Distinguishing these dimensions is important because positive attitudes do not automatically translate into behaviour, and actual sharing may take different forms depending on organizational conditions.

4.2.5 Employee development

Employee development is represented through *skill development, professional growth, and growth of competence*. These dimensions were selected because knowledge sharing contributes not only to immediate learning, but also to broader development outcomes. Skill development reflects the acquisition and improvement of competencies through formal training and through interaction with colleagues, it helps the application of shared knowledge in work tasks (Ben Zammel and Najar, 2022). Professional growth captures longer term development processes like career progression or continuous learning within the organization (Kwon et al., 2024). Competence growth is included as a development related outcome, because shared knowledge often provides the basis for new ideas, improved work practices, or one's capacity to contribute creatively to organizational goals (Ben Zammel and Najar, 2022). Employee development dimensions reflect the view that it is not limited to formal training but shaped by the organization's knowledge environment and the extent to which employees participate in exchange as well.

4.2.6 Relationships within the model

The proposed model assumes that organizational culture, management practices, and organizational structure shape the conditions under which knowledge sharing occurs. Culture provides the foundation for knowledge exchange, management practices translate priorities into concrete support mechanisms, and structure influences communication pathways and access to knowledge within the organization.

This framework displays knowledge sharing as a central process that links conditions within the organization with employee development. The model proposes that supportive organizational conditions increase knowledge sharing, which in turn contributes to development of its employees. The model also acknowledges secondary relationships and feedback logic, which lead to outcomes that may influence future support for knowledge processes.

5. Findings

The conducted interviews with managers from two different organizations indicate that knowledge sharing is strongly shaped by organizational conditions, particularly its culture and support from management. Company A is a multinational agrochemical company that mostly employs sales representatives. Company B is a holding company that brings together multiple firms across different areas of building, civil engineering and infrastructure projects. In relation to RQ1, the interviews suggest that organizational culture and management support are perceived as the most important conditions influencing knowledge sharing.

The first organization used primarily formal channels for information exchange, including e-mail, WhatsApp, phone communication, Microsoft Teams, and shared company spreadsheets. However, during the questioning a different problem was emphasized. The main problem for this organization was not the absence of information and its sharing, but employees' unwillingness to share or effectively use the knowledge available to them. The interview pointed to inconsistency among employees, low responsiveness, and behaviour related to ego which served as barriers, while structure and management were described as weak and outdated. In this case, knowledge sharing was limited less by a lack of formal mechanisms and more by dysfunctional organizational conditions.

In contrast, the second organization reflected a more supportive environment for sharing knowledge. The organization was described as open and growth-oriented, with mentoring, regular discussions, annual evaluations, feedback, and talent development contributing to the exchange of knowledge. Management support appeared particularly important, as respondents repeatedly emphasized the role of mentors and managerial communication in encouraging employees to learn and share. Time constraints were mentioned as a barrier, but the overall picture was that knowledge sharing was embedded in the organization more effectively than in the first company.

The interviews also suggest that sharing contributes to employee development, although the strength of this relationship differs across organizations. Company A had limited development beyond mandatory training, and the respondent stressed that experience was the most important source of growth. Sharing was still viewed as relevant, especially for building professional expertise, but the organization did not appear to provide strong developmental support beyond basic requirements.

Company B linked knowledge sharing more clearly with employee development. Regarding RQ2 and 3 respondents described mentoring, informal discussions, and feedback processes as important mechanisms through which employees develop skills and grow professionally. Informal exchange was emphasized through conversations during coffee breaks and everyday interactions. This suggests that employee development is strengthened when knowledge sharing is supported not only formally, but also through routine interpersonal exchange.

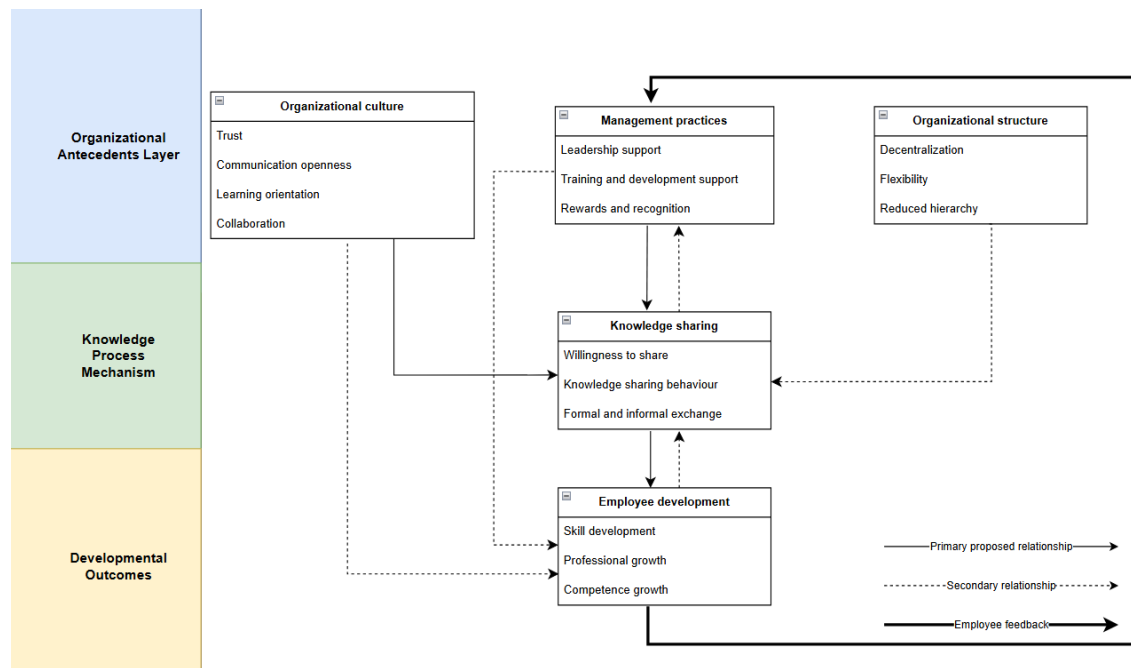


Figure 1: The proposed conceptual model

5.1 Assessment of the Proposed Model

Overall, the findings provide initial support for the proposed conceptual model. In both organizational contexts, respondents considered the relationships included in the model meaningful. At the same time. The interviews showed that the model is reflected in practice to different degrees. For company A, the model described a set of conditions that conceptually made sense but were not functioning effectively in their reality. In company B, the model was perceived as much closer to actual practice, primarily in the links between culture, management, knowledge sharing, and employee development.

The findings suggest that the model is useful not only for describing supportive organizational environments, but also for identifying missing or weakly developed conditions in less effective settings. Through the interviews, organizational culture appeared to be the most influential factor, while structure played secondary but still relevant role. The pilot empirical phase thus supports the relevance of the model, while also indicating that the strength of individual relationships is context dependent.

6. Discussion

The pilot findings suggest that the proposed model captures meaningful relationships between organizational conditions, knowledge sharing, and employee development. In both examined contexts, organizational culture and management support appeared more influential than structure, although structure still affected the ease of knowledge exchange. The comparison of the two organizations indicates how the model can help describe their respective environments. In the first case, the model reflected conditions that were weakly implemented in practice, while in the second case it was more closely aligned with everyday organizational functioning. This suggests that the model may be useful not only as a framework, but also as a tool for identifying missing conditions for knowledge sharing.

7. Conclusion and Limitations

This paper proposed an integrated conceptual model linking organizational dimensions with knowledge processes leading to employee development. Drawing on knowledge management and human resource management literature, the model was designed to explain how organizational conditions shape knowledge-sharing processes and how these processes contribute to development of employees. The pilot empirical phase provided initial qualitative support for the relevance of the model in practice. The findings suggest that culture and support from management are particularly important in shaping knowledge sharing. The comparison of the examined organizations showed that the strength of these relationships depends on the context.

The paper has several limitations. First, it represents a pilot qualitative inquiry based on a small sample of managers from two organizations, which limits the generalizability of the findings. It is important to note that the empirical study is limited by presenting managerial perspective only. The study does not statistically test the proposed relationships and therefore cannot confirm their causal strength. The findings should be understood as an initial assessment of the model rather than its full validation. Future research could extend the sample, include multiple organizational levels, and add quantitative survey-based testing in order to examine the model more comprehensively.

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