# The Mediating Effect of Trust on the Relation between Interpersonal Communication and Tacit Knowledge Sharing

ANNA BAGIEŃSKA
Faculty of Engineering Management,
Bialystok University of Technology,
45 A Wiejska Street, Bialystok 15-351,
POLAND

*Abstract:* - Nowadays, knowledge is increasingly a resource that determines a company's competitive advantage. Managers recognize many benefits of knowledge sharing and companies are increasingly seeking to build a culture of knowledge sharing. However, sharing tacit knowledge is still a challenge. Interpersonal communication seems to be an indispensable way to share knowledge effectively, especially tacit knowledge. Furthermore, trust can be a factor supporting the discovery of 'layers of knowledge' by employees according to the onion model. This article aims to explore the role of direct communication in the sharing of tacit knowledge in the context of mutual interpersonal trust. The results of the study attempt to answer the question of how to improve the sharing of tacit knowledge in an organization. The verification of hypotheses was carried out based on a quantitative survey on a sample of 175 employees in the telecommunications sector in Poland. Based on a bootstrapped mediation model, a statistical analysis of the hypothesized relationship was conducted. The results indicate that interpersonal communication is crucial in enabling the sharing of tacit knowledge. Furthermore, the results confirm the important role of interpersonal trust as a mediator in such a relationship. To increase the sharing of tacit knowledge, organizations should create a climate that supports direct communication. Furthermore, creating an environment based on trust helps to encourage employees to increase tacit knowledge-sharing behaviour. Using Social Exchange Theory, this study shows the importance of trust-based resources such as tacit knowledge sharing in networks.

*Key-Words:* - tacit knowledge, tacit knowledge sharing, direct communication, interpersonal trust, knowledge management, Social Exchange Theory, Social Constructivism Theory, Telecommunication sector.

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## 1 Introduction

Intellectual capital is created by sharing tacit knowledge, [1]. This process enables effective information management [2] and improvement of the organization's operations and performance [3]. Tacit knowledge in particular plays an essential role in facilitating innovation [4], [5]. Through collaborative activities, especially the exchange of information and ideas, the potential value of tacit knowledge leads to the development of innovation [6], better organizational performance [7], and a competitive advantage for the company, [8].

A recent conceptualization known as the "onion" model suggests that tacit knowledge consists of multiple layers. This model describes knowledge along a continuum, with explicit knowledge at one end highly tacit knowledge at the other, and a blend of both in between. The types of knowledge range from those that are easily explained and close to explicit knowledge to those that are almost impossible to articulate and can only be demonstrated, representing the most tacit forms of knowledge, [9].

Although tacit knowledge is typically acquired through personal experience and repeated on-the-job activities, it can also be gained through the guidance of someone willing to share their expertise, [10]. Tacit knowledge is acquired and shared directly through high-quality social interactions among team members, [11]. Direct communication may be the best way for employees to interact with each other.

Exchanging tacit knowledge is a significant challenge today. With the ubiquitous use of technology to coordinate collaboration, and current developments promoting remote work, face-to-face communication in the workplace has been reduced. Since tacit knowledge is personal, it cannot be formalized or forced. Therefore, understanding how to acquire and share tacit knowledge is crucial. Thus, understanding the processes of acquiring and

sharing tacit knowledge is important from an organizational perspective. This requires both managers and researchers to focus on factors that support the effective sharing of tacit knowledge.

The purpose of this article is to explore the role of direct communication in tacit knowledge sharing in the context of mutual interpersonal trust.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways. The theoretical contribution concerns research in the field of direct communication and tacit knowledge sharing, by proposing a framework that includes interpersonal trust as a mediator of this relationship. The second contribution concerns the identification of empirical support for the essential role of trust in the process of tacit knowledge sharing.

# 2 Conceptual Framework

## 2.1 Direct Communication

The transfer of information can be either conducted via direct, face-to-face interactions or via ICT. Communication is perceived as a process, whereas ideas, information, and emotions are transmitted among individuals or groups in order to achieve goals, [12]. Direct communication creates a unique opportunity that allows common understanding to occur. The core aspect of interpersonal communication is the sharing of meaning, thus making something common and interacting with others during this process.

Effective direct communication is an important factor that contributes to organizational success, [13]. Direct communication has been recognized as an optimal information transfer channel due to the possibility of immediate feedback [14]; moreover, it allows understanding to be verified and information to be disseminated successfully.

ICT technologies support the aggregation, codification, and dissemination of explicit knowledge, [15]. They can be used to facilitate knowledge sharing and availability of information [16] and enable the transmission of information; however, they cannot replace direct communication. Interpersonal interaction is the most efficient means of tacit knowledge sharing among employees, [17], [18].

In reference to the social constructivism theory [SCT], [19], knowledge can be shared on the basis of a mutual interactive experience. This theory assumes that the co-creation of knowledge is realized through dialogue and interaction with others, [20]. Therefore, direct communication creates opportunities for information to be shared. Knowledge is co-constructed in the social environment encompassing both other people and environmentally specific habits and practices, [20], [21]. The SCT argues, that the creation and transfer of knowledge is the result of social interaction and mutual understanding. Social interactions affect human cognition; therefore, knowledge can be effectively shared using a collaborative exchange based on direct communication.

## 2.2 Knowledge Sharing

In an organizational context, there are two kinds of knowledge: tacit and explicit, [22]. Explicit knowledge is an objective kind of knowledge that can be easily articulated, [23]. Tacit knowledge is non-verbal, unarticulated, and very often an intuitive kind of knowledge, [24]. Therefore, tacit knowledge can be perceived as a process of thinking rather than a fixed unit with an established structure. Hence, the tacit knowledge is highly personal and is derived from an individual's perspective. Tacit knowledge arises from personal experiences and, as such, it needs to be shared on the basis of interpersonal relationships.

The knowledge-sharing process is commonly defined as an exchange of organizational information between involved parties, usually a source and a recipient, [25]. Knowledge sharing is understood as a central element of knowledge dissemination based on interactions and communication, [26]. In this paper, we assume that tacit knowledge sharing is a process oriented toward disseminating organizational knowledge between co-workers.

Furthermore, tacit knowledge sharing is a core component of knowledge creation, [23]. In this model, there are four main phases of knowledge creation: socialization [tacit to tacit], externalization [tacit to explicit], combination [explicit to tacit], and internalization [explicit to tacit]. Tacit knowledge-sharing occurs during socialization, externalization, and internalization, [27]. Especially socialization and externalization are embedded in tacit knowledge sharing. Socialization encompasses sharing experiences and, consequently, creating mental models or know-how. Externalization includes the sharing of knowledge through available concepts and tools such as metaphors, analogies, and models. Due to the difficulty of codifying hidden knowledge, this process often takes place through interactions aimed at building understanding and mental images or representations. At the foundation of this process lies dialogue and collective thinking. Therefore, the mutual interaction and collective learning, described by SCT [20] are at the root of

this phenomenon. The SCT elucidates how individuals create knowledge in organizations based on sharing collective meaning through dialogue and common reflection. Tacit knowledge sharing, in the form of socialization and externalization, enables an organization to cover its hidden knowledge by making it available, [23]. The creation of knowledge in an organization is a continuous, interactive process aimed at commonizing available tacit knowledge. Therefore, a key element of creating organizational knowledge is the process of sharing tacit knowledge.

Interpersonal interaction is a necessary condition for successful knowledge sharing, [17]. Knowledge sharing via direct interaction is the most reliable and effective channel to transfer knowledge, [28]. Other means used for sharing tacit knowledge [for instance, ICT information and communication solutions] are usually focused more on information management than on supporting and nurturing interactions between organization members, [29]. Therefore, there are arguments that tacit knowledge transfer through ICT is not effective, [27]. Thus, we propose that interpersonal communication can be viewed as a core element that facilitates tacit knowledge sharing between co-workers through direct communication.

Hypothesis 1: Direct communication is positively related to tacit knowledge sharing in organizations.

## 2.3 Direct Communication and Interpersonal Trust

Despite the increased availability of other communication channels within a company, interpersonal communication still plays a very vital role. Numerous studies indicate that face-to-face communication is the richest way to convey information, [30], [31]. Rich information reduces the ambiguity of the message more than poor information, [32]. Moreover, it stimulates the interlocutor's intention to actively engage in interaction, [30]. According to media richness theory [MRT], communication media have several essential characteristics that determine their ability to convey information, [33], [34]. First, immediate feedback - the ability of a given medium to react quickly to messages received. Secondly, the extent to which the user can adapt the message to the needs and situation of the recipient. Thirdly, the a variety of ways of conveying information, [34]. Content can also be transmitted both in words and symbols, [35]. Interpersonal communication allows users to express their personal feelings [30]. The richness of a direct message is influenced not only by the content of information but also by the tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and attitude of the recipient, [34].

This is consistent with the existing literature, in which direct interaction is perceived as an essential fundament of trust [28], [36]. Referring to the strong connections between the formation of trust and social interactions, it is emphasized that “trust needs touch” [37], and trust building is related to group communication, [38]. Moreover, an increase in direct communication leads to–a higher perceived level of trust. Some research indicates that the level of trust depends on social communication, [39]. Likewise, based on empirical study, other authors concluded that social interaction is an important factor that influences the development of trust, [40]. Another qualitative study illustrated that improving communication skills is essential for the building of trust, [41] This suggests that direct communication which provides immediate feedback and a broad spectrum of information [high channel richness medium] helps to create a sense of mutual understanding which enhances the establishment of trust relationships. Successful cooperation is supported by interpersonal meetings, which help to create a sense of community and mutual trust, [42]. Put simply, direct communication nurtures trust among coworkers.

However, [43] demonstrated that interpersonal interaction increases the accuracy of judging whether another person should be trusted and that social interaction is a key factor that enables the formation of trust. From the organizational perspective, interpersonal trust is established on the basis of mutual understanding. Direct communication allows such a bond to be formed and we assume that it allows such a relationship to be maintained.

## 2.4 Interpersonal Trust as a Mediator of Direct Communication and Tacit Knowledge Sharing

Trust can be defined as an interpersonal relationship in which both sides have positive future expectations of the other side and both make decisions on the basis of this assumption, [44]. In an organizational context, trust refers to collective actions and collaborative behaviors, [45], [46]. Moreover, it has been stated that trust facilitates effective cooperation, [47], [48]. Additionally, it impacts team performance, [49].

Organizational trust has three dimensions: inter-organizational trust (between organizations), intraorganizational (involving trust towards one’s own organization and its management), and

interpersonal (describing the relationship between employees within an organization), [50]. Interpersonal trust involves trusting co-workers or supervisors, [51]. In this article, interpersonal trust is understood as a mutual relationship in which interdependent sides adjust their actions based on positive expectations toward others.

The existing research on trust indicates its important role in knowledge sharing, [52]. Trust has been recognized as a significant antecedent of knowledge sharing, [53], [54]. Empirical studies conducted by [55] suggested that an increased level of trust was associated with increased benefits from knowledge sharing. Qualitative research, [56], revealed that trust is one of the core factors that affect the success of knowledge sharing. In addition, a study involving 102 financial sector professionals showed the significant role of trust in effective knowledge sharing. Trusting relationships reduce the risk associated with a situation in which knowledge is exchanged, [57]. In summary, trust is an important factor that affects the process of information sharing in organizations.

However, knowledge sharing can occur without the requirement of trust, since different motivators might influence an individual's decision regarding dissemination of knowledge, [58], [59]. Therefore, other factors might motivate one to share knowledge. For instance, someone might share his/her expertise because it gives him/her internal satisfaction, [60]. Another possible reasons for sharing knowledge might be one's concern for other employees' poor job competence, [61]. Additional causes might relate to social norms in organizations [62] or extrinsic incentives oriented towards self-gain, [63]. This suggests that trust is not an essential element of knowledge-sharing behavior.

We consider interpersonal trust to be important, even if it is not a crucial aspect of knowledge sharing. In particular, empirical studies have confirmed that tacit knowledge sharing is linked to a trusting environment, [64]. Further, [65] indicated the necessity of interpersonal trust in tacit knowledge sharing. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships can facilitate the process of dissemination of tacit knowledge [66] and enhance the willingness to spread tacit knowledge in an organization, [67]. Moreover, the impact of interpersonal trust on tacit knowledge-sharing behavior has been identified, [68]. Therefore, interpersonal trust is a vital element of the knowledge-sharing process within organizations.

Furthermore, interpersonal trust facilitates exchange in networks such as teams in organizations, [69]. It is especially significant when transactions refer to valuable resources, such as tacit knowledge. Thus, tacit knowledge sharing is inevitably embedded in interpersonal trust between actors.

Thus, it may be predicted that interpersonal trust will be shown to positively influence tacit knowledge sharing. When co-workers have a greater degree of trust, they are more willing to share their expertise, ideas, and "know-how". It can therefore be assumed that employees with a higher level of trust in co-workers will be disposed to conveying more information to others.

In this study, it is argued that the benefits of interpersonal communication facilitate tacit knowledge sharing. Interpersonal trust between co-workers should, in turn, lead to improved sharing of tacit knowledge. Based on the aforementioned theoretical and empirical framework, we hypothesized that interpersonal communication enhances tacit knowledge sharing through trust. While it is likely that direct communication is the cornerstone of tacit knowledge sharing itself, it is highly possible that trusting relationships among coworkers offer more opportunities for involved individuals to share tacit knowledge. We integrated this linkage into the model of direct communication and tacit knowledge relationship mediated by interpersonal trust which is shown in Figure 1. Thus, it is assumed that:

Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal trust in co-workers mediates the relationship between direct communication and tacit knowledge sharing. Specifically, higher levels of trust result in a stronger relationship between interpersonal communication and knowledge sharing.

# 3 Method

The hypotheses were verified through a quantitative survey conducted on a sample of 175 employees from the telecommunications sector in Poland. A statistical analysis of the proposed relationships was performed using a bootstrapped mediation model.

*Participants, sampling, and research procedure*

In order to verify the presented hypotheses, empirical research based on a questionnaire was carried out. Polish telecommunications companies listed in the Office of Electronic Communications register were selected. The national register was used as a sample unit, [70]. The telecommunications sector in Poland is considered innovative as it applies new solutions and processes which require tacit knowledge sharing. The sample comprises of

n=175 employees chosen from these companies. The questionnaires were distributed by the author in 2022. In total, 175 employees took part in the survey. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of data anonymity.

*Measures*

Questionnaire items were adapted from the existing literature. A five-point Likert scale was used as a measurement method [5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree]. This form of rating is an accepted scale for evaluating trust within organizations [71], [72] and provides reliable results. The study used instruments that have been empirically validated in previous studies.

*Direct communication*

The analysis of interpersonal communication in the workplace is related to its role in facilitating collaboration, [73]. Interpersonal communication in organizations is based on mutual, bilateral exchange of ideas and information between individuals. As such, it should enable content to be communicated in a way that ensures the greatest possible richness of media [34]. Therefore, communication as presented in this study focuses on two-way direct interactions and instant feedback.

In this study interpersonal communication was measured using a 3-item scale focusing on interpersonal communication. It was adapted from an instrument that evaluates organizational communication, developed by [74]. The measure was established assuming that the core characteristic of interpersonal communication is face-to-face interaction, [75].

The respondents were asked the following questions: "In this organization, we have ample opportunity to have our say", "In this organization everyone is able to communicate with everyone directly", and "In this organization we communicate with each other directly, face-to-face". The Cronbach alpha was 0.76 and the mean value was 3.83 [SD= .72].

*Interpersonal Trust*

In conceptualizing the notion of interpersonal trust, the duality of its dimension must be considered. On the one hand, interpersonal trust concerns the relationship between employees, also called lateral trust, [50]. Conversely, the trust relationship in an organizational context can refer to trust between supervisor and subordinate, which is referred to as vertical trust.

Another important distinction in analyzing trust concerns two types of trust in a cooperation environment. Analyzing the attitude of interpersonal trust in working teams, two interpretative perspectives of this phenomenon are distinguished: "state" trust and "dispositional" trust, [76]. The state concerns an individual's conviction about another person and his or her cooperative attitude, manifested in a positive anticipation, in which the partner will behave in a way that is beneficial to the individual, [77]. Dispositional trust refers to the general disposition of an individual to trust or distrust others. In the present study, state trust is being analyzed. Hence, the focus is on how employees describe their assumptions regarding a colleague's trustworthiness. This was evaluated by both employees and supervisors concerning their co-workers.

This interpersonal lateral trust variable was measured using a scale adapted from [78] and [79]. It was comprised of the following questions: "Most of my co-workers can be relied upon to do their work", "Most of my co-workers are trustworthy", and "I have confidence in my co-workers". The Cronbach's alpha of Interpersonal Trust was 0.76.

*Tacit Knowledge sharing*

There are two dimensions of tacit knowledge: technical and cognitive. Technical tacit knowledge refers to the skills or competencies acquired by an individual based on experience. In turn, cognitive knowledge refers to mental models, which are the basic source of interpretation of the external world, [80]. Cognitive tacit knowledge is a pivotal factor enabling the performance of professional tasks based on a variety of mental perspectives, [81]. Cognitive tacit knowledge is the dimension on which this study was focused.

In order to measure the sharing of tacit knowledge, different perspectives should be taken into account in the recognition of this phenomenon. The process of interpretation of tacit knowledge sharing was included in this work. This approach highlights its dynamic nature, [82]. The process of sharing tacit knowledge is understood as an interactive process in which individuals transfer experience and know-how to each other. Thus, it is expressed in the willingness of individuals to share their accumulated knowledge with others in the organization, [83].

Drawing upon this perspective, tacit knowledge sharing was measured by a scaled instrument adapted from [84]. The items were as follows: "In my organization, people are happy to communicate their personal experience with other members", "In my organization people like to share their expertise with other members" and "In my organization,

people are willing to share know-how knowledge at the request of another member". Cronbach alpha was established to be 0.81 and the mean value was 3.68 (SD=.75).

*Control variables*

In order to prevent a potentially misrepresentative linkage between the analyzed variables and to enhance the validity of this study, the effects of gender, education, and professional experience were controlled. Gender and education are considered to impact individual levels of trust, [85]. Additionally, the amount of professional experience changes employees' attitudes toward work and knowledge sharing, [86]. Younger employees are usually eager to learn and share their knowledge, while more experienced employees value their expertise and are more careful with transferring their know-how, [87]. The control variables were measured as follows: binary variable gender ( 0 – female, 1 – male), years of professional experience as one of 4 categories (0, less than a year of professional experience; 1, 1–5 years; 2, 6–10 years; 3, more than 10 years), education in terms of academic qualifications (0, high school graduates; 1, undergraduate academic degree; 2, Master's degree).

## 3.1 Data Analysis

The next stage of the analysis was to verify the hypotheses based on the Hayes PROCESS mediation procedure, [88]. The PROCESS macro is a tool for performing advanced mediation analyses, including direct, indirect, and total effects and relationships between variables based on a 5000 bootstrapped sample. The analysis was carried out in R. The analysis is validated by bootstrapped confidence intervals: if they do not contain zero, the analysis is valid.

Next, the indirect effects of interpersonal trust as mediators of the relationship between communication and tacit knowledge sharing were analyzed. Both total, indirect, and direct effects were examined. A 95% confidence interval [CI] analysis was used as an indicator of statistical significance. When the interval between low [LLCI] and high [ULCI] is zero, the mediation result is considered statistically insignificant. This study assumes the presence of partial mediation. The presence of partial mediation refers to the analysis in which the indirect effect βyx.m does not fall below zero and in which the mediation (indirect effect of X on Y) is statistically significant (p level).

## 3.2 Measurement Model Estimation

Confirmatory factor analysis [CFA] was conducted for model verification. As a statistical remedy to the possibility of common method bias, we used the single factor effect controls method, [89]. This method shall detect the occurrence of measurement error.

First, the analysis was conducted on a one-factor model that included all 9 indicators. Next, a two-factor model analysis was carried out in which the independent variable and the mediating variable were combined. Finally, a three-factor model analysis was performed, the results of which confirmed the uniqueness of the hypothesized three-factor model. The above method enabled us to assume that the hypothesized three dimensions are significantly different. Furthermore, the conducted CFA showed that the hypothesized model has a good fit (Table 1). Therefore, further analyses were carried out.

Table 1. Comparison of fit of the hypothesized model with alternative models

| Model | $\chi2$ | df | $\chi2$/df | $\Delta\chi2$ | Δdf | CFI | RMSEA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hypothesized model: three-factor model | 79 | 24 | 3.29 | | | 0.922 | 0.144 |
| Alternative model 1: one-factor model | 242 | 27 | 8.96 | 163 | 3 | 0.693 | 0.213 |
| Alternative model 2: two-factor model [interpersonal trust, and communication combined] | 187 | 26 | 7.19 | 108 | 2 | 0.771 | 0.188 |

*Note: All models are compared to the hypothesized model. df-degree of freedom; CFI- comparative fit index; RMSEA- The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation*

Another method to address the possibility of common method bias resulting from the use of a self-reporting questionnaire was theuse Harman's test, [90]. All indicators were loaded into a single factor to verify that it would account for more than half of the covariance (i.e. >50 percent). Harman's test demonstrated that the covariance between the scale indicators was 41 percent, thus indicating that common method bias does not significantly jeopardize the findings of this study.

This was followed by a reliability and validity analysis of the variables. The reliability of the variables was measured by composite reliability (CR), which was greater than the recommended value of 0.7 for individual factors (Table 2), [91]. Discriminant validity and convergent validity analysis also indicated a result above the acceptable threshold.

All p-values are < 0.001, indicating that each item significantly contributes to the respective construct. Analyzing interpersonal trust , it can be concluded that all three items significantly influence the interpersonal trust construct, with IT 2 having the strongest relationship. For tacit knowledge sharing again, all three items significantly affect tacit knowledge sharing, with TKS 1 having the highest loading. In the interpersonal communication assessment, all items also significantly load on the direct communication construct, with C2 having the strongest relationship. High z-values further support the statistical significance of these loadings (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability analysis of variables

| Measures | Construct items | Stand. Estimate | SE | z | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interperso-nal trust | IT 1 | 0.708 | 0.0709 | 9.81 | < .001 |
| | IT 2 | 0.861 | 0.0512 | 12.24 | < .001 |
| | IT 3 | 0.612 | 0.0517 | 8.10 | < .001 |
| Tacit knowledge sharing | TKS1 | 0.896 | 0.0551 | 13.92 | < .001 |
| | TKS1 | 0.822 | 0.0512 | 12.53 | < .001 |
| | TKS1 | 0.633 | 0.0729 | 8.68 | < .001 |
| Direct communi-cation | C1 | 0.676 | 0.0757 | 9.36 | < .001 |
| | C2 | 0.847 | 0.0650 | 12.45 | < .001 |
| | C3 | 0.827 | 0.0749 | 12.10 | < .001 |

| | Composite reliability | Average variance extracted | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interpersonal trust | 0.774 | 0.539 | 0.747 |
| Tacit knowledge sharing | 0.831 | 0.626 | 0.826 |
| Direct communi-cation | 0.869 | 0.619 | 0.801 |

Table 3. Correlations between constructs

| | CR | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct communi-cation | 0.774 | 0.539 | **0.78704** | | |
| Interper-sonal trust | 0.869 | 0.619 | 0.465*** | **0.73419** | |
| Tacit knowledge sharing | 0.831 | 0.626 | 0.419*** | 0.401*** | **0.79145** |

*Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; AVE stands for average variance extract. * The bold number is the square root of AVE. The bold numbers listed diagonally are the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures. The off-diagonal elements are the correlations among the constructs. For discriminate validity, the diagonal elements should be larger than the off-diagonal elements.*

The construct items are used to explain the construct.

Table 2 presents the values of the average variance extracted (AVE) and the results of Cronbach alpha analysis. The AVE ratio is above the recommended 0.5 [91] and the Cronbach alpha coefficient is above 0.7, [91]. The table 3 shows the AVE values and compares the square root of AVE with the correlation between the constructs.

The analyses indicate that the used measures are characterized by reliability and validity.

# 4 Results

## 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Of the respondents, 34.9% were female and 65.1% were male. 22.9% have been working for one to five years, 13.1% have been working for six to ten years, 3.4% have been working for less than one year, and 60.6% have been working for more than ten years. Directors comprised 5.14% of the sample in terms of position in the organization, while specialists were the largest group (67.43 %), 18.29 % were classified as managers, 3.43 % as experts, 1.71 % as analysts, 0.57 % as assistants, and 3.43 % as others. Employees holding a master's degree made up 67.43 % of the population, 17.71 % held a bachelor's degree, 11.43 % held an engineering degree, 1.14 % held a high school diploma, and 2.29 % did not specify.

## 4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Empirical verification of hypothesis H1 (Direct communication is positively related to tacit knowledge sharing in organizations) based on linear regression analysis indicates that communication positively affects tacit knowledge sharing ($\beta$ =0.314; (F (1,173) = 36.9; $p$ < 0.001), and explained 17 percent of variance ($R^2$ = 0.17).

The next step of the statistical analysis was the mediation analysis.

## 4.3 Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis results are described in Table 4.

The results based on 5000 bootstrapped samples of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 4. These findings support a hypothesized relationship between communication and knowledge sharing mediated by interpersonal trust. Statistical analyses indicate that the total effect is statistically significant ($\beta$yx=0.313; LLCI=0.211; ULCI=0.415; p<0.001). Moreover, after adding the mediation effect, when controlling for the dependent variable

(X- direct communication), the total effect was statistically significant, but its value decreased (βyx.m=0.222; LLCI=0.110; ULCI=0.333). The model explains the 22 % variance in knowledge sharing.

Table 4. Total, direct, and indirect links between direct communication and tacit knowledge sharing through interpersonal trust

| | | | | Bootstrap 95 % Confidence Interval (CI) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Effect (β)** | **SE** | **t** | **p** | **LLCI** | **ULCI** |
| Total effect (βyx): Direct communication (X) on tacit knowledge sharing (Y) | | | | | |
| 0.313 $F_p$=36.852*** $R^2$ = 0.175 | 0.051 | 6.070 | <0.001 | 0.211 | 0.415 |
| Direct effect: Communication (X) on tacit knowledge sharing (Y) | | | | | |
| 0.222 | 0.056 | 3.927 | <0.001 | 0.110 | 0.333 |
| Indirect effect (βyx.m) Direct communication (X) on tacit knowledge sharing (Y) through the interpersonal trust (M) | | | | | |
| 0.091 | 0.036 | | | 0.026 | 0.171 |

*Notes: lower level confidence interval (LLCI); level upper-level confidence interval (ULCI)*
*Number of bootstrap samples for corrected bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals: 5,000*
*Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output: 95 %. N=175*

A ratio analysis of the indirect effect to the total effect of X on Y: β=0.411, LLCI=0.086; ULCI=2.029 supports the results.
The results of the study indicate that direct communication has a positive effect on sharing tacit knowledge within the organization through interpersonal trust.

The performed statistical analyses of the empirical data indicate that the positive relationship between direct communication and tacit knowledge sharing is partially dependent on interpersonal trust. Therefore, this supports the verification of hypothesis H1 (Direct communication is positively related to tacit knowledge sharing in organizations). Furthermore, the mediation analysis supports hypothesis H2 (Interpersonal trust in co-workers mediates the relationship between direct communication and tacit knowledge sharing).

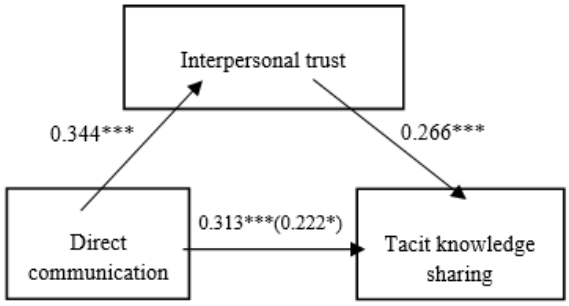


Fig. 1: Parallel mediation model (n=175). Indirect effects of direct communication on tacit knowledge sharing through interpersonal trust Standardized effects estimates are presented. The effects on the direct path from communication to tacit knowledge sharing depict the direct effect and the (total effect).***p<0.001

# 5 Discussion

This study focuses on addressing the dissemination of tacit knowledge within organizations, a critical issue for modern enterprises, as highlighted in prior research, [92]. In this context, the research examines the impact of direct interpersonal communication on the sharing of tacit knowledge. While the existing literature places considerable emphasis on the role of indirect communication facilitated by ICT tools [93], there is a noticeable gap in studies investigating the role of face-to-face, interpersonal communication in the process of tacit knowledge transfer. Additionally, the influence of trust, a variable that potentially affects this knowledge-sharing process, has not been thoroughly explored. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a deeper understanding of how direct communication and interpersonal trust interact to influence the sharing of tacit knowledge. As anticipated, the study found a positive and significant relationship between interpersonal communication and tacit knowledge sharing. The results further revealed that trust plays a crucial role in moderating this relationship, demonstrating that the presence of trust strengthens the effect of interpersonal communication on tacit knowledge dissemination. These findings highlight the importance of direct communication in fostering a trusting environment, which in turn enhances the sharing of tacit knowledge among employees.

The data aligns with the conclusions of [94], who pointed to the challenges of effectively disseminating tacit knowledge. This study supports the idea that the internalization of tacit knowledge is a time-intensive process, and that successful

knowledge-sharing is inherently tied to direct interpersonal interactions, [28]. Interpersonal communication, therefore, emerges as a fundamental component in the effective transfer of tacit knowledge. This insight is consistent with the framework proposed in [23], which underscores interpersonal communication as a core mechanism for sharing tacit knowledge within organizations.

Our study also underscores that the combination of interpersonal communication and trust among coworkers plays a crucial role in facilitating the transfer of tacit knowledge within organizations. This finding highlights the importance of traditional, face-to-face interaction in the effective dissemination of tacit knowledge. Moreover, the results suggest that fostering opportunities for employees to bond and engage in direct communication leads to significant improvements in knowledge sharing. Direct communication not only helps maintain trust among coworkers but also encourages a greater willingness to share valuable know-how, expertise, and ideas. As a result, interpersonal communication is regarded as a foundational element in creating an environment conducive to the successful exchange of tacit knowledge.

In expanding upon previous research, our study has extended the understanding of tacit knowledge sharing and its key antecedents. Specifically, our results identify trust as a critical mediating factor in the relationship between interpersonal communication and tacit knowledge transfer. This contribution adds to the growing body of work that seeks to explain the factors influencing tacit knowledge sharing. Our findings provide valuable insight into the communication-based mechanisms that underpin this process, suggesting that employees who engage in regular direct interactions are more inclined to share tacit knowledge with one another.

From a practical perspective, our research offers important guidance for managers seeking to foster knowledge sharing in modern organizations. It emphasizes that encouraging direct communication not only nurtures a trusting workplace environment but also significantly enhances the transfer of tacit knowledge. Managers should therefore prioritize opportunities for employees to interact and build relationships, as these interactions are pivotal for effective knowledge dissemination.

The significance of tacit knowledge extends beyond its immediate application and is closely tied to the process of knowledge creation within organizations, [95]. The ability to socialize, articulate, and internalize tacit knowledge is fundamental to the generation of new knowledge, [23]. Since tacit knowledge resides in the minds of individuals, its distribution through communication is essential for its utilization in organizational contexts. When individuals share their tacit knowledge, they not only improve their own understanding but also collaborate to develop new ideas and concepts. This process, in turn, gives rise to innovative approaches to professional challenges and problem-solving.

The organizational knowledge creation process relies heavily on the transition of knowledge from individuals to teams, facilitated by social interactions. Consequently, tacit knowledge must be shared to be effectively applied within an organization. Furthermore, tacit knowledge is inherently linked to innovation. Prior research has confirmed a positive relationship between tacit knowledge and innovation, [81]. As such, the development of new ideas, solutions, and innovations is largely dependent on the collective sharing of tacit knowledge, which moves from individuals to groups through reflection, discussion, and collaboration. In this context, the sharing of tacit knowledge serves as the cornerstone of organizational innovation, making it a critical driver for the advancement of new ideas and solutions.

## 5.1 Implications

The results of the present research confirm that both the concepts of interpersonal communication and trust are multidimensional, overlapping, and require further research. Direct communication contributes to the creation of mutual relations based on trust, and trust in co-workers strengthens the bonds that are created in the workplace. Face-to-face communication is a foundation of trust owing to the richness of the message (dialogue, language, gestures, interactions). Interpersonal communication facilitates tacit knowledge sharing and co-creation of new knowledge. Additionally, direct communication enables knowledge co-creation, on the basis of mutual relationships. Individuals exchange expertise and practices on the basis of mutual understanding. This unique comprehension which allows employees to share their tacit knowledge, is based on social interactions.

Secondly, this study implies that direct communication is a significant factor in enabling tacit knowledge sharing. The analyses revealed that even without the mediating effect of trust, direct communication affects tacit knowledge sharing. It contributes to the human capital theory by suggesting a positive relationship between direct communication and knowledge sharing.

Finally, this research provides empirical evidence for processes in which interpersonal communication affects tacit knowledge sharing. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first study to concentrate on the links between direct communication, trust, and tacit knowledge.

*Managerial implications*

The managerial implications relate to the importance of direct interaction in organizations. The results also suggest that interpersonal communication nurtures trust among coworkers. As a result, it is a platform for successful tacit knowledge sharing. This study suggests that the more frequently employees communicate openly, the higher the probability of tacit knowledge-sharing behavior.

The competitive advantage in current organizations depends on a company's ability to manage knowledge, [96]. Especially the process of knowledge creation and creativity in organizations is embedded in tacit knowledge, [97]. Tacit knowledge sharing is linked to organizational innovation, [81]. Yet, tacit knowledge is highly subjective and difficult to disseminate. Therefore, managers would do well to foster opportunities for employees to share tacit knowledge.

Secondly, this study provides an important insight for managers in terms of how to boost tacit knowledge dissemination. Organizations should implement practices oriented toward strengthening interpersonal bonds between coworkers and providing space for direct communication.

Thirdly, sharing tacit knowledge is beneficial for an enterprise and helps it to prosper in the turbulent contemporary environment. This is consistent with other studies, [98], [99] that emphasize the need for knowledge sharing in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Moreover, this study offers an explanation of how to advance tacit knowledge sharing by encouraging interpersonal communication. This will provide an opportunity to exchange tacit knowledge, which requires both time and interaction. Another practical conclusion suggests that trust and communication are necessary to improve knowledge management and consequently an organization's performance. It suggests that the improvement of social skills could be a successful strategy for increasing tacit knowledge sharing. More importantly, interpersonal interaction not only encourages employees to share knowledge, but it provides the necessary means to achieve it. Interpersonal interactions help build trust and psychological safety within teams, which are essential for knowledge sharing. When employees feel safe and trust one another, they are more likely to share valuable tacit knowledge, which is often personal and context-specific. Trust reduces the fear of judgment or competition, making employees more comfortable sharing their insights, [100]. Face-to-face interaction provides a more effective medium for sharing complex, context-dependent knowledge. Tacit knowledge often requires explanation through gestures, tone, and real-time feedback, which are difficult to replicate in indirect communication forms like emails or reports. Through personal interaction, employees can clarify misunderstandings, ask questions, and deepen their understanding, ensuring that knowledge is effectively transferred, [34]. Interpersonal interactions foster collaboration, which is a critical component of knowledge sharing. Employees working together on tasks or challenges can leverage their combined tacit knowledge to co-create new solutions, ideas, or innovations. This real-time exchange of ideas not only encourages sharing but makes it more dynamic and productive, [101]. Tacit knowledge is often shared through socialization, where employees learn by observing others or through informal discussions. Interpersonal interaction provides the context for this kind of learning, as employees are exposed to others' skills, techniques, and problem-solving approaches in a more natural and accessible way, [102]. Moreover, regular interpersonal communication helps reinforce a culture of openness and knowledge exchange. As employees interact more frequently, sharing becomes part of the daily routine, and cultural norms around collaboration and learning are strengthened. This encourages continuous sharing, as employees see it as a valued and rewarded behavior within the organization, [103].

## 5.2 Limitations

The limitation of this study provides challenges for future studies. The main limitation is related to sample size. It is recommended to replicate this research in different sectors on larger samples. Prospective research could explore cross-cultural aspects of the relationship between tacit knowledge sharing and interpersonal communication.

The multidimensionality of the concepts of interpersonal communication and trust makes it possible to explore more detailed aspects of these concepts. Both trust and tacit knowledge sharing have many dimensions. A precise picture of these phenomena is difficult to achieve in cross-sectional studies. Longitudinal analysis could allow

monitoring of how a relationship between trust and tacit knowledge sharing evolves.

Both vertical and horizontal trust between colleagues was taken into account in this study. However, they do not all reflect the way in which interpersonal trust issues are addressed and do not exhaust further interpretations. Another direction of research could be to examine whether trust in the organization, as a whole [institutional trust], affects tacit knowledge sharing. Moreover, it may be analyzed whether a strategic vision has an impact on employees' tacit knowledge-sharing behavior.

In addition, it would be expedient to carry out qualitative research that would make it possible to qualitatively verify the mechanism of sharing tacit knowledge based on the perspective of individual employees. An additional variable that could be included in future research is organizational culture. Another direction of further research may be to verify whether some other factors, apart from interpersonal communication, mediate the relationship between interpersonal trust and tacit knowledge sharing.

# 6 Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between direct communication, trust, and tacit knowledge sharing. The findings revealed that direct communication positively and significantly affects tacit knowledge sharing. Moreover, the research confirms that trust mediates this relationship.

The study contributes to the understanding of the "hidden mechanisms" behind tacit knowledge-sharing practices by revealing how direct communication, underpinned by trust, fosters an environment where knowledge can flow more freely. Tacit knowledge, by its nature, is difficult to externalize and requires relational mechanisms — such as trust and communication — between individuals to be transferred effectively. This emphasizes that knowledge sharing is not just about formal systems but also about interpersonal dynamics that shape behavior.

The study provides valuable guidance for managers by highlighting the importance of facilitating direct interaction among employees. In today's organizations, where remote work, digital tools, and virtual communication are prevalent, fostering direct, personal communication can be challenging but remains essential. By encouraging face-to-face interaction or creating opportunities for informal discussions, managers can create a culture where employees feel comfortable sharing tacit knowledge. This leads to improved knowledge transfer and collaboration, ultimately enhancing organizational performance and innovation.

In fast-paced and complex organizational environments, tacit knowledge is crucial for innovation and problem-solving. The study's emphasis on direct communication and trust provides practical insights for modern organizations looking to improve their internal knowledge-sharing practices. Supporting direct interaction is not just about facilitating meetings but also about creating a collaborative culture that values personal exchanges and builds trust among employees, leading to sustained knowledge flow.

**Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author wrote, reviewed and edited the content as needed and she has not utilised artificial intelligence (AI) tools. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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