The relation between skills and knowledge sharing. Explaining the mediating role of fear losing power

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Abstract

Background: Knowledge sharing is a critical driver of organizational innovation and competitiveness. However, fear of losing power often hinders employees from sharing their expertise, limiting collective learning and performance. While prior research emphasizes technical and managerial solutions, the role of individual skills (hard, soft and emotional) in influencing knowledge-sharing behaviors and mitigating power-related fears remains underexplored.

Objectives: This study examines the impact of individual skills on knowledge-sharing behaviors and investigates the mediating role of fear of losing power. Specifically, it aims to clarify how technical expertise, interpersonal skills, and emotional skills shape the willingness to share knowledge in organizational contexts.

Methodology: A survey-based approach was employed, targeting employees from diverse sectors. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the direct and mediated relationships among individual skills, fear of losing power, and knowledge sharing.

Results: Employees with advanced hard skills tend to be less inclined to share knowledge, as they experience an increased sense of vulnerability and a fear of losing their perceived power. In contrast, individuals possessing strong soft skills demonstrate greater openness and a proactive willingness to collaborate. The fear of losing power acts as a pivotal mediator, amplifying the limiting effects of hard skills on knowledge sharing while leaving soft skills unaffected. Emotional skills, on the other hand, play a significant mediating role by mitigating the fear of losing power, thereby fostering a more open and inclusive exchange of knowledge.

Implications: Organizations should address power dynamics by fostering environments that reduce competitive mindsets. Interventions such as emotional intelligence training, collaborative frameworks, and clear incentives for knowledge sharing can mitigate power-related fears and enhance knowledge flow.

Originality e Value: This study extends knowledge management literature by highlighting the nuanced role of individual skills and power dynamics in knowledge sharing. It underscores the importance of emotional intelligence and relational skills in overcoming psychological barriers, contributing to innovative and inclusive organizational cultures.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Individual Skills, Organizational Power, Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

In the modern knowledge-driven economy, the capacity to share and utilize information effectively is critical for organizational innovation and competitive advantage. Knowledge sharing - the intentional act of exchanging information, skills, and experiences - is a cornerstone of organizational learning and collaborative success (Azeem et al., 2021).

While its strategic value is widely acknowledged, the socio-psychological and structural barriers that hinder its implementation often receive insufficient attention. At the heart of this complexity lies a dialectical tension: the declared intention to share knowledge for collective advancement versus the individual perception of potential risks to power or status. Academic literature extensively explores the determinants of knowledge sharing, emphasizing its dual nature: explicit knowledge, which is easily codified, and tacit knowledge, deeply rooted in personal experience and challenging to articulate (Ganguly et al., 2019). While considerable research has addressed technological and managerial facilitators of knowledge sharing, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of individual skills - specifically hard, soft, and emotional skills - in shaping knowledge-sharing behaviors.

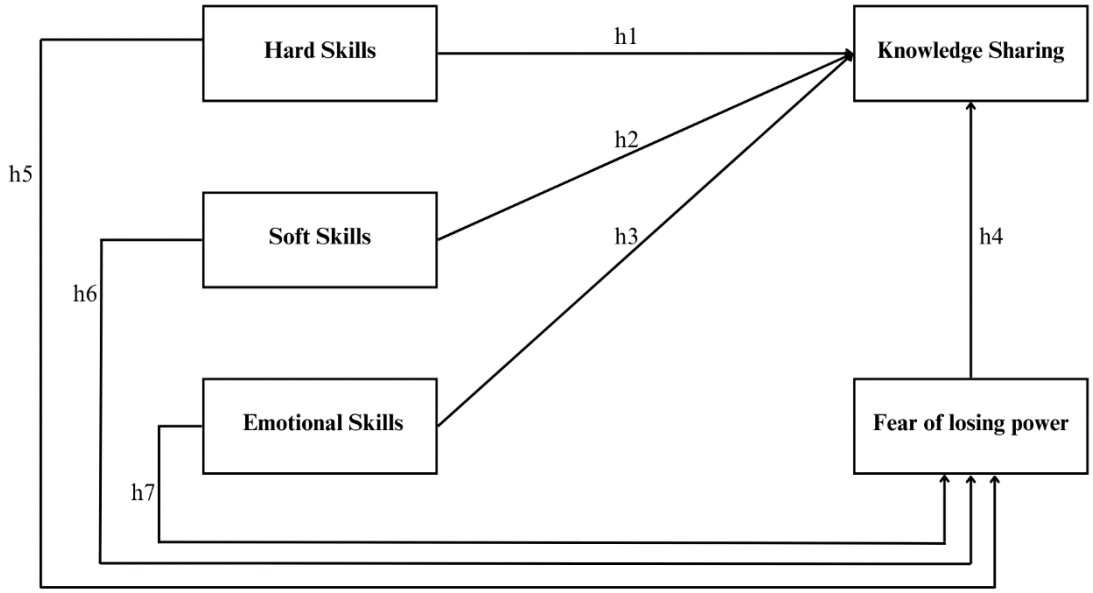
Recent statistics underscore the urgency of addressing this gap. Deloitte's "*2024 Global Human Capital Trends*" report emphasizes that individual skills and human performance are central elements in fostering a work environment that supports knowledge sharing (Deloitte, 2024). The concept of human sustainability, introduced in the report, focuses on skill development, strengthening the sense of belonging, and creating collective value through the exchange of information, experiences, and ideas (Deloitte, 2024). According to the report, traditional indicators, such as productivity, are inadequate for measuring an organization's true effectiveness in promoting collaboration. Instead, assessing factors such as trust, creativity, emotional intelligence, and well-being becomes essential to encourage proactive behaviors in knowledge sharing. These findings highlight the need for an integrated understanding of how individual skills intersect with psychological and organizational

factors to influence knowledge-sharing behaviors. So, this study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating:

- RQ1: *Do hard, soft and emotional skills shape proactive behaviors in knowledge sharing?*
- RQ2: *Does the perception of fear of losing power affect the willingness to share knowledge?*
- RQ3: Does *fear of losing power mediate the relationship between these skills and knowledge-sharing behaviors?*

The proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1), therefore, aims to analyze how individual skills not only directly influence the propensity to share knowledge, but also interact with the fear of losing power, which can act as an important mediator.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework (Figure 1) integrates these dimensions, proposing that while hard skills may inadvertently amplify fears of power loss, soft and emotional skills can mitigate such barriers, fostering a culture of openness and collaboration. This study contributes to the literature by exploring these nuanced relationships, offering practical insights into creating knowledge-centric, adaptive organizations.

The research employs a quantitative approach, leveraging a survey-based methodology to examine latent constructs. The sample consists of 318 employees from manufacturing and service industries, ensuring diversity in roles and demographics. Validated scales from existing literature were adapted to measure individual skills, fear of losing power and knowledge sharing. The methodology involved two key stages: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model, ensuring internal consistency and convergent validity; Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to explore causal relationships and test the mediating effect of fear of losing power. The results reveal that Hard skills negatively correlate with knowledge sharing, suggesting that high technical expertise may heighten perceptions of personal power threats. Soft skills show a positive and significant relationship, highlighting their role in fostering collaborative behaviors. Emotional skills are not significantly associated with knowledge sharing but they play an important mediating role by alleviating the fear of losing power, thus promoting the knowledge sharing and, finally, Fear of losing power mediates the relationship between hard skills and soft skills with knowledge sharing.

The paper begins with an Introduction outlining the research background, objectives, and research questions. The Theoretical Background explores existing literature and presents the hypotheses. The Methodology describes the research design, data collection and analysis. The Results highlight key findings, including relationships between skills, fear of losing power, and knowledge sharing. The article concludes with a Discussion, addressing implications and future research directions and, finally, with the limitations.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Skills in action: analyzing the role of competence in knowledge sharing behaviors

Knowledge management, conceptualized as the process through which information is collected, organized, and distributed within an organization, ensures that people have access to relevant information at the right time and in the right format (Intezari et al., 2017). This process is closely linked to knowledge sharing, a key element that precedes the effective use of knowledge. Academic literature defines knowledge sharing as an intentional behavior through which individuals exchange information, skills, and experiences (Ahmed et al., 2019). Such exchanges are essential for creating new knowledge and strengthening both individual and organizational capabilities, directly influencing corporate competitiveness.

In the managerial and organizational context, knowledge sharing includes both explicit knowledge, which can be easily codified and transferred, and tacit knowledge, embedded in personal experience and difficult to transfer without direct interaction (Ganguly et al., 2019; Olaisen & Revang, 2018). Through well-structured sharing processes, companies can foster innovation at both the individual (Kim et al., 2024) and organizational levels (Abubakar et al., 2019). The ability to share knowledge involves a cognitive and behavioral process that enables individuals to make sense of what they know and adapt that knowledge to their operating environments (Azeem et al., 2021). Indeed, knowledge sharing is widely recognized in management literature as an intentional process involving the voluntary disclosure of ideas, skills, and experiences among organizational members, thereby contributing to the enhancement of collective intellectual capital (Donate et al., 2022). The success of knowledge sharing requires a dual effort: on one hand, converting knowledge into understandable and applicable forms; on the other, fostering a genuine willingness to share such knowledge with others (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). This behavior implies a partial relinquishment of knowledge ownership for the common good, often described as prosocial behavior (Ipe, 2003; Singh et al., 2021). In this sense, knowledge sharing can be seen as an intentional act that requires conscious effort and

commitment to release information that can benefit others (Singh et al., 2021). Thus, the concept of knowledge sharing is intrinsically linked to organizational learning, defined as the organization's ability to adapt and transform through the accumulation and application of new skills (Castaneda & Durán, 2018; Kimmerle et al., 2010).

In light of the above, the concept of competence emerges as a central element in knowledge sharing, as it represents the practical expression of the abilities and skills individuals employ to contribute to organizational success (Testa, 2024). In managerial and organizational contexts, competence is defined as the ability of individuals to mobilize knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to meet excellence standards in specific contexts (Syah et al., 2020).

Being competent in a rapidly evolving world implies that competence is no longer confined to technical expertise but encompasses a broader spectrum of skills that enable individuals to thrive in dynamic and complex environments. The ability to learn continuously and proactively improve performance has become a cornerstone of professional success (Ossiannilsson, 2022). In this context, emotional intelligence plays a particularly vital role, enabling professionals to manage interpersonal relationships, navigate change, and foster a resilient approach to challenges (Serrat, 2017). Alongside technical proficiency, qualities such as adaptability, teamwork, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation are increasingly regarded as critical for achieving sustainable professional success (Universitas & Maranatha, 2021). Empirical studies emphasize that investments in human capital - spanning both technical and interpersonal skills - yield measurable benefits for organizational performance (Testa et al., 2024). Hard skills, characterized by domain-specific technical expertise, have long been foundational to professional competence (Ardina et al., 2021; Laker & Powell, 2011); however, their value is increasingly contextualized within broader frameworks that integrate interpersonal and behavioral proficiencies, commonly referred to as soft skills. These skills, including communication, collaboration, and ethical conduct, enable individuals to navigate the relational dynamics that underpin effective teamwork and innovation (Sciarelli et al., 2020). As complexity grows in professional environments, there is a rising demand for reflective and methodological skills.

Decision-making ability, cognitive flexibility, and structured problem-solving approaches are critical for addressing ambiguity and driving innovation (Universitas & Maranatha, 2021). Rather than treating technical expertise as an isolated metric of success, organizations must recognize the interplay between these diverse skill sets: by fostering environments that prioritize continuous learning and integrating technical proficiency with interpersonal effectiveness, organizations can build adaptive and collaborative workforces equipped for the challenges of the future (Syah et al., 2020). This evolving perspective on competence reflects a broader shift in managerial thought, one that values not only what employees know but how they apply, share, and adapt their knowledge in complex and interconnected settings (Alt et al., 2023).

Specifically, hard skills represent a set of specific abilities derived from theoretical and practical knowledge acquired through formal education, professional experience, and on-the-job learning; traditionally, possessing deep and specialized hard skills was considered a guarantee of success in the labor market (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018a). These skills form the core of an individual's "know-how" and are essential for effectively performing work tasks in specific contexts (Setiawan Wibowo et al., 2020).

So, will an individual with high hard skills share his knowledge with others? Mastery of specific skills related to one's field of work influence a proactive attitude in knowledge sharing, thus impacting the flow of information and innovation in a professional context. The first hypothesis to be tested can be expressed as follows:

H1: Hard skills influence the willingness to share knowledge.

However, the contemporary professional landscape demands not only highly specialized vertical knowledge but also a continuous ability to update and adapt to technological and methodological innovations (Fan et al., 2017). From an organizational perspective, maintaining a high level of hard skills requires significant investments in continuous training programs and professional development. Empirical evidence shows that an increase in employees' hard skills translates into higher motivation, job satisfaction, and improved operational performance (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018a).

Soft skills, in turn, occupy a prominent position as they represent personal qualities, attitudes, and behaviors that go beyond hard or formal knowledge (Universitas & Maranatha, 2021). Contemporary management literature emphasizes the strategic role of soft skills in the workplace, highlighting them as essential skills for effectively integrating and applying hard knowledge in complex organizational contexts (Marin-Zapata et al., 2022). These skills include interpersonal, human, and behavioral abilities rooted in the personal sphere and closely tied to an individual's identity (van Laar et al., 2017). Soft skills manifest through a wide range of behaviors and dispositions, including but not limited to problem-solving, creativity, intrinsic motivation, flexibility, stress management, critical thinking, effective communication, and empathy (van Laar et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, organizational literature underscores that soft skills are not ancillary but fundamental to the functioning of modern organizations, as they support the creation of collaborative and productive environments (Alt et al., 2023).

Recent studies have demonstrated that top performers excel not only due to their hard skills but also because of their ability to exhibit intrinsic motivation, positive attitudes, and shared values (Marin-Zapata et al., 2022). Promoting soft skills in organizations is crucial to sustaining continuous learning processes and facilitating knowledge sharing: recent research highlights that acquiring and integrating transversal skills enhances employees' work effectiveness, generating positive attitudes and fostering proactive behaviors oriented toward collaboration (Kordab et al., 2020). This leads to a more productive, rewarding, and sustainable work environment where employees feel motivated and supported in their professional growth (Alt et al., 2023; Kordab et al., 2020). Therefore, soft skills, in turn, being relational and communicative skills, could favor the sharing of one's knowledge. This assumption is based on the idea that skills such as effective communication and the ability to collaborate create a favorable environment for sharing experiences and skills. This allows one to experience greater trust and openness towards others as well as stimulate a climate of collaboration that favors the will to actively participate in the process of sharing knowledge. Therefore, the hypothesis to be verified is the following:

H2: Soft skills influence the willingness to share knowledge.

Instead, Emotional skills represent a complex set of individual traits emerging from the dynamic interaction between innate biological predispositions and cumulative environmental influences (Cavallo & Brienza, 2002; Serrat, 2017). These traits manifest through behavioral, cognitive, and emotional patterns that consolidate throughout life via formal and informal learning experiences (Obermayer & Kovari, 2016; Rechberg & Essig, 2023). In today's socio-economic context, emotional skills have gained increasing prominence, emerging as critical elements for employability and both individual and collective well-being (Leon & Romanelli, 2020). Within this context, emotional intelligence (EI) has become a key dimension for understanding organizational functioning. Twenty-first-century companies have progressively shifted their focus from intelligence quotient (IQ) to emotional quotient (EQ), recognizing the strategic role of emotional skills in building resilient, empathetic, and sustainability-oriented work environments (Malik, 2021; Srivastava & Jaiswal, 2022). This paradigm shift has been supported by pioneering research highlighting the critical role of emotions in regulating workplace behaviors and shaping the quality of interpersonal relationships in organizational settings (Damasio, 1994; D'Souza et al., 2021; Pham, 2022). The focus on the development of emotional skills is a very important element in the analysis of the willingness to share knowledge. The concept of emotional skills encompasses the awareness and regulation of emotions, as well as the ability to understand and respond empathetically to the emotions of others. From this perspective, it is assumed that those who develop these skills can contribute to creating a work environment that promotes trust, mutual understanding and open sharing of experiences. When individuals are able to constructively manage their emotions, they are more likely to feel comfortable in expressing their ideas, opinions and experiences, without fear of judgment or criticism. Therefore, the hypothesis to be tested is the following:

H3: Emotional skills influence the willingness to share knowledge.

However, the individual predisposition to share personal knowledge and skills (hard, soft or emotional) is not guaranteed and can often be hindered by psychological and social barriers (Catalano

et al., 2018; Peng, 2024). Among these, the fear of losing power holds a central position (Iqbal et al., 2022).

The psychology of power: how fear shapes knowledge sharing

Fear, defined as a primary emotion arising in response to perceived threats, plays a central role in this scenario: psychological research suggests that it represents an evolutionary reaction aimed at protecting the individual but can trigger dysfunctional behaviors when applied in the workplace (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). In the organizational context, fear manifests as a multidimensional construct influenced by structural, social, and psychological factors, shaping defensive attitudes and communicative closure (Luqman et al., 2023). When employees perceive that their professional value is tied to exclusive knowledge, they may adopt protective strategies, including withholding information or limiting skill-sharing (S. Wang & Noe, 2010). The fear of sharing knowledge can be seen as a defensive strategy against uncertainty and perceived risk, especially when employees feel they lack control over potential consequences (Fang, 2017; Milliken et al., 2003); indeed, the literature highlights that the perception of potential status loss or career opportunities can intensify knowledge-hoarding behaviors, particularly in highly competitive environments (Shukla et al., 2024). Knowledge and expertise become strategic resources that grant bargaining power to their holders, fostering opportunistic behaviors and limiting collaboration opportunities (Issac et al., 2022). This dynamic is further amplified by digital interactions, where the lack of direct contact can exacerbate feelings of insecurity and isolation (Hsu & Chang, 2014; Luqman et al., 2023). As a result, knowledge is not viewed as a collective asset but as a personal bargaining tool: employees may develop a competitive mindset, perceiving knowledge sharing as a threat to their professional relevance, thus generating distrust and opportunism (Durst & Zieba, 2019).

Social psychology has extensively explored the concept of power, describing it as a combination of control over resources and the ability to influence others while maintaining relative immunity from external influence (Durst & Zieba, 2019; Keltner et al., 2008); it is as a fluctuating psychological state

dependent on environmental conditions and social interactions (Galinsky A. D. et al., 2015; Galinsky et al., 2003). This perspective implies that power is not a static attribute but a dynamic construct developed through access to critical resources and the ability to positively influence the organization through knowledge sharing (Grözinger et al., 2022).

Organizational power theory suggests that controlling informational resources provides individuals not only with an internal competitive advantage but also greater immunity from external influences (Nasim, 2018). This informational power translates into the ability to define the conditions of one's organizational participation, constructing cognitive and relational barriers that hinder collaborative exchange (Sanchis et al., 2020). Such dynamics are particularly pronounced in highly specialized contexts where hard knowledge is scarce and of high strategic value (Sanchis et al., 2020). The resulting social dilemma is evident: individual rationality aimed at preserving power conflicts with collective well-being, compromising the creation of shared value (Van Lange et al., 2013). Individuals, fearing exploitation or inadequate recognition for their contributions, adopt defensive strategies that limit access to information and hinder others' development of new skills (Aram, 1989; Van Lange et al., 2013). Employees may perceive that sharing their unique knowledge decreases their value, putting their status, authority, and even job security at risk (van de Water et al., 2023). This dilemma highlights a critical research gap: while existing literature has primarily focused on interventions such as implementing knowledge management systems to facilitate information flow and adopting ethical leadership practices to promote authentic sharing and individual merit recognition (Budhwar et al., 2023), the role of individual skills remains underexplored.

Based on the findings, it becomes evident that managerial literature provides a broad and complex theoretical foundation on knowledge management, particularly concerning knowledge sharing and the skills required to facilitate this process. The primary goal of employees who share knowledge is to create a continuous learning environment, improving their skills and contributing to collective growth (Coun et al., 2019). This proactive behavior becomes an adaptive response aimed at building collaborative relationships and generating shared value (Singh et al., 2021). However, studies on hard

skills have primarily focused on their operational implications and measurability (Universitas & Maranatha, 2021), while soft skills have been addressed mainly in relation to team dynamics and leadership (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018a; Syah et al., 2020). This reveals a theoretical gap: the interaction between individual skills – hard, soft, and emotional – and the perception of power threat in organizational contexts related to knowledge sharing has not been adequately explored. Most studies have concentrated on interpersonal relationships and conflict management, overlooking the impact that skills, particularly emotional ones, may have in overcoming knowledge-sharing barriers driven by the fear of losing power (Salehi & Sadeq Alanbari, 2023; W. T. Wang et al., 2019). This theoretical limitation highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics associated with knowledge sharing, moving beyond the current focus on external mechanisms and fostering sustainable collaborative behaviors. While organizational power is viewed as dynamic and linked to the control of informational resources, the fear of losing power is often interpreted as a consequence of organizational structures, neglecting the active role of emotional skills. So, the objective of this research is to examine how the willingness to share knowledge can be influenced by the fear of losing power. This perspective highlights that information sharing is not merely a matter of knowledge transmission but is closely interconnected with authority and subordination relationships in a professional context. Power dynamics play a significant role in shaping individuals' perception of the risk of losing influence when they choose to share their knowledge. Therefore, the following hypothesis is worth testing:

H4: The fear of losing power influences the decision to share one's knowledge.

At the same time, an advanced level of technical expertise can contribute to greater individual insecurity, thereby increasing the perception of threat associated with knowledge sharing. Consequently, the following hypothesis is worth testing:

H5: To have a high level of hard skills influences the fear of losing power associated with knowledge sharing.

Similarly, an enhancement of soft skills can play a significant role in mitigating concerns related to loss of control during the knowledge-sharing process. Individuals may be more inclined to manage information-sharing dynamics in a collaborative and constructive manner, thereby fostering an environment where knowledge sharing is perceived as a non-threatening act. This suggests that the relational dimension is crucial in shaping perceptions and fears associated with the knowledge-sharing process, providing a more comprehensive understanding of organizational dynamics. Therefore, the following hypothesis is worth testing:

H6: Soft skills influence the fear of losing power associated with knowledge sharing.

Lastly, effective emotional management could modulate the perception of threat associated with knowledge sharing, as individuals capable of managing their emotions effectively are more likely to perceive the knowledge-sharing process as less threatening to their power. As highlighted in the literature, adequate and functional emotional skills are essential for creating a work climate in which people feel more comfortable sharing information, thereby promoting an open and collaborative organizational culture (Srivastava & Jaiswal, 2022). In summary, the ability to manage emotions could emerge as a key factor in shaping individuals' willingness to share knowledge. Therefore, the following hypothesis is worth testing:

H7: Emotional skills influence the fear of losing power associated with knowledge sharing.

The objective is to outline practical managerial implications aimed at fostering a work environment that encourages knowledge sharing, stimulates innovation, and contributes to sustainable success and shared prosperity.

Methodology

In this paragraph the methodology used to explore the relationship between individual skills and fear of losing power on the willingness of knowledge sharing is described.

The empirical analysis is based on a survey questionnaire designed to capture the latent dimensions of individual skills, fear of losing power and knowledge sharing. To provide robustness of the results, validated items and scales of the latent variables are adapted from previous literature.

Sample, Data collection procedure and Respondent Profile

To explore and validate the hypotheses outlined in the conceptual framework, we conducted a survey targeting employees from Italian companies. The survey was administered via email, ensuring broad accessibility. A probabilistic sampling method was employed to enhance the representativeness of the sample, aiming to capture diverse demographic and organizational characteristics relevant to the study and to facilitate the generalization of findings. The web-based survey, developed using Microsoft Forms, was structured into two main sections. The first section included eleven demographic questions designed to profile the participants, such as gender, age, place of residence, legal domicile of the company, the company's primary industry, the employee's role, job function, and working modality (e.g., remote, in-person, or hybrid). The second section focused on capturing data related to the three primary constructs within the conceptual framework: individual skills (hard, soft, and emotional), fear of losing power, and knowledge-sharing behaviors. The questions were designed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Strongly Disagree," 3 signified "Neutral," and 5 indicated "Strongly Agree." The Likert scale is a psychometric tool widely used to measure attitudes, offering a standardized method for capturing respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement (Likert, 1932).

The questionnaire was distributed to a pool of companies selected from the client portfolio of Virvelle, an Italian consulting and training company specializing in human resources development and organizational improvement. Virvelle supports organizations by designing and delivering tailored training programs, conducting assessments, and offering coaching and outdoor management training to enhance organizational capabilities. The company's expertise in training and assessment ensured

that the targeted participants aligned with the research objectives, covering a variety of industries and organizational roles.

Before the official distribution, a pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 37 employees to evaluate the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions. Based on the feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve the questionnaire's structure and ensure its suitability for a larger audience. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, adhering to ethical research principles and ensuring data privacy. The final survey was distributed to companies operating in diverse sectors, yielding a total of 372 responses. After a thorough data cleaning process, 318 valid responses were retained for analysis. This process filtered out incomplete responses and ensured that participants met predefined criteria, such as their role and length of employment, to guarantee data quality and reliability.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1, which provides a detailed breakdown of the participants by frequency and percentage across various categories. This descriptive analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the sample composition and provides valuable context for interpreting the study's findings.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic characteristics

Demographic	**Value**	**N**	**%**
Gender	Man	228	28,3%
	Woman	90	71,7%
Age	16-24	4	1,3%
	25-34	107	33,6%
	35-44	77	24,2%
	45-54	89	28,0%
	55-64	40	12,6%
	64+	1	0,3%
Nationality	Italian	316	99,4%
	English	2	0,6%
Education level	Primary school diploma	16	5,0%
	Middle school diploma	41	12,9%
	High school diploma	84	26,4%
	Bachelor's degree	33	10,4%
	Master's degree	25	7,9%
	PhD	5	1,6%
Core Business	Food	11	3,5%
	Automotive	16	5,0%

	Carpentry	22	6,9%
	Construction	53	16,7%
	Renewable Energy	69	21,7%
	Education	15	4,7%
	Manufacturing	21	6,6%
	Marketing	19	6,0%
	Metalworking	79	24,8%
	Human Resources	13	4,1%
Business Role	Manager	16	5,0%
	Middle Manager	10	3,1%
	Office Employee	176	55,3%
	Worker	116	36,5%
Business Function	Procurement and Sourcing	27	8,5%
	Administration and Finance	23	7,2%
	Corporate Communications	2	0,6%
	Customer Service	1	0,3%
	Quality Management	5	1,6%
	Legal and Compliance	5	1,6%
	Logistics and Supply Chain Management	15	4,7%
	Production and Operations	162	50,9%
	Research and Development (R&D)	25	7,9%
	Human Resources (HR)	13	4,1%
	Information Technology (IT)	13	4,1%
	Sales and Marketing	27	8,5%
Working mode	In person	253	79,6%
	Mixed	55	17,3%
	Smart working	10	3,1%
Mostly the work is done	Both ways	213	67,0%
	In team	46	14,5%
	Individually	59	18,6%

Table 1 highlights the demographic and organizational characteristics of the participants, supporting the alignment of the sample with the research objectives and ensuring the robustness of the subsequent analysis.

The sample is predominantly composed of men (71.7%), consistent with the representation in sectors such as metalworking, construction, and renewable energy, where male participation is generally higher; women, on the other hand, represent 28.3% of the total. Regarding age, the sample is primarily distributed in the 25–34 age group (33.6%), followed by the 45–54 age group (28.0%) and the 35–44 age group (24.2%). This distribution indicates a prevalence of young and middle-aged workers, representing a mix of established professionals and new perspectives. Nearly the entire sample is

Italian (99.4%), with a minimal representation of foreign participants (0.6%). This data reflects the geographical localization of the sample and the influence of the Italian socio-cultural context on organizational dynamics. In terms of education, the sample shows an interesting diversification: 26.4% hold a high school diploma, while 18.3% possess a university degree (bachelor's or master's) or higher (PhD). However, a significant portion (17.9%) has a lower educational level (primary or middle school). Furthermore, the sample covers a wide variety of industrial sectors, with a predominance of metalworking companies (24.8%), followed by renewable energy (21.7%) and construction (16.7%). In terms of business roles, the majority of participants are office employees (55.3%) and workers (36.5%), with a smaller presence of managers (5.0%) and middle managers (3.1%). The predominant business function is "Production and Operations" (50.9%), followed by "Procurement and Sourcing" (8.5%) and "Sales and Marketing" (8.5%). This indicates that the sample is focused on core and operational activities. In terms of working mode, the majority of participants work in person (79.6%), while a smaller percentage adopt mixed modalities (17.3%) or remote work (3.1%). Additionally, work is predominantly performed collaboratively (67.0%), with 14.5% working in teams and 18.6% working individually.

Measurement elements

For this study, a meticulous approach was adopted to validate the research instruments and scales, leveraging established theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies to ensure accuracy and relevance. Each construct was carefully selected to align with the research objectives and to comprehensively capture the dimensions of interest. Knowledge sharing emerges represents the interactive and collaborative process through which individuals exchange insights, expertise, and experiences (Fang, 2017). The fear of losing power is a psychological dimension that examines the reluctance or hesitance individuals may experience when sharing knowledge (Fang, 2017). This construct delves into the concerns about diminishing personal value or influence within an

organization. It encapsulates the tension between contributing to collective success and safeguarding individual status, particularly in competitive or hierarchical settings.

Hard skills, defined by their technical and specialized nature, form the foundation of professional expertise (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018b); soft skills are examined as the interpersonal and adaptive abilities that enable individuals to navigate complex social and professional environments (Forrest & Swanton, 2021) and, finally, emotional skills represent the capacity to recognize, manage, and respond to emotions - both one's own and those of others - in workplace interactions (Takšić et al., 2009). Each construct was operationalized using validated scales from the literature, ensuring that they are both theoretically grounded and empirically robust. Descriptions of these constructs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement elements and their references

Construct	Description	Author/s
Knowledge Sharing	Knowledge sharing refers to the collaborative activity in which individuals exchange information, skills, and ideas to foster the achievement of common goals.	(Fang, 2017)
Fear of Losing Power	Fear of losing power is a psychological construct that captures the individual perception of risks associated with knowledge sharing. It is defined as the anxiety or fear that the transfer of personal knowledge might compromise one's unique value or advantageous position within an organization.	(Fang, 2017)
Hard Skills	Hard skills represent the set of technical abilities and specific practical knowledge required to perform work-related tasks.	(Hendarman & Cantner, 2018a)
Soft Skills	Soft skills encompass a range of cognitive, social, and relational abilities necessary to navigate complex environments.	(Forrest & Swanton, 2021)
Emotional Skills	Emotional skills reflect the ability to perceive, express, and regulate personal and others' emotions in the workplace.	(Takšić et al., 2009)

Analysis

The theoretical construct was tested employing a Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis, a sophisticated statistic technique particularly suited for studying relations among latent variables (Qin & Wang, 2024). Moreover, SEM is quite useful to explore mediating relationship, as in our case.

The application of a SEM analysis follows two main steps: the valuation of the measurement model to assure the validity of the latent construct followed by the fit of the structural model that tests the relationship among the individual skills, the fear of losing power and knowledge sharing.

Common method bias was checked using the procedures proposed by Saxena et al. (2022). In particular, a Harman's single factor and a Variance inflation factor (VIF) test are performed to assure that our data are not influenced by common method variance. The results of the test both support the absence of common method bias.

Measurement model

The measurement model was valuated through an explorative factor analysis followed by a confirmative factor analysis. Internal consistency of each construct was confirmed using KMO and Cronbach's Alpha. Both measures are higher than 0.8 indicating a robust internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

Convergent validity was checked using the average variance extracted (AVE). All the AVE values are above 0.5 ensuring the presence of a strong convergence of the measures within each construct.

The results of the confirmative factorial analysis are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Confirmative Factorial Analysis

	μ	SD	α di Cronbach	AVE	KMO
KS	3.17	0.964	0.870	0.632	0.892
FLP	2.59	1.31	0.940	0.721	0.893
HS	3.95	0.793	0.873	0.506	0.855
SS	3.83	0.576	0.888	0.568	0.879
ES	3.41	0.549	0.949	0.603	0.899

The CFA confirmed the robustness of the measurements of the constructs used in the study, ensuring both validity and reliability. The results highlight that the construct related to knowledge sharing (KS) is effectively represented, with high values for both internal consistency and convergent validity. Similarly, fear of losing power (FLP) stands out for its excellent reliability and the clear ability of the

items to capture the key dimensions of the construct. Hard skills (HS), while showing an AVE value close to the critical threshold, demonstrate good overall reliability, indicating that the construct is robust, although it could benefit from further refinement. In contrast, soft skills (SS) and emotional skills (ES) rank among the most solid constructs, exhibiting high levels of internal consistency and clear convergent validity. Emotional skills, in particular, demonstrate extremely precise measurement, reaffirming their crucial role in the analyzed context. Overall, the CFA results provide strong support for the validity of the model, enabling a confident approach to the structural analysis of the relationships between individual skills, fear of losing power, and knowledge sharing.

Structural model and Results

The structural model for the i^{th} observations is described by the following two equations:

$$z_i = \beta_0 + \beta_{xz} x_i + \varepsilon_{zi},$$

$$y_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_{zy} z_i + \alpha_{xy} x_i + \varepsilon_{yi}$$

where ε_{zi} and ε_{yi} are the errors supposed uncorrelated and normally distributed.

The system of structural equations describes the direct effect α_{xy} referring to the route from the exogenous variable to the outcome, while accounting for the mediator. The indirect effect delineates the route from the exogenous variable to the outcome via the mediator. This pathway is denoted by the product of β_{xz} and α_{zy}. The overall effect is the aggregate of the both the direct and indirect effects (Gunzler et al., 2013).

To test the mediation, we begin by analysing a simplified regression equation that excludes the mediator.

$$y_i = \alpha^*{}_0 + \alpha^*_{xy} x_i + \varepsilon^*{}_{yi}$$

If the term α^*_{xy} is different from 0 then we proceed to evaluate the mediation effect of the fear of losing power on the specific individual skills.

The results of the first step of the analysis without considering the mediator are reported in Table 5 and Figure 2. The model shows a reasonable good model fit according to multiple fit statistics: χ^2 6212 (df 2690) p<0.001; RMSEA=0.070; SRMR=0.075; GFI=0.85; AGFI=0.86 (Table 4).

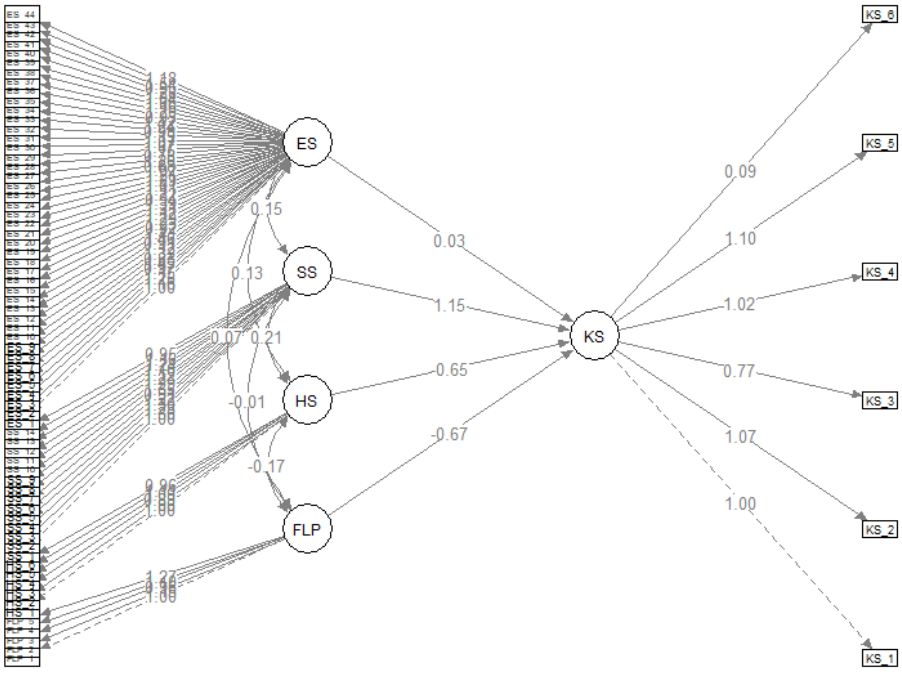
Table 4. Fit indices without mediation effect

						95% Confidence Intervals		
χ2	**df**	**SRMR**	**RMSEA**	**GFI**	**AGFI**	**Lower**	**Upper**	**RMSEA p**
6212	2690	0.075	0.070	0.85	0.86	0.068	0.072	< .001

Table 5. SEM results without mediation effect

				95% Confidence Intervals				
Dep	**Pred**	**Estimate**	**SE**	**Lower**	**Upper**	**β**	**z**	**p**
KS	FLP	-0.6662	0.0675	-0.798	-0.534	-0.6363	-9.875	< .001
KS	HS	-0.6516	0.1184	-0.884	-0.419	-0.4240	-5.502	< .001
KS	SS	11.473	0.2112	0.733	1.561	0.5129	5.432	< .001
KS	ES	0.0301	0.1548	-0.273	0.334	0.0130	0.194	0.846

Figure 2. Path diagram of the SEM model without mediation effect



The result presented in Table 5 show that hard individual skills are negatively and significantly related to the knowledge sharing (-0.65, p<0.001). The results suggest that employees who possess a high

level of hard skills have a tendency to restrict the amount of information they share with others. In contrast, soft skill are positively related with knowledge sharing (1.15, p<0.001). In such cases, people with more soft skills are more likely to share knowledge. The results show a not significant relationship between emotional skills and knowledge sharing. Overall considered these results partially support H1.

At last, the results of these model show that there is a negative and significant relation between the fear of losing power and knowledge sharing (-0.66, p<0.001). This suggests that a high perception of personal power threat is associated with a decreased desire to share knowledge. The result support H2.

Taking count of this results, the analysis continued considering the mediation role of the fear of losing power on the individual skills. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 7 and the path diagram in Figure 8. This model shows a reasonable good model fit: χ^2 6222 (df 2691) p<0.001; RMSEA=0.070; SRMR=0.077; GFI=0.87; AGFI=0.86 (Table 6).

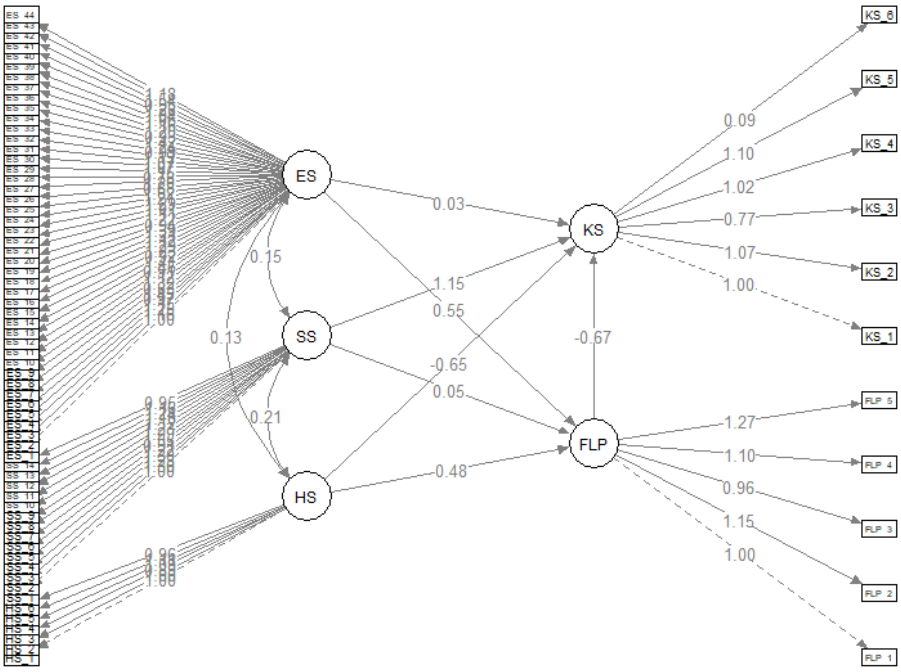
Table 6. Fit indices with mediation effect

						95% Confidence Intervals		
χ2	**df**	**SRMR**	**RMSEA**	**GFI**	**AGFI**	**Lower**	**Upper**	**RMSEA p**
6222	2691	0.077	0.070	0.87	0.86	0.068	0.072	< .001

Table 7. SEM results with the mediation effect

				95% Confidence Intervals				
Dep	**Pred**	**Estimate**	**SE**	**Lower**	**Upper**	**β**	**z**	**p**
KS	FLP	-0.6662	0.0675	-0.798	-0.534	-0.6363	-9.875	< .001
KS	HS	-0.6517	0.1185	-0.884	-0.420	-0.4240	-5.502	< .001
KS	SS	11.473	0.2112	0.733	1.561	0.5129	5.432	< .001
KS	ES	0.0301	0.1548	-0.273	0.334	0.0130	0.194	0.846
FLP	HS	-0.4827	0.1228	-0.723	-0.242	-0.3288	-3.931	< .001
FLP	SS	0.0547	0.2089	-0.355	0.464	0.0256	0.262	0.793
FLP	ES	0.5466	0.1846	0.185	0.908	0.2481	2.961	0.003

Figure 3 Path diagram of the SEM model with the mediation effect



The results for this model further confirm the relationship obtained for the previous model. In addition, this model shows that the fear of losing power act as a mediator in the relationship between hard skill and knowledge sharing (0.48, $p<0.001$) while is not a mediator for the soft skill. This finding implies that employees' higher degrees of hard skills may induce a greater sense of personal power threat, which in turn leads them to restrict their knowledge sharing. Finally, emotional skills positively mediate the fear of losing power leading to sharing one's knowledge (0.5466, $p=0.003$); this finding highlights a nuanced dynamic: individuals with higher emotional intelligence may perceive the knowledge-sharing process as less threatening to their power. The positive coefficient suggests that these skills could buffer the negative impacts of fear in the organizational context. In mediation terms, emotional skills may indirectly support knowledge sharing by mitigating the fear of losing power.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how individual skills and the fear of losing power influence knowledge-sharing behaviors in organizational settings. These results contribute to both the theoretical discourse on knowledge management and the practical approaches to fostering collaborative and innovative environments.

The negative relationship between hard skills and knowledge sharing highlights a paradox in organizational dynamics. While technical expertise is traditionally viewed as a cornerstone of professional competence, the findings suggest that individuals with high levels of hard skills may perceive their specialized knowledge as a source of personal power. This perception, in turn, fosters a protective stance, where the act of sharing knowledge is seen as a potential threat to their unique value within the organization. This defensive behavior aligns with existing literature on power dynamics, where knowledge is not merely a resource but a political asset (Nasim, 2018). These findings underscore the need for organizations to address the unintended consequences of expertise-driven hierarchies, which may inadvertently discourage open knowledge sharing. Strategies such as cross-functional collaboration, peer mentoring, and recognition systems that reward knowledge dissemination can help mitigate these barriers.

In fact, in contrast, the positive association between soft skills and knowledge sharing reinforces their pivotal role in fostering collaborative and inclusive organizational cultures: individuals with strong interpersonal and relational abilities are more likely to engage in open dialogue, build trust, and create environments conducive to the exchange of ideas and experiences. This finding resonates with previous research that highlights the role of communication, empathy, and adaptability in overcoming relational barriers to knowledge sharing (Marin-Zapata et al., 2022). Soft skills appear to function as a bridge, facilitating the flow of tacit and explicit knowledge across organizational boundaries. For practitioners, this underscores the importance of embedding soft skills training into employee development programs, particularly for roles that require cross-departmental collaboration and stakeholder engagement.

The lack of a significant relationship between emotional skills and knowledge sharing presents an intriguing finding. While emotional intelligence is widely regarded as essential for managing interpersonal relationships and navigating organizational complexities, its direct influence on proactive knowledge-sharing behaviors appears less pronounced in this study. This finding could be

attributed to the multifaceted nature of emotional skills, which, although critical for individual well-being and team dynamics, may not readily translate into deliberate knowledge-sharing practices.

Notably, however, emotional skills play an indirect yet vital role in mitigating fear, acting as a buffer that fosters psychological safety and enhances collaborative behaviors. This underscores the strategic importance of emotional intelligence in shaping organizational culture, particularly by addressing psychological barriers to openness and trust. While emotional skills may not directly drive knowledge sharing, their capacity to reduce fear and create a supportive environment highlights their broader organizational significance.

Alternatively, the organizational context may moderate the influence of emotional skills, especially in settings characterized by structural or cultural obstacles to knowledge sharing. This contextual dependence calls for further exploration into how emotional intelligence interacts with other factors, such as team dynamics and organizational climate, to shape knowledge-sharing outcomes. Future research in this area could provide valuable insights into optimizing emotional intelligence training and interventions.

Moreover, the mediating role of fear of losing power sheds light on the psychological mechanisms underlying knowledge-sharing behaviors. The study demonstrates that fear exacerbates the restrictive effects of hard skills on knowledge sharing, while exerting no mediating impact on the relationship between soft skills and knowledge sharing.

This divergence suggests that while technical expertise may heighten perceptions of vulnerability, relational and communicative skills inherently mitigate such fears. Addressing these fears requires a dual approach: fostering a culture of psychological safety where employees feel valued regardless of their knowledge contributions, and implementing transparent systems that recognize and reward collaborative behaviors.

Conclusion

This study offers a critical rethinking of knowledge sharing within organizations, emphasizing that its success depends as much on human and psychological dimensions as on technological or structural factors; it moves beyond the traditional focus on systems and processes, highlighting the necessity of addressing the nuanced interplay between individual skills, organizational culture, and psychological perceptions.

In a rapidly evolving business landscape, where innovation and adaptability are paramount, organizations must adopt a holistic approach to knowledge management. This involves not only cultivating technical, relational, and emotional skills but also fostering environments that prioritize collective over individual success. As recent managerial literature suggests, the future of work will be defined by trust, emotional intelligence, and a strong relational foundation (Deloitte, 2024; Marin-Zapata et al., 2022). These elements are not supplementary but integral to creating adaptive and high-performing ecosystems.

The findings point to an urgent need for organizations to reevaluate traditional metrics of success, such as individual productivity and expertise. Instead, they should embrace new paradigms that measure collaboration, inclusivity, and psychological safety. Efforts to dismantle hierarchical silos, reward collective achievements, and address power dynamics are crucial for unlocking the full potential of organizational knowledge. Furthermore, the role of emotional skills - while not directly linked to knowledge sharing in this study - remains a promising avenue for exploration: emotional intelligence, particularly in fostering resilience and reducing relational tensions, holds significant potential for shaping adaptive and cohesive workplace cultures. Investing in emotional and relational skills will likely yield indirect but profound benefits, creating environments conducive to open communication and innovation.

Looking forward, the integration of individual skills with structural and cultural strategies offers a robust pathway for enhancing knowledge-sharing practices. As organizations increasingly embrace digital work environments and global collaboration, they must consider how these shifts impact knowledge dynamics. Comparative studies across industries and cultures, as well as longitudinal

research on evolving workplace behaviors, will be invaluable in refining our understanding of these complex interactions.

Ultimately, this study underscores that knowledge sharing is not merely an operational process but a deeply human endeavor. By aligning individual capabilities with inclusive and psychologically safe practices, organizations can create resilient and innovative ecosystems that thrive in the face of change. In doing so, they will position themselves not just as repositories of knowledge but as engines of collective growth and sustainable success.

Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on knowledge management by highlighting the interaction between individual skills, psychological constructs, and knowledge-sharing behaviors. While previous research has predominantly focused on structural and technological enablers, this work underscores the nuanced role of individual skills (hard, soft, and emotional) and their intersection with power dynamics. The findings validate the mediating role of the fear of losing power in influencing the relationship between individual skills and knowledge-sharing behaviors, offering deeper insights into the socio-psychological barriers that hinder collaborative practices. This expands the theoretical framework of knowledge sharing by integrating a psychological perspective, which is often underexplored.

From a managerial perspective, this study provides practical insights for fostering a knowledge-sharing culture and mitigating psychological barriers to collaboration. The negative impact of hard skills on knowledge sharing suggests that organizations must move beyond merely valuing technical expertise and address the unintended consequences of expertise-driven hierarchies. Managers should actively promote cross-functional collaboration and design reward systems that recognize not only individual performance but also contributions to collective knowledge.

The mediating role of the fear of losing power emphasizes the importance of creating psychologically safe workplaces. Managers should implement transparent communication policies, ensure equitable

recognition for knowledge contributions, and develop leadership practices that prioritize inclusivity and trust. For instance, establishing mentorship programs or peer-learning initiatives can reduce competitive mindsets and encourage employees to perceive knowledge sharing as a mutually beneficial activity. Finally, although emotional skills did not directly influence knowledge sharing in this study, their broader role in shaping organizational resilience and employee well-being cannot be overlooked. Future research might consider moderating factors to better understand these relationships. Managers should invest in emotional intelligence training and provide resources for employees to manage stress, competition, and effectively navigate interpersonal dynamics. Such initiatives can indirectly support knowledge sharing by enhancing team cohesion and reducing relational tensions.

These findings invite reflection on the broader implications of knowledge sharing in the modern workplace. The interaction between individual skills and organizational culture suggests that fostering collaboration requires a shift in how organizations value and reward knowledge exchange. Future research could build on these insights by exploring longitudinal changes in knowledge-sharing behaviors, particularly as organizations adopt new technologies and adapt to evolving workforce demographics. It could also focus on factors that may moderate the fear of losing power. Furthermore, comparative studies across industries and cultural contexts could offer a deeper understanding of how external factors shape the relationships identified in this study. Advancing this line of inquiry, scholars and practitioners can contribute to the development of more inclusive, adaptive, and knowledge-centered organizations.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that warrant consideration: the sample is primarily composed of employees from Italian organizations, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or industrial contexts. Comparative studies across different regions and sectors could enhance the applicability of the results.

Additionally, while the study explores the mediating role of fear of losing power, other psychological factors, such as trust, engagement, or organizational climate, were not explicitly examined. These factors could interact with the constructs analyzed, influencing knowledge-sharing behaviors in ways not captured by the current framework. Expanding the model to include additional mediators or moderators would provide a more holistic view of the dynamics at play.

By addressing these limitations, future studies can build on the present findings, providing deeper insights into the complex interplay between individual skills, psychological dynamics, and organizational knowledge flows.

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