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KNOWLEDGE SHARING FROM THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE: THE ROLES OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT, JOB SATISFACTION, AND DIGITAL LITERACY IN SLOVENIAN SMES

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This study explores knowledge sharing in Slovenian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), focusing on the roles of digital literacy, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. It identifies low digital literacy as a key issue that limits effective knowledge sharing and negatively affects employee outcomes. A conceptual model is proposed that positions knowledge sharing and digital literacy as interrelated factors influencing organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance. The study is based on a literature review and will be empirically tested in a future doctoral dissertation. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of knowledge sharing at the individual level and provide practical insights for improving digital competencies and employee engagement in SMEs.

1. Introduction

Knowledge represents a fundamental resource for both individuals and organisations (Bollinger and Smith 2001). It provides organisations with the basis to develop, innovate, and achieve sustainable growth. The systematic management of this resource is ensured through knowledge management, which encompasses the processes of knowledge creation, capture, sharing, and utilisation (Alavi and Leidner 2001). These processes play a central role in sustaining innovation (Cristache et al. 2025), enhancing competitiveness (Cheng et al. 2024) and supporting organisational learning (Obeso et al. 2020). Moreover, knowledge management facilitates the preservation and development of knowledge by enabling the accumulation of experience at both organisational and individual levels, ultimately leading to improved job performance and increased innovation (Antunes and Pinheiro 2020).

In theory, knowledge is commonly divided into explicit and implicit forms. Explicit knowledge, as discussed by (Seghroucheni et al. 2025) is formalised, documented, and systematically stored, making it accessible to a broader range of individuals. It can be found in books, manuals, databases, and digital resources, with the modern digital environment significantly enhancing its accessibility (Bernik and Šprajc 2025). In contrast, implicit (tacit) knowledge refers to personal, experience-based, and often undocumented knowledge that develops through practice, experience, and social interaction (Eraut 2000).

In an organisational context, tacit knowledge is particularly important, as it is primarily shared through collaboration, communication, and mentoring (Kucharska and Erickson 2023). To ensure effective knowledge sharing, a positive organisational climate and culture are essential, as they foster trust, openness, and cooperation. An equally important factor in this process is the reward system. When knowledge sharing is recognised and appropriately rewarded, employees' motivation to share knowledge increases (Lee and Ahn 2007). Mentors, who share knowledge with less experienced colleagues alongside their regular work tasks, contribute substantially to organisational development and should therefore be appropriately paid for their efforts (Sanfilippo 2025).

Mentors are typically more experienced employees who possess a deep understanding of work processes, organisational culture, and managerial decision-making. However, in practice, mentoring is often neither systematically supported nor appropriately rewarded, which leads to a decline in employees' willingness to assume mentoring roles (Roobol and Koster 2020). Despite this, mentors tend to demonstrate a high level of organisational commitment and a strong willingness to contribute to organisational development (Allen et al. 2004).

One effective approach to strengthening knowledge sharing and organisational commitment is the establishment of formal mentoring schemes. Such schemes enable structured knowledge sharing while simultaneously enhancing the sense of value and inclusion among both mentors and mentees. Employees who perceive the organisation invests in training, development and mentorship programmes are more likely to develop higher levels of organisational commitment and job satisfaction, which in turn contribute to greater organisational stability, effectiveness, and innovation (Moore and Wang 2017).

In the digital era, knowledge sharing is increasingly facilitated through digital technologies (Stachová et al. 2020). The appropriate and purposeful use of such technologies can significantly enhance both the extent and effectiveness of knowledge sharing if employees possess the necessary basic levels of digital literacy. Digital literacy represents a fundamental competence that enables employees to effectively use digital technologies to access, evaluate, create, and communicate information (Martínez-Bravo et al. 2022). Without sufficient digital literacy, digital technology may not be fully utilised or may even become an additional barrier to knowledge sharing among employees and organisations.

In this context, digital technology functions as an enabling mechanism that increases the speed, accessibility, and scope of knowledge sharing (Colnar et al. 2022). Modern collaboration platforms, such as knowledge management systems, intranets, and collaborative tools, facilitate both asynchronous and synchronous information exchange, minimise time and location constraints and support organisational learning processes (Gadola et al. 2026; Xia et al. 2021). However, the effectiveness of these platforms depends not only on their technical sophistication but, more importantly, on employees' ability to use them in a meaningful and goal-oriented manner (Leišytė 2026).

Employees with higher levels of digital literacy are therefore more likely to actively engage in knowledge-sharing processes (Binsaeed et al. 2023), as they are better able to identify relevant information, structure it appropriately, and communicate it effectively to others (Russo et al. 2023). Furthermore, greater confidence in the use of digital technologies reduces resistance to adopting new digital solutions and promotes their broader integration within the organisational environment. Consequently, the effective use

of digital technologies can lead to higher levels of organisational commitment (Braojos et al. 2024) and job satisfaction (Bolli and Pusterla 2022) and, indirectly, to improved job performance (Duan et al. 2024).

An issue identified in the examined literature and in professional experience with Slovenian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is the relatively low level of knowledge sharing. This is particularly associated with limited competencies, especially insufficient digital literacy, which is increasingly essential for capturing and storing organisational (explicit) knowledge. The issue is especially relevant for SMEs, which often face high employee turnover rates and consequent knowledge loss. Such loss of knowledge is typically linked to a decline in employee commitment and performance.
Given that SMEs represent the dominant organisational form in the European Union (EU) and play a crucial role in economic development and employment, it is essential to develop solutions to improve employees' digital competencies and enhance their intention to share knowledge. Strengthening these areas may also contribute to increased innovation and performance in the Alpe-Adria region and the wider EU.

2. Research Problem and Research Gap

As previously discussed, knowledge represents a key resource for both organisational and individual performance and innovation. However, existing approaches tend to focus on organisational systems and structures, while paying less attention to the role of individuals. In practice, knowledge sharing largely depends on employees' competencies and their willingness to share knowledge.
This issue is particularly evident in SMEs, where limited resources and less formalised structures mean that knowledge sharing relies primarily on informal interactions (Dzenopoljac et al. 2025). As a result, knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, remains embedded in individuals, making its transfer highly dependent on personal attitudes and competencies.
At the same time, the digital transformation of work processes is reshaping how knowledge is created and shared. Although digital technologies enable more efficient knowledge exchange, their effectiveness depends on employees' level of digital literacy. Differences in digital competencies can therefore significantly influence knowledge-sharing behaviour. The central research problem addressed in this conceptual study is the relatively low level of digital literacy among employees in SMEs, which contributes to insufficient knowledge sharing, and vice versa. This reciprocal relationship can negatively affect organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance. Despite the importance of these relationships, there remains a limited understanding of how individual factors, such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction, interact with technological factors, particularly digital literacy, to shape knowledge-sharing behaviour.
This lack of an integrated perspective represents a clear research gap. Existing studies tend to examine individual and technological factors separately, without effectively addressing their combined influence at the individual level. This gap is especially significant in SMEs, where low levels of knowledge sharing, insufficient digital competencies, and knowledge loss due to employee turnover remain persistent challenges. Accordingly, this study conceptualises knowledge sharing as an individual-level behaviour and seeks to better understand how individual and technological factors jointly shape this process in SMEs. It proposes a conceptual model that integrates these dimensions and provides a foundation for future empirical research.

3. Research Purpose and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to develop and empirically validate a conceptual model that explains the relationships between knowledge sharing and digital literacy as key input factors, their influence on organisational commitment and job satisfaction as mediating factors, and their joint impact on job performance as the outcome (Figure 1).

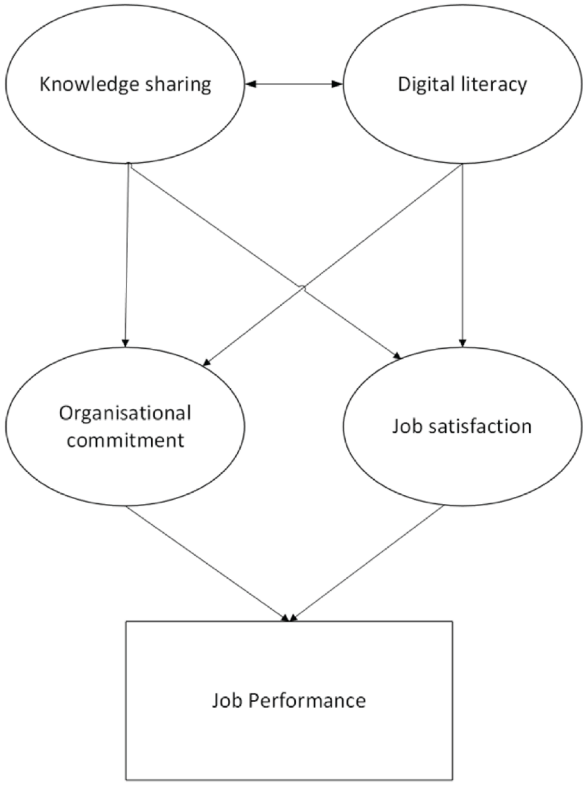

Figure 1: Conceptual model

This study forms part of a broader doctoral dissertation and will be empirically tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), enabling the examination of both direct and indirect relationships between constructs within the proposed model.
Based on the conceptual model, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between knowledge sharing and digital literacy in SMEs?
RQ2: How do knowledge sharing and digital literacy influence organisational commitment?
RQ3: How do knowledge sharing and digital literacy influence job satisfaction?
RQ4: How do organisational commitment and job satisfaction affect job performance?
RQ5: Do organisational commitment and job satisfaction mediate the relationship between knowledge sharing, digital literacy, and job performance?

Based on research questions, hypotheses will be developed. By employing SEM in the doctoral research, the study will test both direct and indirect (mediated) relationships, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how technological and individual factors jointly contribute to job performance.

4. Methodology

This study is grounded in several years of doctoral research, during which digital literacy and knowledge sharing have been identified as critical components and factors of human resource management. Through continuous academic engagement and research development, it has become evident that both factors play a central role in shaping employee behaviour, organisational processes, and overall performance, particularly in the context of digitally transforming work environments.
Rather than relying on empirical data collection at this stage, the study adopts a conceptual research design based on a systematic and integrative review of the existing literature. It draws on established theoretical perspectives and prior empirical findings to identify key constructs, clarify their conceptual definitions, and propose theoretically grounded relationships among them within a conceptual framework. The proposed model is developed by synthesising insights from relevant theoretical approaches, including the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). These perspectives provide a robust foundation for understanding how individual-level factors are influenced by knowledge sharing and digital literacy, particularly in SMEs. Special attention is given to the context of Slovenian SMEs, considering their structural characteristics, resource limitations, and ongoing digital transformation processes within the broader EU environment.

Although no primary data are collected within this conceptual phase, the study outlines a proposed empirical research design for future validation of the model as part of the doctoral dissertation. This includes recommendations for survey-based data collection, appropriate sampling strategies targeting employees in SMEs, and the application of SEM to test the hypothesised relationships between constructs. From an ethical perspective, future empirical research will be conducted in accordance with established research ethics standards. Approval from the institutional ethics committee will be obtained prior to data collection. As the study will involve self-administered questionnaires targeting individual respondents, particular attention will be given to ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. In addition, informed consent will be obtained from all participants, especially considering the collection of demographic data.

5. Expected results and conclusions

The proposed conceptual model is expected to demonstrate that knowledge sharing and digital literacy are mutually reinforcing factors that jointly influence employees' attitudes and behaviours within organisations. Specifically, it is anticipated that higher levels of digital literacy will enable more effective participation in knowledge-sharing processes, while active engagement in knowledge sharing will further enhance employees' digital competencies.
Furthermore, the model is expected to confirm that both knowledge sharing and digital literacy positively influence organisational commitment and job satisfaction. These factors are likely to act as key mediating mechanisms through which technological and behavioural inputs are translated into improved job performance. In line with this, it is expected that employees who actively share knowledge and possess higher digital literacy will demonstrate stronger organisational commitment, higher job satisfaction, and consequently better job performance.
The mediating role of organisational commitment and job satisfaction is expected to be particularly significant in the context of SMEs, where formal systems are limited and individual-level dynamics play a central role.

As such, the findings are likely to highlight that improving digital literacy and fostering knowledge sharing alone may not be sufficient unless these processes are supported by positive employee attitudes and perceptions.

This study is expected to contribute to both theoretical and practical domains. From a theoretical perspective, it advances understanding of knowledge sharing by focusing on individual-level determinants rather than organisational structures alone and by integrating technological factors (such as digital literacy) into a single conceptual framework. From a practical perspective, the findings may provide valuable guidance for SME managers seeking to enhance knowledge sharing within their organisations. By identifying key drivers of knowledge sharing, organisations can design targeted interventions to strengthen employee engagement, improve job satisfaction, and develop digital competencies.

In addition, the study aligns with broader EU policy initiatives related to digital transformation and workforce development. Enhancing digital literacy and fostering knowledge sharing are central components of frameworks such as the EU Digital Strategy and Digital Competence Framework, which emphasise the importance of digital competencies for sustainable organisational development. In this regard, the study may offer insights that support policy implementation at both organisational and regional levels, particularly within the SMEs

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. As a conceptual study, it does not include empirical validation of the proposed relationships, which limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about causality. The model is also contextually oriented towards SMEs, particularly within Slovenia and the broader EU environment, which may affect its generalisability to other organisational or cultural contexts. Furthermore, the model focuses on selected individual and technological factors, while other potentially relevant factors, such as leadership, organisational culture, or external environmental influences, are not explicitly included.

In conclusion, this study provides a structured conceptual foundation for understanding knowledge sharing as an individual-level phenomenon shaped by both individual and technological factors. It highlights the importance of integrating digital literacy into knowledge management practices and emphasises the role of employee attitudes in driving organisational outcomes. The proposed model offers a basis for future empirical research and contributes to ongoing discussions on digital transformation, knowledge management, and human resource development in SMEs.

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