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**Perceived Organizational Support and Knowledge Sharing: A Moderated  
Mediation Model Including Affective Commitment and Task  
Interdependence**

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## Abstract

Organizational support is considered one of the important factors that facilitate employees' knowledge sharing. However, it is still unclear how organizational support influences knowledge sharing. This study investigates how employees' perception of organizational support is related to their knowledge sharing. The results show that perceived organizational support increases employees' emotional attachment to their organizations, and then leads to knowledge sharing, and employees share knowledge more when they feel that sharing knowledge is discretionary than required. Our findings imply that organizational support is not an effective way to enhance knowledge sharing when it is necessary to complete their tasks.

## Introduction

To compete in the competitive market successfully, organizations must acquire and maintain knowledge and motivate employees to share knowledge with one another (Wang, Noe, & Wang, 2014). Knowledge sharing refers to the degree to which employees exchange their information and know-how with others to develop ideas, execute work procedures, and complete their tasks (Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006). By fostering knowledge sharing, organizations are expected to make better decisions (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006), establish efficient and effective work processes (Kearns & Lederer, 2003), and increase creativity and innovation (Carneiro, 2000).

Recently, scholars have focused on organizational support as a promising organizational strategy to promote knowledge sharing (e.g., Hislop, 2013). Organizational support denotes the degree to which organizations care about their employees' well-being and respect employees' contributions to organizations (Allen & Shanock, 2012). When employees receive support from their organizations, they may return this favor by sharing knowledge among employees to increase both individual and organizational performance (Wang et al., 2014).

Despite the persuasive reasoning, the relationship between organizational support and knowledge sharing is still being explored. For instance, in a downsizing organization, organizational support for knowledge sharing did not predict knowledge sharing among employees (Lu, Leung, & Koch, 2006). Similarly, organizational support had null effects on the intent to share knowledge when information technology employees' jobs were insecure (Bartol, Liu, Zeng, & Wu, 2009). Thus, previous researchers call for investigating how and when organizational support increases knowledge sharing of employees.

Elaborating on the previous research, we investigate the underlying processes in the relationship between organizational support and knowledge sharing. First, we theorize that organizational support would influence knowledge sharing through the social exchange relationship between employees and their organization. Specifically, we test and find that the social exchange relationship is represented by affective

commitment and that affective commitment mediates the relationship between organizational support and knowledge sharing. Second, we test whether the mediation effect of affective commitment is moderated by task interdependence. Task interdependence is the degree to which employees need information and materials from coworkers to complete their tasks (Aggarwal, Siggelkow, & Singh, 2011; Bailey, Leonardi, & Chong, 2010). We reason and demonstrate that it may neutralize the positive effect of affective commitment on knowledge sharing (Figure 1).

## **Theoretical Reasoning and Hypotheses Development**

### **Social Exchange and Knowledge Sharing**

Researchers have suggested that knowledge sharing of employees depends on the quality of social exchange relationships in organizations (Bartol et al., 2009). A social exchange relationship represents the mutual trust and long-term relationship between employees and organizations (Blau, 1964). When employees participate in a high quality social exchange relationship, they receive favorable treatment from organizations and return the favor from organizations by exhibiting positive attitudes and discretionary behaviors toward organizations (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). Because knowledge sharing is hard to achieve (Cerne, Nerstad, Dysvik, & Škerlavaj, 2014), knowledge sharing is theorized to be discretionary behavior, which can be fostered by high quality social exchange relationships.

In this study, we focus on organizational support as one of the precursors of social exchange relationships. When employees feel that their organization supports them, they will feel an obligation to return the favor in the form of emotional attachment toward their organization, which will increase knowledge sharing.

### **Perceived Organizational Support and Affective Commitment**

Previous studies on organizational support have found that organizational support is predictive of the affective commitment of employees (e.g., Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Since organizational support engenders the norms of reciprocity and trust in long-term relationships with employees, employees feel that they ought to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization to repay the organizational support. To fulfill their obligation, employees are more likely to have a long-term relationship with organizations and be affectively committed to their organization (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). Empirical tests employing longitudinal research designs supported this argument such that organizational support predicted affective commitment in the long term (Rhoades et al., 2001). Thus, we expect the following:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceived organizational support will be positively related to affective commitment.*

### **Affective Commitment and Knowledge Sharing**

Affective commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). There is considerable research support showing that affective commitment is an important predictor of organizational outcomes including in-role job performance and pro-social behaviors (Gellatly, Meyer, & Luchak, 2006; Lee, 2005). Affective commitment produces a collective sense of identity among individuals in the organization, increases willingness to act favorably toward fellow employees, enhances communication with other employees, and results in pro-social behaviors (Dewitte & Cremer, 2001) such as voluntarily sharing knowledge. Moreover, the collective identity and emotional attachment of affective commitment potentially reduce opportunism and increase confidence in openness while motivating employees to share their knowledge.

*Hypothesis 2: Affective commitment will be positively related to knowledge sharing.*

### **Moderating Effects of Task Interdependence**

Task interdependence refers to the degree to which individuals need information and materials from members to complete their tasks. A high level of task interdependence indicates that employees exchange information with each other and feel a responsibility to collaborate with each other to complete tasks. If they fail in sharing information, employees cannot complete their tasks. That means, employees may share information (or knowledge) not because of their emotional status but because of their duties and the norms in groups.

We suggest that task interdependence may interfere with the social exchange relationship nested in knowledge sharing because it may influence the role perceptions of employees. In organizations, roles define the required tasks and expected behaviors of employees' jobs. Role perceptions are important because they indicate why employees engage in discretionary behaviors and determine the effectiveness of individual effort and organizational procedures to facilitate such behaviors (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). In-role perceptions of certain behaviors enable employees to perform those behaviors frequently but also have a substitute effect such that a high level of social relationships has less impact on employees' discretionary behaviors.

When task interdependence is low, employees may be less likely to consider that knowledge sharing as an in-role behavior. Rather, it would be more perceived as a discretionary behavior that employees exhibit when they want to benefit their organizations. When employees are emotionally attached to their organizations, they are more likely to engage in discretionary behaviors above and beyond the norm (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In the context of low levels of task interdependence, knowledge sharing is

not necessarily required but beneficial for organizations: employees will share knowledge if they have high quality social exchange relationships which is represented by high levels of affective commitment.

When task interdependence is high, the exchange of information and knowledge to perform the job is necessary and taken for granted. Employees may feel that they have responsibilities for others' performance and the willingness to share knowledge as well. Under high levels of task interdependence, employees may be constrained at sharing knowledge as parts of their in-roles regardless of the quality of social exchange, and the moderating mediating? effect of affective commitment may be less critical for knowledge sharing.

*Hypothesis 3: Task independence will moderate the relationship between affective commitment and knowledge sharing such that the relationship will be weaker when task interdependence is high than when task interdependence is low.*

Collectively, we hypothesize that perceived organizational support may enhance affective commitment and, in turn, influence knowledge sharing among employees, and this indirect effect of perceived organizational support depends on task interdependence (Figure 1). Specifically, task interdependence will weaken the indirect effects of perceived organizational support through affective commitment on knowledge sharing.

*Hypothesis 4: Task interdependence will moderate the strength of the mediated relationship between perceived organizational support and knowledge sharing through affective commitment such that the indirect effect of perceived organizational support will be weaker when task interdependence is high than low.*

## Methods

### Sample and Procedures

Data were collected from employees and their supervisors in 11 South Korean companies. We contacted HR managers in each company to help facilitate the data collection from their company, and if they agreed, we administered the survey in the conference room during their regular work hours. The questionnaires were distributed to 270 full-time employees and of these 194 were returned, giving a response rate of 71.85%. Among participants, 58.8% were male. Their average age was 28.96 years ( $SD = 4.52$ ). On average, their job tenure was 26.72 months ( $SD = 24.30$ ). The jobs that the participants held were very diverse, including software engineering, office management, and book editing, to name only a few.

The managerial surveys were delivered to their immediate managers and After the managers rated the surveys, they were sealed by the manager and returned by participants. The subordinate's name was written on the supervisor's questionnaire so that the supervisor could focus on the subordinate s/he was evaluating. After completing the questionnaire, we asked the supervisors to cut out the subordinates' names so that the identity of the subordinate would remain anonymous, even if someone happened to see the completed questionnaire. Fifty managers returned the survey, of whom 88.0% were male and 90.0% held at least a bachelor's degree. Their average age was 34.90 years (SD = 4.35). They had an average job tenure of 43.61 months (SD = 28.49). On average, one manger rated 4.2 subordinates.

We formed a dyad of subordinates and their immediate supervisor's questionnaire by using a matching code, and included the number on both the subordinate and supervisor's questionnaires. As a result, 50 supervisors rated their employees' knowledge sharing, yielding 194 supervisor-employee dyads for our analysis.

## Measures

The response scales of the items were ranked from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Original items were written in English and translated into Korean by using back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1980). Perceived organizational support (POS) was measured with the nine items from Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986). A sample item is "The organization really cares about my well-being." The reliability of POS was .91. Affective commitment was measured with the eight items of Meyer and Allen (1991). A sample item reads, "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.", and the Cronbach's alpha was .87. Task interdependence was assessed with the 10 items of Pearce and Gregerseon's (1991) measures, which capture the reciprocal interdependence dimension of task interdependence. A sample item is "I frequently must coordinate my efforts with others." The reliability of the five items was .87. The employees' supervisor rated knowledge sharing with seven items from Srivastava et al. (2006). A sample item is "The subordinate shares his/her special knowledge and expertise with others." The internal reliability of the items was .92.

## Analytical Strategies

The hypotheses were tested with Edwards and Lambert's (2007) path analytic procedures. Moderated mediation paths were examined with the estimation of regression coefficients from the regression equation of the mediation and moderation.

$$M = a_0 + a_1X + e_M \quad (1)$$

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2M + b_3Z + b_4MZ + e_Y \quad (2)$$

In Equation (1), X represents perceived organizational support, and M represents the affective commitment. In Equation (2), Z represents task interdependence, and Y represents knowledge sharing. In Equation (1),  $a_1$  represents the effect of perceived organizational support on affective commitment (Hypothesis 1). In Equation (2),  $b_2$  represents the effect of affective commitment on knowledge sharing (Hypothesis 2), and the value of  $(b_2 + b_4Z)$  represents the significance of the second-stage moderating effect of task interdependence (Hypothesis 3). The value of  $a_1(b_2 + b_4)Z$  captures the moderated mediation effect (Hypothesis 4).

The combinations of the estimated regression coefficients were estimated with bootstrapping analysis (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) and used to plot the direct, indirect, and total effects of organizational support on knowledge sharing at  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of task interdependence.

## Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables.

### Moderated Mediation Test

Hypothesis 1 proposed that organizational support will be positively related to affective commitment. As can be seen in Table 2, perceived organizational support was positively associated with affective commitment ( $a_1 = .53, p > .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 predicted that affective commitment would be positively related to knowledge sharing. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between affective commitment and employees' knowledge sharing rated by their direct supervisor ( $b_2 = .28, p > .01$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Hypothesis 3 projected that task interdependence would moderate the relationship between affective commitment and knowledge sharing. In Table 2, the coefficient estimates of the interaction term between affective commitment and task interdependence was significant ( $b_4 = -.16, p < .05$ ). In Table 3, the second stage moderation effect was stronger when task interdependence was low ( $.41, p < .01$ ) than when task interdependence was high ( $.14, p = n. s.$ ). The difference in the second stage moderation effects was also significant ( $-.27, p < .05$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that task interdependence would moderate the effect of perceived organizational support on knowledge sharing mediated by affective commitment. In Table 3, differences in the effects of perceived organizational support for low and high task interdependence indicated that the indirect effect of perceived organizational support was stronger for low task interdependence ( $.33, p < .01$ ) than for high task interdependence ( $.11, p = n. s.$ ). The difference in the indirect effects was also significant ( $-.22, p < .05$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4.



## Discussions

This study investigated the relationship between organizational support and knowledge sharing by examining a mediated moderation effect of task interdependence. Generally, the results were consistent with our theoretical reasoning. The results showed that organizational support was positively related to affective commitment. This finding is associated with the theory of POS that employees would exhibit positive attitudes toward organizations when they receive favorable treatments from their organizations. Results also showed that the relationship between affective commitment and knowledge sharing was moderated by task interdependence. When task interdependence was high, the relationship became insignificant, implying that employees' in-role and extra-role perceptions of knowledge sharing influence the effects of social exchange relationships on knowledge sharing.

### Theoretical Contributions

First, this study contributes to the literature on knowledge sharing by demonstrating that organizational support is vital for enhancing knowledge sharing in the workplace. Previous studies have focused on organizational support as one of the environmental factors to facilitate knowledge sharing in the workplace (e.g., Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005; Wang et al., 2014). The results from our study showed a positive relationship between organizational support and knowledge sharing, confirming the importance of organizational support for increasing knowledge sharing.

Second, our findings contribute to expanding the theoretical perspectives on knowledge sharing by examining the social exchange process in knowledge sharing. Social exchange perspectives have been used by the research on knowledge sharing, but more research is required to examine the potential mechanisms through which organizational factors establish social exchange relationships, thereby increasing knowledge sharing. Resonating with Jeong, Yoon, and Choi (2017), our study found that organizational supports enhancing knowledge sharing through increasing affective commitment, which is an index of social exchange relationship. Findings from our results may demonstrate that organizational support would enhance the quality of social exchange relationships with employees and motivate employees to perform extra-role behaviors including knowledge sharing.

Third and more importantly, the results on the moderating effects of task interdependence suggest a condition in which the social exchange process matters in knowledge sharing. The extra-role perspective of knowledge sharing implies that employees will share their knowledge with colleagues when they have high quality social exchange relationships. However, our findings imply that if employees' perceived knowledge sharing as an in-role, a high quality social exchange relationship may not be predictive of

knowledge sharing. That is, situational factors may substitute the positive effects of social exchange processes on knowledge sharing.

### **Practical Implications**

First, our findings suggest that organizations' support should involve caring about employees' well-being to foster knowledge sharing. Particularly, organizational support is one of the effective ways to encourage high levels of knowledge sharing when employees are not required to share information with employees but organizations want to enhance knowledge sharing. Organizations should develop practices to show they value employees' opinions and ideas to increase employees' intent to share knowledge.

Second, our finding that affective commitment is positively related to knowledge sharing implies that organizations may need to raise employees' emotional attachment to organizations to increase knowledge sharing. Organizations need to care about social relationships among employees and provide sessions on teamwork building to their employees. These practices may increase affective commitment, increasing the possibility of knowledge sharing in the workplace.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

First, we measured knowledge sharing with the agree-disagree scale points, but did not control the types and quality of knowledge shared among employees. It is possible that some employees may share new and unique knowledge with their colleagues, whereas other employees may continue to share existing knowledge which is already recognized in teams. It may be interesting to investigate whether high quality social exchange relationships enable employees to share high quality knowledge.

Second, we reasoned that knowledge sharing would depend on the cognitive process in social exchange (i.e., felt obligation) and/or attribution process (i.e., perception of in-role and extra-role behaviors), but did not measure these underlying processes in knowledge sharing.

Third, we measured all variables at the same time, and thus we may not have captured the temporal relationship among variables from our results. However, a previous longitudinal study found that perceived organizational support predicted affective commitment (e.g., Rhoades et al., 2001), and also conceptually, attitudinal variables (e.g., affective commitment) are predictive of behavioral outcomes (i.e., knowledge sharing). Nevertheless, future research should apply a longitudinal design to test the causal relationship among variables.

Lastly, common method variance (CMV) may be a concern because perceived organizational support, task interdependence, and affective commitment were measured from a single source. However, we measured knowledge sharing from the supervisory perspective, and CMV may not be a concern in the

relationship between attitudinal variables and knowledge sharing (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables <sup>a</sup>

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived organizational support <sup>b</sup>	4.22	.90	(.91)			
2. Affective commitment <sup>b</sup>	4.43	.98	.73**	(.87)		
3. Task interdependence <sup>b</sup>	4.74	.84	.27**	.33**	(.87)	
4. Knowledge sharing <sup>c</sup>	4.71	.94	.09	.22*	.13*	(.92)

*Note:*  $N = 194$ . Reliabilities are on the diagonal in parentheses. <sup>a</sup> Means and standard deviations are listed for informational purposes only. <sup>b</sup> These variables were measured from focal employees. <sup>c</sup> Managerial rating. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed)

Table 2. Coefficient Estimates

Independent variable	a <sub>0</sub>	a <sub>1</sub>	R <sup>2</sup>	b <sub>0</sub>	b <sub>1</sub>	b <sub>2</sub>	b <sub>3</sub>	b <sub>4</sub>	R <sup>2</sup>
Perceived Organizational Support	.00	.53**	.54**	4.75**	-.14	.28**	.07	-.16*	.09*

*Note:*  $N = 194$ . Entries under columns labeled  $a_0$ ,  $a_1$  are unstandardized coefficient estimates from Equation 1, in which the dependent variable is affective commitment. Entries under columns labeled  $b_0$ ,  $b_1$ ,  $b_2$ ,  $b_3$ , and  $b_4$  are unstandardized coefficient estimates from Equation 2, in which the dependent variable is knowledge sharing. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

Table 3. Analysis of Simple Effects

Independent variable	Second Stage Moderation	Effect		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
Perceived Organizational Support				
Low Task Interdependence	.41**	-.14	.33**	.19**
High Task Interdependence	.14	-.14	.11	-.03
Difference	-.27*	-	-.22*	-.22*

*Note:*  $N = 194$ . For low task interdependence and high task interdependence rows, entries are simple effects calculated from Equation 2 using unstandardized coefficient estimates from Table 1.  $Z = -.84$  and  $.84$  for low and high task interdependence, respectively (i.e.,  $\pm$  one standard deviation). Differences in simple effects were calculated by subtracting the simple effects for low task interdependence from the simple effects for high task interdependence. Tests of differences for second stage moderation and direct effect are the same as tests of  $b_4$  and  $b_1$ . Tests of differences for the indirect and total effect were conducted with the bias-corrected confidence intervals extracted from bootstrapping estimates with 10000 sample. \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$



Figure 1. Conceptual Model

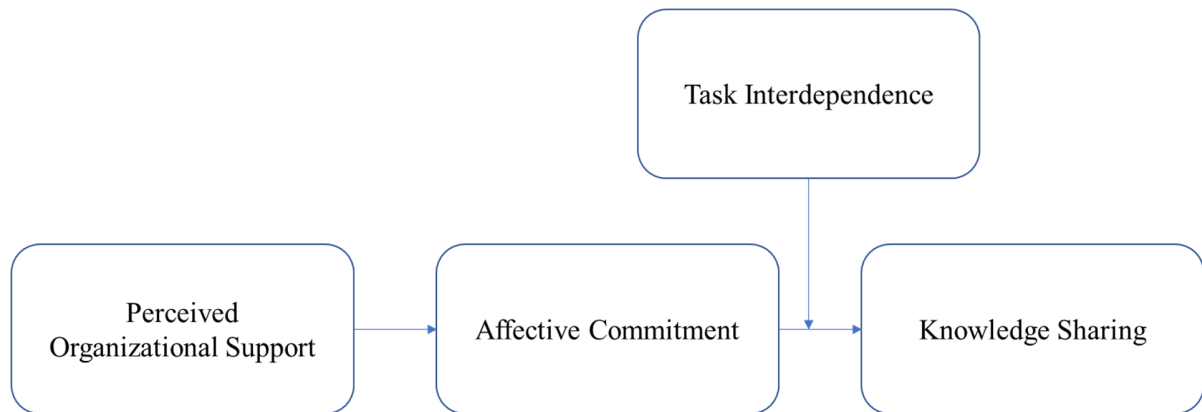
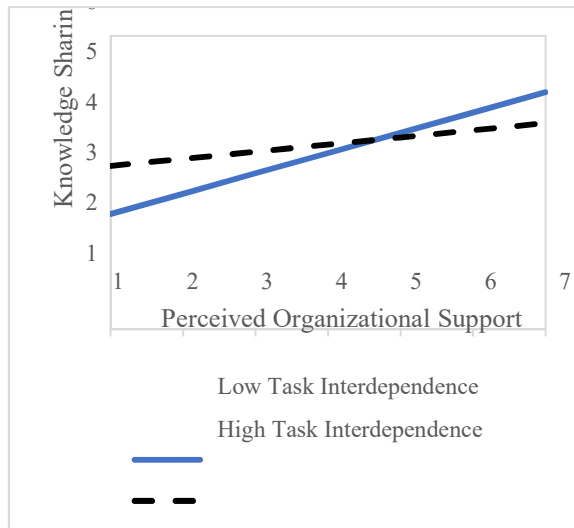
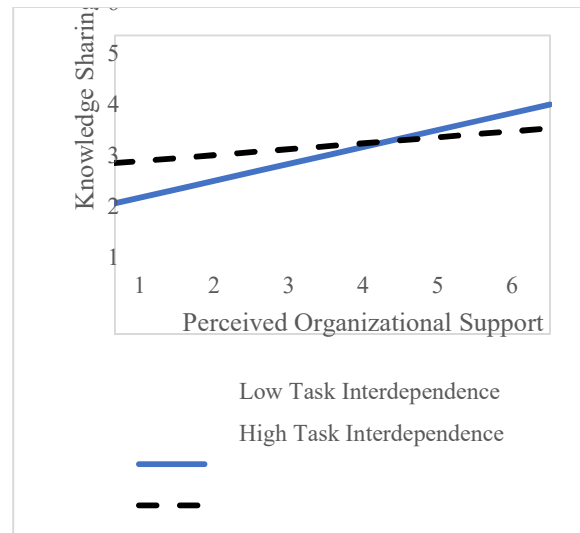


Figure 2. Plots of Simple Paths and Effects of Perceived Organizational Support and Affective Commitment with Task Interdependence

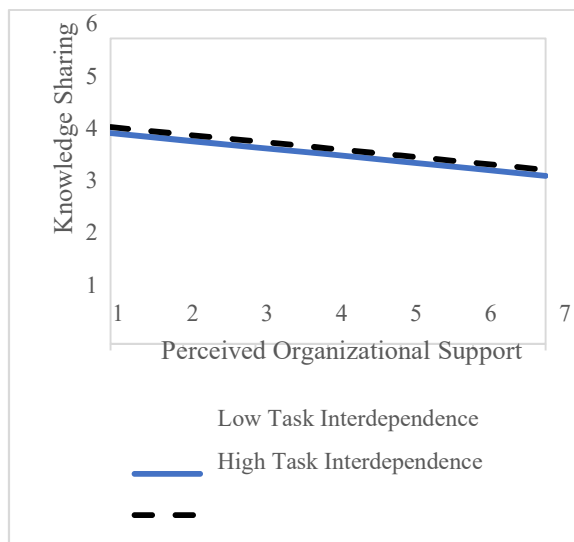
A. Second Stage Moderation



B. Indirect Effect



C. Direct Effect



D. Total Effect

