

## Promoting Knowledge Sharing Behavior of Academic Staff: The Mediating Role of Affective Commitment

**Raheela Haque<sup>1\*</sup>, Sarwar Mehmood Azhar<sup>2</sup>, Farhan Mehboob<sup>3</sup>, Saifullah Shaikh<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Institutional affiliation: Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan.

Address: Sukkur IBA University, Airport Road Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan

Email: [raheela@iba-suk.edu.pk](mailto:raheela@iba-suk.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup>Institutional affiliation: Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan.

Address: Sukkur IBA University, Airport Road Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan

Email: [sarwar.azhar@iba-suk.edu.pk](mailto:sarwar.azhar@iba-suk.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup>Institutional affiliation: School of Business Management Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Email: [farhan.mehboob9@gmail.com](mailto:farhan.mehboob9@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor, Institute of Commerce & Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.

Email: [saifullah.shaikh@salu.edu.pk](mailto:saifullah.shaikh@salu.edu.pk)

### Abstract

This study contributes to investigate the influence of various factors such as affective commitment, perceived organizational support, and perceived organizational incentives on the knowledge sharing behavior of employees. The paper studies the mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship between perceived organizational support and knowledge sharing behavior as well as between perceived organizational incentives and knowledge sharing behavior. The data for the study was collected from academic staff (N=201) serving under seven different public sector universities of Sindh province of Pakistan, using survey method and random sampling technique. Moreover, AMOS was used to test all of the study's hypotheses, and as per findings all of the hypothesized relationships were supported and the results demonstrated the evidence of full mediation than partial.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Sharing, Affective Commitment, Perceived Organizational Support, Perceived Organizational Incentives

### Introduction

Today's knowledge-based economy, followed by rapid technological expansion, has made knowledge a critical resource of nearly all

organizations in terms of their survival (Bloodgood, 2019; Bollinger & Smith, 2001; Houghton & Sheehan, 2000). To leverage this critical organizational resource for achieving sustainable

competitive advantage, knowledge management (KM) has captured the attention of managers, scholars, and academicians. Recently, like other organizations i.e., manufacturing and service, educational institutions are also very much concerned and pay wider attention towards managing knowledge of their valuable strategic asset i.e., especially academic staff. For this reason, universities are performing numerous activities for managing knowledge of their staff members which eventually influences their positive attitudes and behaviors at the workplace. Within the KM process, knowledge sharing (KS) is a key component (Gast, Gundolf, Harms, & Collado, 2019). KS can be conceptualized as a dynamic process of interpersonal interaction where individuals willingly share their valuable knowledge, ideas, skills, experiences, behaviors, and best practices that they have acquired or created, among other members of the organization (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Swift & Hwang, 2013). In other words, it is the exchange of information among organizational members where individuals not only just share their knowledge and experiences with others but also at the same time acquire others' knowledge and experiences in return. This exchange of information thus resulting in developing skills; building competencies; and creation of new knowledge, concepts, innovation, and ideas that ultimately helps an organization to offer unique and valuable products and services to their

customer thus achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Spender, 1996).

KS is neither is a spontaneous process nor it is an activity that can be enforced rather it's a deliberate act that requires individuals' willingness to participate voluntarily in sharing their knowledge with others (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Ipe, 2003; Kim & Mauborgne, 1998). However, a fundamental problem that has been observed is that employees lack the willingness to share their valuable knowledge with others i.e., their colleagues, rather they tend to hoard knowledge because of certain reasons (Gagné, 2009; Su, 2020). Organizations, therefore, always have a look into some motivational techniques and practices that can overcome knowledge hoarding issue and promote effective knowledge sharing behavior (KSB) among employees (Hall & Sapsed, 2006; Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2002; Robertson & Hammersley, 2000). Research in the organizational behavior literature suggests that KS within an organization depends on one of the psychological factors such as affective commitment (Lombardi, Sassetti, & Cavaliere, 2019; Rasdi & Tangaraja, 2020). Affective Commitment (AC) requires employees emotional attachment, identification, and involvement towards their organization and its goals which in turn influences their general attitudes, behaviors, and participation at work (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Brown, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Over

the past decade, AC has become a prominent concept among researchers due to its positive consequences on employees' intentions and behaviors i.e., in terms of their high loyalty, job satisfaction, improved performance, lower turnover intentions as well as their active participation in pro-social and extra-role behaviors, such as and OCBs, and knowledge sharing etc. (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schröder, 2003; Jo & Joo, 2011; Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004).

Nevertheless, employees' identification with and attachment to their organization leads to their increased commitment towards their job. But this commitment doesn't develop automatically rather it is in response to some contributions from the side of their organization in the form of various facilitation and incentives etc., which develop employees' psychological mindset that their organization values their efforts and cares about them. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) corresponds to the degree to which employees perceive that their organization values their efforts and contributions by providing them with adequate support (i.e., training, promotions, salary increases) and favorable working conditions i.e., (resources, infrastructure) as well as help them and cares them in case of need (e.g. illness, work-related problems) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Perceived Organizational Incentives (POI) on the other hand, refers to the extent to which employees

perceive their employer appreciate their efforts and contributions by providing them different kinds of incentives. Organizations provide them incentives in the form of increased pay based on their performance, job security, bonuses, and career advancement, etc. (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Lazear, 2018). This kind of support and incentives from their organization is understood by employees as a sign of respect and consideration from their employer, which eventually increases their positive attitude and behavior towards their work and enhances their relationship with their organization. Also based on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees when supported or rewarded by their organizations are inclined to feel more obligated and thus show their gratitude to their employer with their positive attitude thus increasing their level of AC (Williamson, Burnett, & Bartol, 2009), a key determinant of the employees' KSB (Lombardi *et al.*, 2019).

This paper, therefore, extends and contributes to the knowledge-sharing literature by highlighting a few of the antecedents influencing KSB of academic staff serving under various public sector universities of Pakistan. Universities are one of the knowledge-centric organizations and their faculty is their strategic resource and the reason for their success and survival. KSB of their academic staff will help them to strengthen their teaching and research activities. Therefore, determining those factors which promote their academic

staff's KSB constitutes an important research area. The study, therefore, assesses the relative importance of organizational support and incentives as determinants of employees' AC and examines the influence of AC as a key antecedent of employees' KSB.

### Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

So far many studies have explained a positive significant relationship between POS and AC (Jaewon Lee & Peccei, 2007; Marique, Stinglhamber, Desmette, Caesens, & De Zanet, 2013; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analysis also shows a strong positive correlation between POS and AC. Likewise, as per different researchers, the relationship between POS and AC is based on the social exchange theory, where the development and maintenance of relationships between an organization and its employees are based on the exchange mechanism (Fuller, Barnett, Hester, & Relyea, 2003; Nazir, Qun, Hui, & Shafi, 2018; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). Therefore, employees who have a high level of POS demonstrates more AC with their organization, and they are just not willing to continue working with their organization but also strives to make necessary efforts that help the organization to meet its objectives (Arshadi & Hayavi, 2013; Caesens, Marique, & Stinglhamber, 2014; Marique *et al.*, 2013).

*H1a: Perceived organizational support has a positive significant impact on the affective commitment of academic staff.*

Incentives provided by the organizations are a great motivational source of employees' desired behaviors (Coccia, 2019; Lazear, 2018). Researches considering the influence of incentives on AC provides positive significant results (Hadžiahmetović & Dinç, 2017; Taba, 2018). As per findings of various studies performed under different organizations and contexts, when organizations provide their employees with different incentives in exchange for their contributions towards the organization, employees show their commitment to their organization in return as they feel that their organization values their efforts (Jaworski, Ravichandran, Karpinski, & Singh, 2018; Jaeyoon Lee, Sohn, Kim, Kwon, & Park, 2018; Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018).

*H1b: Perceived organizational incentives have a positive significant impact on the affective commitment of academic staff.*

Several studies provide empirical support for the notion that employees' AC positively contributes to fostering their KSB (Curtis, 2018; Hashim & Tan, 2015; Lombardi *et al.*, 2019). A meta-analysis was done by Witherspoon *et al.*, (2013), also highlighted that AC is a significant determinant of employees' KSB. Likewise, many recent studies have shed light on the importance of

employees' AC towards their organization and considered it as one of the crucial influencers of employee's KSB (Ahmed, Kanwal, & Lodhi, 2020; Rasdi & Tangaraja, 2020). As per Meyer, et al., (2002), AC has the strongest effect on employee workplace behavior and is considered as a source of eliminating the KS barrier.

*H2: Affective commitment has a positive significant impact on the knowledge sharing behavior of academic staff.*

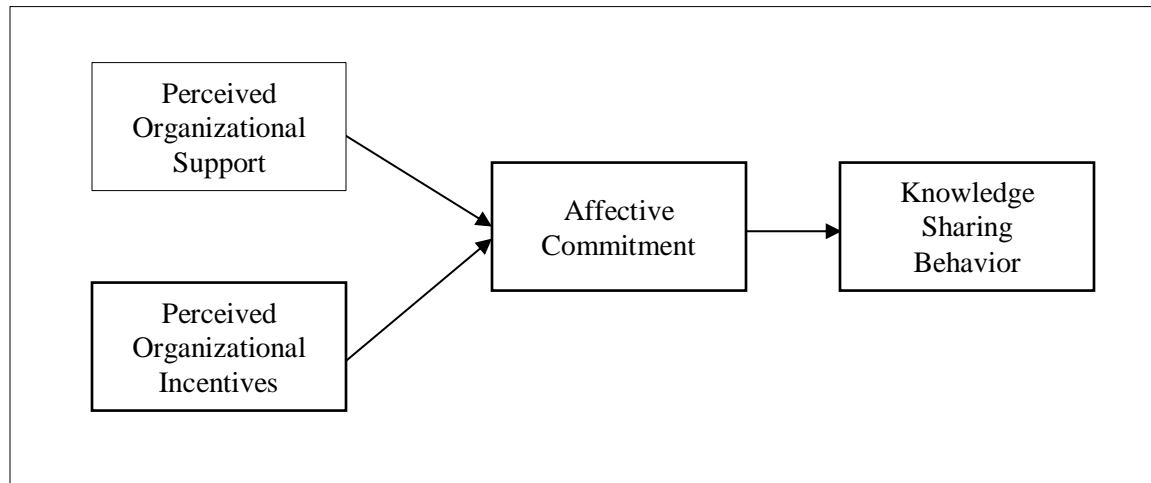
As discussed above, many studies have checked the positive significant relationship of AC with KSB of employees. However, according to available literature, the authors strongly believe that POS transfers its positivity in the form of employees' KSB through the psychological variables and AC is one of them (Jeung, Yoon, & Choi, 2017). AC, therefore, playing a mediating role under different relations that promote KSB of employees (Camelo-Ordaz, Garcia-Cruz, Sousa-Ginel, & Valle-Cabrera, 2011; Curtis, 2018; Martin-Perez, 2015). To sum up, POS is likely to enhance employees' emotional attachment with their organization, and they become more motivated and inclined to share knowledge with others (Han, Yoon, Suh, Li, & Chae, 2019; Yang, van Rijn, & Sanders, 2020).

*H3a: Affective commitment mediates the relation between perceived*

*organizational support and the knowledge sharing behavior of academic staff.*

A considerable body of research proves that incentives provided by the organizations are one of the important motivational tools that convince employees to frequently repeat their positive contributions towards their organization (Tshube, Akpata, & Irwin, 2012; Wei & Yazdanifard, 2014; Wright, 1994). In addition, based on reciprocity norms, many organizations provide incentives specifically designed to encourage their employees to share their knowledge with others (Berger, Fiolleau, & MacTavish, 2019; Taylor, 2006). However, several research findings suggest that AC plays a mediating role in between various antecedents and employees' KSB (Camelo-Ordaz *et al.*, 2011; Curtis, 2018; Martin-Perez, 2015). As with the help of various organizational incentives, organizations enhance their employees' emotional attachment with their organizations, and this AC resulting in the form of their long-term commitment as well as positive work attitudes and behaviors.

*H3b: Affective commitment mediates the relation between perceived organizational incentives and the knowledge sharing behavior of academic staff.*

**Figure 1: Research Model**

## Methodology

### Sample and procedure

Data for the study was collected from academic staff serving under seven different public sector universities of Sindh province of Pakistan, using survey method and random sampling technique. A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 218 were received back. After the screening of those collected, finally, 201 were used for data analysis. A total of 62% of males and 38% of females participated in the study. Related to their qualification, 34% were having master's degrees, 48% were MS qualified, and 18% were Ph.D. degree holders. Concerning their designation, 52% were serving as lecturers, 32% were assistant professors, 12% were associate professors and 4% were professors. In terms of their total teaching experience, 37% were 1-5 years experienced, 26% were 6-10 years experienced, 25% were 11-15 years experienced, and 12% were

having experience of more than 15 years.

### Measure

All measuring scales have been adopted and adapted based on the available literature. Respondents' extent of agreement with the responses was gathered on the 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

POS was measured using eight items given by Eisenberger et al., (1997), and Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, (1999). For measuring POI, five items were adapted from the study of Kankanhalli et al., (2005). For assessing AC, six items scale was used (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Finally, for measuring KSB, seven items were taken and adapted based on the studies of Lee (2001), Teigland and Wasko (2003), and Bock et al., (2005).



### Analysis of Results

For analysis of data, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out using AMOS 23. For assessing the goodness of fit as well as the validity of the measurement model, various model fit indices were evaluated i.e., Comparative fit index (CFI); Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), & Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). As per Hair et al. (2019), the values of CFI and TLI  $\geq 0.90$ , and RMSEA  $< 0.08$ , shows a greater fit. Accordingly, the study's measurement model indicated a better fit (CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.06;  $p < 0.000$ ), as all of the values are coming under the proposed

range (see Table 1). Table 1, demonstrates the summary of the descriptive statistics along with reliability and zero-order correlation analysis. The internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The values ranging from 0.83 to 0.92, indicating that the study's constructs are reliable as they meet the threshold level of 0.70 as suggested by Nunnally (1978). Furthermore, all inter-construct correlations were found significant and pointed in the hypothesized direction. Specifically, the relationship between AC and KSB was found stronger ( $r = 0.35$ ) than the rest of the proposed links.

**Table 1:** Descriptive, Reliability and CFA Statistics

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	POS	3.23	0.90	(0.92)			
2	POI	3.34	0.87	<i>0.28</i>	(0.83)		
3	AC	3.43	0.83	<i>0.33</i>	<i>0.33</i>	(0.86)	
4	KSB	3.40	0.96	<i>0.32</i>	<i>0.29</i>	<i>0.35</i>	(0.89)
	<b>Fit Indices</b>	<b>CFI</b>		<b>TLI</b>		<b>RMSEA</b>	
		0.95		0.94		0.06	

Correlation values in italics are significant at  $P < 0.05$

Moreover, for testing hypotheses, H1a, H1b, and H2, Structural Regression (SR) was performed. The hypotheses H1a and H1b were indicated POS and POI as predictors to academic staff's AC. Whereas, hypothesis H2 seeks to examine the direct path between

academic staff's AC and their KSB. As per the results, both POS and POI significantly predicted the academics staff's AC (AC  $\leftarrow$  POS:  $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ; AC  $\leftarrow$  POI:  $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) that further led them to their KSB (KSB  $\leftarrow$  AC:  $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Structural Regression

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H1a: AC	<---	POS	.170	.059	2.903	***
H1b: AC	<---	POI	.213	.073	2.853	***
H2: KSB	<---	AC	.364	.111	3.247	***

\*\*\*p &lt; .05

Moreover, the H3a and H3b were proposed to check the mediating role of AC in analyzing the impact of academic staff's POS and POI towards their KSB. As predicted, the result of both of the hypotheses indicated that the POS and

POI have an indirect influence on the KSB of academic staff by the presence of AC. The results providing support to both of the hypotheses H3a and H3b by showing full mediation than partial (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Mediation Analysis Results

	<u>Knowledge Sharing Behaviour</u>			
	BC 95% CI			
	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>
H3a: Indirect effect of POS on KSB via AC	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.12
H3b: Indirect effect of POI on KSB via AC	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.14

Note. "BC = bias corrected (5,000 bootstrapping samples); CI = confidence interval"

### Discussion of Results

Based on analytical results, all of the above hypotheses are supported. As per the findings, POS and POI are positively associated with AC, revealing that employees' emotional attachment with their organization increases when they perceive that their organization supports them and rewards their contributions. These results are also consistent with the social exchange theory. Accordingly, employees when appreciated in terms of incentives or other facilities by their

organization, they respond to their organization with their AC which in turn leads to positive behavioral outcomes. In short, AC is largely a function of organizational support and incentives and, therefore, employees' perception towards their organization as supportive, likable, and trustworthy, that creates their emotional attachment towards their organization (Jaewon Lee & Peccei, 2007; Marique *et al.*, 2013; Taba, 2018). The result of H2 also confirms that employees with a higher level of AC



with their organization contribute more to KSB. AC highlights a strong influence on outcomes of interest such as employees KSB, as this motivates employees to overcome their natural resistance to their KSB (Swart, Kinnie, Van Rossenberg, & Yalabik, 2014). Once employees are emotionally committed to their organization, their sense of engagement and interest towards organizational objectives and goals is higher and such positive emotional feelings eventually develop employees' positive attitude towards their work and they become more willing to share their knowledge with others (Curtis, 2018; Hashim & Tan, 2015; Lombardi *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, the results of H3a and H3b confirms that a positive significant relationship that exists between POS and KSB, as well as POI and KSB, is fully mediated by employees' AC. Employees with high levels of AC shows their strong emotional attachment with their organizations in terms of their low turnover and long-term retention, high motivation, more willingness to provide extra discretionary efforts, as well as it provides employees the confidence to share their knowledge and experiences with others (Camelo-Ordaz *et al.*, 2011; Raggio & Folse, 2009).

### Implications

This study findings have practical implications for university administrators to promote the culture of knowledge sharing within their academic staff. First of all, universities

management needs to understand that KSB does not occur naturally among their employees, rather they have to look into some factors that increase their employees' motivation and commitment to share knowledge with one another. For encouraging this behavior, departmental heads or universities management need to demonstrate recognition of their staff's contributions and concerns. Consequently, organizations must consider several interventions as well as seek ways to reinforce employees' AC. Likewise, they should provide support to employees in the form of various incentives; organizing career development programs; give them empowerment and work autonomy, etc. as well as need to avoid those practices which are detrimental in terms of affective commitment or promoting KSB.

### Conclusion

In this era of extensive competition, knowledge is considered to be one of the important sources of organizations' competitiveness. This study contributes to the existing literature by evaluating the impact of various factors on the KSB of academic staff. Organizational support and incentives are considered to be crucial factors that motivate and encourage employees' desired behaviors regarding their KSB within the organization. However, this influence does not take place directly rather emotional attachment with their organization is important to consider in between. Organizational support and

incentives to their employees in terms of various kinds of facilitation and rewards help develop employees' AC with their work and organization. These motivational factors give employees a perception of consideration and respect

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