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TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND INDIVIDUAL WORK PERFORMANCE IN THE VIET NAM AVIATION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop a theoretical model and verify the relationship between tacit knowledge sharing and individual performance in the aviation industry with the motivating role of personal motivation and social contextual factors. The individual motivators are social status, reciprocity, while social capital is a social contextual factor. The research hypotheses are verified by a structural equation modeling (SEM) based on survey data from 369 respondents who are flight attendants working in aviation companies in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings revealed that all factors such as social status, reciprocity, and social capital have positively impacted tacit knowledge sharing. In addition, tacit knowledge sharing and social capital are found to enhance individual work performance. This paper offers some implications for managers in the airlines to stimulate tacit knowledge sharing and enhance employees' performance.

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1. Introduction

In organizations, knowledge is divided into two types: explicit and tacit knowledge. The origin of tacit knowledge is an individual's experience and values. It is an intangible asset that is not subject to the law of diminishing returns and its value increases as more people share it. The essential role of tacit knowledge has been verified in relation to decision-making, time management, quality and competitive capability in firms (Mohajan, 2016). The understanding of tacit knowledge is especially crucial because it refers to practical intelligence and employee behavior that is acquired through experience. The implicit knowledge is also known to be particularly useful in explaining individual differences in job performance that arise from the processes of learning and practice (Manaf et al., 2018). In the last decade, the development of the air-transport market in Vietnam has been remarkable. The country has become one of the world's fastest growing air-transport markets. The deregulation policy has contributed greatly to the development of the aviation sector in Vietnam in the last decade. Vietnam is viewed as one of the world's fastest growing aviation markets. In 2016 alone, the total volume of passengers was estimated to be approximately 81 million, a 29% increase over the same period in 2015. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) anticipates that in the next five years Vietnam will be the fifth fastest-growing aviation market in the world, averaging nearly 14% and will reach 150 million passengers by 2035 (Pham, 2020). Airline companies need to provide new, high-quality, and enhanced services to create unique customer experiences in order to succeed. To achieve this goal, managers should establish regular and frequent knowledge sharing among employees to create value-added services. The flight attendants' knowledge is very important for airline companies to retain and attract new customers, satisfy their demands, and improve services delivered to them. To create new and unique customer experiences, managers have recently been interested in knowledge sharing (Afsar et al., 2017). However, transfer and sharing of tacit knowledge is not an easy task, tacit knowledge sharing may cause risks to an individual (Mohajan, 2016). Motivation is one of the most key factors influencing employees' behavior to share their knowledge. Knowledge sharing seldom occurs unless participants have strong individual motivation (Hau et al., 2013). Previous studies on individual motivations have identified extrinsic motivations, such as reciprocity and social position are the outstanding benefits an employee can receive from knowledge sharing (Hau et al., 2013; Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Zhao & Detlor, 2021). Furthermore, social capital is an intermediary form of intellectual capital consisting of knowledge in groups and networks of people. More specifically, social capital consists of knowledge resources embedded within, available through, and derived from a network of relationships (Youndt et al., 2004). Social capital has been identified as one of the critical enablers of tacit knowledge sharing. On this topic, most prior research concentrated on knowledge in general and have failed to simultaneously integrate the antecedents and results of tacit knowledge sharing behavior in a complete model. Besides, research on individual motivators and knowledge sharing mainly have been done in virtual community context. The current study is a step toward filling these gaps. The purpose of this article is to identify the antecedents that support an individual's tacit knowledge-sharing behavior from the perspectives of social exchange theory. This study explores the nature of the social exchange benefits and social context and divides them into three constructs (social status, reciprocity, social capital) to examine their impacts on tacit knowledge sharing and job performance from the aviation industry. These findings impress the key role of implicit knowledge sharing on the managers in enhancing employees' job performance.

2. Theoretical background and research model

2.1. Theoretical background

Social exchange is defined as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two actors, the nature of the social processes that result in associations between individuals (Homans,

1961). The exchange behavior must be oriented toward ends that can only be achieved through interaction with other persons, and it must seek to adapt means to further achievement of these ends. Social exchange processes give rise to differentiation in social status and power based on the dependence of some actors on others for the provision of valued goods and services (Cook et al., 2013). Social exchange theory defines social behavior as "*voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others*" (Blau, 1964). Resources, including intangible ones such as knowledge and symbols of approval or prestige, are the currency of social exchange (Zhao & Detlor, 2021). Social exchange theory indicates that tacit knowledge sharing is essentially and initially a social exchange behavior between a knowledge provider and a knowledge receiver (Jiang & Xu, 2020). Resources received as a result of social exchange or positive outcomes of exchange can be seen as benefits. Social exchange theory shows that people behave in ways that maximize their benefits and minimize their costs (Kankanhalli et al., 2005). Social capital have been offered as antecedents for a variety of pro-social behaviors, including collective action, community involvement, and differential social achievements that the concept of individual based capital (such as human or financial capital) is unable to explain. Social capital resides in the fabric of relationships between individuals and in individuals' connections with their communities (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Clearly, such relationships are not limited to internal knowledge exchanges among employees, but also extend to relationships with customers, suppliers, alliance partners, and the like (Youndt et al., 2004).

2.2. Research model and hypotheses

2.2.1. Motivation factors and tacit knowledge sharing

2.2.1.1. Social status and tacit kowledge sharing

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) shows that individuals engage in social interaction based on an expectation that it will lead in some ways to social rewards such as approval, status, and respect. This suggests that one potential way a person can benefit from active participation is the perception that participation enhances his or her personal status in the network. Status refers to an actor's relative position in a group when this standing is based on "prestige, honor, or deference". Status brings many benefits for individuals who possess it (Zhao & Detlor, 2021). The standing of an actor in a network was viewed as the key determinant of his/her power and influence (in the form of control over needed resources such as knowledge, information) (Cook et al., 2013). Thus, the perception that contributing tacit knowledge will improve one's status and reputation in the profession may stimulate flight attendants to sharetheir valuable, personal experience to others in the team. This leads to the first hypotheses.

Hypothese H1: Social status seeking is positively related to tacit knowledge sharing.

2.2.1.2. Reciprocity and tacit kowledge sharing

Reciprocity has been seen as a benefit for individuals to engage in social exchange (Blau, 1964). Knowledge sharing is also facilitated by a strong sense of reciprocity (Chang & Chuang, 2011). Many consequences have revealed that reciprocal knowledge exchange relationships promote employees' knowledge sharing intentions (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Once a flight attendant donates valuable knowledge to others, the knowledge receivers are indebted to transfer equivalent knowledge to the knowledge provider. Such reciprocity based on a knowledge exchange relationship has been pointed out as a major antecedent to encouraging employees to share their tacit knowledge (Hau et al., 2013). In workplace, employees who are more willing to share their high-quality ideas expect others to respond to their ideas and generate new ones (Hung et al., 2011). If reciprocity is a strong norm in the collective, individuals trust that their knowledge sharing efforts will be reciprocated, thereby rewarding individual efforts and ensuring ongoing sharing. These generate the hypothese:

Hypothese H2: Reciprocity stimulates tacit knowledge sharing.

2.2.2. Social capital and tacit knowledge sharing

Social capital (SC) is "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). At the organizational level, SC includes diverse aspects of social context, including social relationships, trust, and value systems that bond individuals or groups (Terry Kim et al., 2013). This study has addressed social capital from an intellectual capital perspective, arguing that related knowledge derives from interpersonal interactions, including internal and external relationships of an organization. These connections facilitate knowledge diffusion, transfer, and combination (Youndt et al., 2004). A network of relationships provides access to information, knowledge, and resources. Tacit knowledge is transferred through observing behavior, communicating or coordinating among employees (Mohajan, 2016). To transfer tacit knowledge it requires extensive personal contact, regular interaction and trust. It is sometimes captured when the knowledge holder joins a network or a community practice (Goffin & Koners, 2011). It can only be revealed through practice in a particular context and transmitted through social networks (Mohajan, 2016). Flight attendants have essential role in understanding how passengers react to the services provided by airlines. Their frequent interactions with coworkers make them more aware of customers' needs and preferences regarding the airlines' services. As a result, flight attendants would seek more ideas and good skills for his/her professional development. Based on these arguments, it is reasonable to formulate the hypothese as below.

Hypothese H3: Social capital positively impacts on tacit knowledge sharing.

2.2.3. Tacit knowledge sharing and individual work performance

Flight attendants who seek tacit knowledge from others gain access to completely new and diverse ideas, which in turn leads to cognitive stimulation of knowledge recipients. This enriches their knowledge depth and breadth, thereby improving capability to generate novel ideas and solutions (Mohammed & Kamalanabhan, 2020). Tacit knowledge makes work go smoothly, it increases the quality of the work and it often characterizes a master of his/her profession. The role of tacit knowledge in the knowledge resources of firms can be considered significant and has been pointed out in relation to decision-making, time-management, quality and competitiveness (Ganguly et al., 2019). By sharing tacit knowledge, it is highly likely that flight attendants would initiate more ideas related to enhancing their job performance. Consequently, this study expects that flight attendants who gain new insights by engaging in tacit knowledge sharing from colleagues, go through experiences which broadens their knowledge base and helps see work-related problems from different aspects which eventually promotes their work performance.

Hypothese H4: Tacit knowledge sharinging has a positive effect on individual work performance.

2.2.4. Social capital and individual work performance

Social capital facilitates the actions of individuals within the structure (Coleman, 1990). Social capital makes possible the achievement of ends that would be impossible without it or that could be achieved only at extra cost (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In examining the consequences of social capital for action, this study can identify two distinct themes. First, social capital increases the efficiency of action. Networks of social relations, particularly those characterized by weak ties or structural holes (i.e., disconnections or nonequivalencies among players in an arena), increase the efficiency of information diffusion through minimizing redundancy (Burt, 1992). The second theme centers on the role of social capital as an aid to adaptive efficiency and to the creativity and learning it implies. Social capital was found is to encourage cooperative behavior, thereby facilitating the development of new forms of association (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). A relative network also facilitates building a strong culture that shapes how all members perceive problems, interact, approach decisions, and solve problems, as well as motivates individuals to forgo self-interest when it is in conflict with the organization's

goals (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Zou & Ingram, 2013). Networks rich in structural boles provide an individual with some benefits: more unique and timely access to information, greater bargaining power and thus control over resources and outcomes, and greater visibility and career opportunities throughout the social system. An employee's contact with members of other organizational functions will provide access to information not available within his or her own functional group. greater access to information and resources should enhance individual work performance (Seibert et al., 2001). Individuals can use their network positions to fill a broker or boundary spanner role within an organization add greater value to the organization (Burt, 1992). Based on the above arguments, hypothesis H5 is proposed as follows:

Hypothese H5: Social capital has a positive effect on individual work performance.

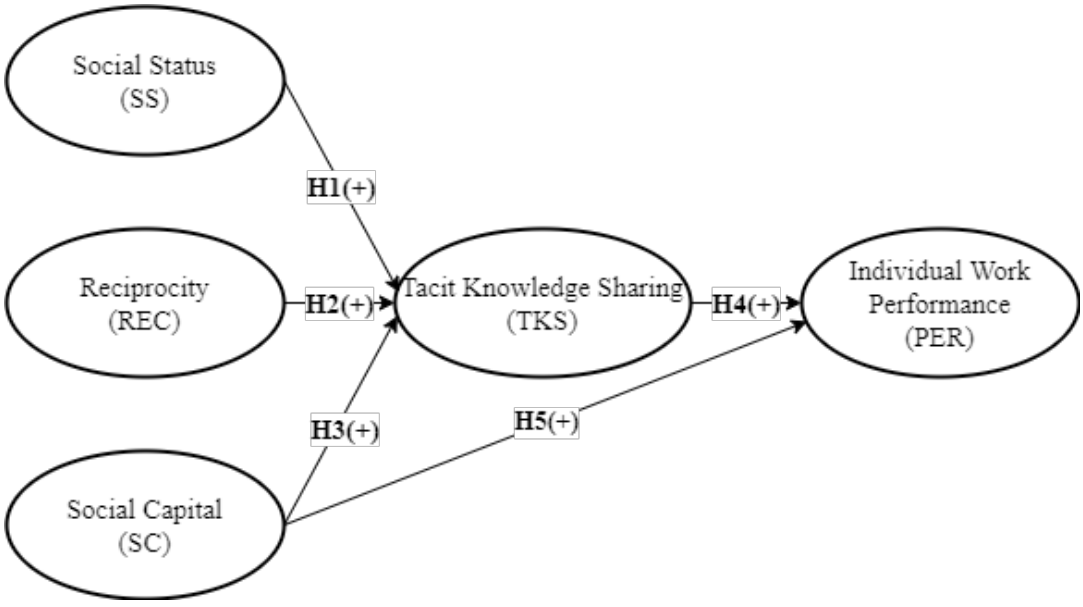

Figure 1. The hypothesized model of the study

3. Research methodology

3.1. Data collection and sampling

The questionnaire was available in both English and Vietnamese, with the Vietnamese version produced following the translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1970). Using convenience and judgmental sampling techniques, this study used the convenience sampling approach and contacted the managers for inviting them to participate in the survey. After obtaining their approval, the author asked them to deliver the survey website link to the flight attendants who worked with them. Following the criteria to select the eligible participants, this study collected a sample size of 500 from flight attendants who work for Vietnam Airlines (200 respondents), Jetstar Pacific (150 respondents) and VietJet Air (150 respondents) located in Ho Chi Minh city more than six months. Data collection took place between March and May of 2021. With 500 questionnaires distributed, a total of 369 valid questionnaires were returned, accounting for a 73.8 percent response rate.

3.2. Measurement of variables

The measurement items were developed by adopting the existing validated scales with slight modifications to reflect the context of the research. The social status (SS) seeking was measured using the four-item scale adopted from Zhao and Detlor (2021). To measure reciprocity (REC), study chose the four-item scale developed by Kankanhalli et al. (2005). The five items for measuring social capital (SC) were adopted from Youndt et al. (2004). Tacit knowledge sharing (TKS) which include five

items were adapted from Reychav and Weisberg (2009). This research adapted the five-item scale from Becker et al. (1996) for individual work performance. The items were measured with a 5 points Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). A measurement model was first established via a confirmatory factory analysis and then, using AMOS 24 a path analysis was conducted and the path coefficients were estimated. In order to evaluate the validity of the measurement model, two tests were conducted: convergent validity and discriminant validity. The convergent validity is tested by assessing the standardized factor loading, which should be significant for all indicators (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988); the squared multiple correlation (SMC), which should be more than 0.40 for all indicators (Bollen, 1989); the composite reliability (CR), which should exceed 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981); and the average variance extracted (AVE), which should be more than 0.50 for all constructs. To assess discriminant validity, the AVE for each construct should be higher than the squared correlation between the construct and any of the other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Several measurement model and structural model fit measures, such as Chi square (df), p value, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and comparative fit index (CFI), were employed. The TLI and CFI statistics should exceed the recommended 0.92 threshold level (Hair et al., 2014). The RMSEA should be less than the cutoff value of 0.08 (Bollen, 1989).

4. Research findings

4.1. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The EFA uses Maximum likelihood with the Promax rotation method, which is in accordance with Hair et al. (2014). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.917, which is above the recommended value (0.8). Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p-value less than 0.05) It shows that the data are suitable for the analysis. The item SC5 was removed because it presented a factor loading (0.427) under 0.6. Cronbach's alpha is above 0.8 for all constructs (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 1. Measurement items and scale reliabilities

Constructs, indicators	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	SMC
1. SS		0.861	
SS1	0.781		0.610
SS2	0.692		0.479
SS3	0.826		0.682
SS4	0.819		0.671
2. REC		0.829	
REC1	0.652		0.425
REC2	0.807		0.651
REC3	0.827		0.684
REC4	0.684		0.468
3. SC		0.838	
SC1	0.727		0.529
SC2	0.805		0.648
SC3	0.828		0.685
SC4	0.790		0.624
SC5	-		-

4. TKS		0.910	
TKS1	0.737		0.543
TKS2	0.799		0.638
TKS3	0.813		0.662
TKS4	0.865		0.749
TKS5	0.870		0.757
5. PER		0.872	
PER1	0.800		0.640
PER2	0.754		0.568
PER3	0.775		0.601
PER4	0.759		0.576
PER5	0.719		0.517

Notes: *SMC: Squared Multiple Correlations.*

4.2. Measurement model

Analysis of model fit measures shows that Chi-Square = 471.143, Degrees of Freedom (DF) = 199 CMIN/df = 2.368, p-value = 0.000, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.944, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.935, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.0394 and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.061. These results pass the cut-off values as suggested by (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, our data fit the model well.

We assessed convergent validity by checking the standardized loading estimates and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. As shown in Table 2, all of the standardized factor loadings of the items of substantive variables exceed 0.6; all of the AVE values ranges from 0.557 for REC to 0.670 for TKS are higher than the threshold of 0.5 and composite reliability (CR) of all five latent variables ranges from 0.833 for the REC construct to 0.910 for the TKS construct exceed the threshold of 0.7 as recommended by (Hair et al., 2014). This implies that the model achieves convergent validity. In addition, none of the correlations between the construct exceed the square root of the AVE of each construct (Table 2), implying that all latent variables or constructs receive adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Results of Validity Analysis

	CR	AVE	MSV	Square root of AVE	PER	TKS	SS	REC	SC
PER	0.874	0.580	0.521	0.762	**1**				
TKS	0.910	0.670	0.521	0.818	0.722***	**1**			
SS	0.862	0.611	0.370	0.781	0.418***	0.517***	**1**		
REC	0.833	0.557	0.370	0.746	0.400***	0.492***	0.608***	**1**	
SC	0.868	0.621	0.484	0.788	0.696***	0.696***	0.429***	0.482***	1

Notes: ***: $p < 0.001$.

4.3. Structural model

An analysis of the structural model is subsequently carried out to verify all proposed hypotheses. The subsequent step involves an estimation that uses maximum likelihood estimation to validate all the hypothesized relationships postulated from the research model (Byrne, 2016). Model fit measures reveal that

CMIN/df = 2.346, p-value = 0.000, CFI = 0.944, TLI = 0.936, SRMR = 0.0397, RMSEA = 0.060. It can be concluded that research data fit the model well (Hair et al., 2014). Hypothesis testing was performed and summarised in Table 3. All hypotheses are statistically significant at different levels. Research result model is described in Appendix 1.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing of the structural model

Hypothesized relationships	SRW	p-value	Remark
H1 (SS →TKS)	0.267	***	Supported
H2 (REC → TKS)	0.148	0.003	Supported
H3 (SC → TKS)	0.602	***	Supported
H4 (TKS → PER)	0.457	***	Supported
H5 (SC → PER)	0.376	***	Supported

Notes: ***: $p < 0.001$.

SRW: Standardized Regression Weight

5. Discussion and implications

5.1. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the structural relationships among tacit knowledge sharing enablers, and outcome in the aviation industry from an integrative perspective by using social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and intellectual capital theory (Youndt et al., 2004). These results support for the theoretical model and qualified support for all hypothesized relationships. The findings indicate that social status is a significant predictor of flight attendants' tacit knowledge sharing behaviour. The current results are also consistent with prior researchs (Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Zhao & Detlor, 2021), providing additional evidence that status seeking is a strong motivator for implicit knowledge sharing. Empirical results also show that reciprocity significantly influence tacit knowledge sharing. Prior studies have revealed that reciprocal knowledge exchange relationships increase employees' knowledge sharing intentions (Hau et al., 2013; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). When an employee sharing valuable knowledge for others, the knowledge collectors are indebted to transfer equivalent knowledge to the knowledge provider. Such reciprocity based on a knowledge exchange relationship is a major factor to encourage employees to share their knowledge. In addition to individual motivations, this paper shows evidence that social capital develops and plays an important role underlying tacit knowledge exchange. Scholars, therefore, argued that social capital provides important social context and conditions for social exchange in general (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p.874), and for knowledge exchange in particular (Zhao & Detlor, 2021). As such, it is possible that the impacts of social context pertaining to social exchange theory is contingent upon social capital. Social capital emphasizes interpersonal linkage within internal and external relationships of firms. These network relationships strengthen information and knowledge exchange.

Social capital is showed to significantly predict job performance. These results are supported by previous studies (Burt, 1992; Seibert et al., 2001) which have elaborated that employees who gain social capital gain access to a variety of people with the necessary information and the chance to contribute to organizational functioning, thereby gaining more positive career outcomes, such as faster promotions and career outcomes. Moreover, several researchers have indicated that an individual who is central in the social network is, over time, able to accumulate knowledge about task-related problems and workable solutions. This expertise not only enables the central individual to solve problems readily, but also

serves as a valued resource for future exchanges with coworkers (Zou & Ingram, 2013).

Last but not least, finding is that job performance is strongly driven by tacit knowledge. This result support to the findings of Reychav and Weisberg (2009), Zaqout and Abbas (2012), who found that effectiveness is stimulated by implicit knowledge sharing. Tacit knowledge associated with managing tasks refers to knowledge about how to establish careers, how to enhance positions, and how to convince superiors about ideas or products (Manaf et al., 2018). Tacit knowledge makes work go smoothly, it increases the quality of the work and it often characterizes a master of his/her profession.

5.2. Implications

The findings demonstrated that social status and reciprocity have strong impact on tacit knowledge sharing between flight attendants and showed how social exchanges are contingent upon social context, such as social capital in the airline firms. The study contributes to extant social exchange theory as follows. First, this study adds to the current literature of social exchange on the complicated relationship of benefits and exchange by providing additional evidence from status and reciprocity factors. Second, this article adopt an intellectual capital perspective to examnine social context and conditions for social exchange that is social capital. Third, this study concentrate on the intangible resources such as tacit knowledge. It is viewed as the currency of social exchange.

This article provides practitioners in the airlines with some insights that can facilitate knowledge employees' work performance by some managerial implications drawn from tacit knowledge sharing behaviour. Firstly, a important method to promote individual participation in the tacit knowledge sharing process is to develop solutions that help establish individuals' status, reputation in their profession. For example, it could be potential to assign standing to flight attendants and make this status apparent both within the teams, units. Besides, efforts to foster the reciprocal relationships and interpersonal interactions of employees are necessary for creating and maintaining a positive knowledge sharing culture in aviation industry firms. Particularly, managers can improve perceptions of reciprocal benefits among flight attendants, which are important in implicit knowledge sharing intentions.

Results also demonstrate that social capital has a positive influence on participants' behavior to share tacit knowledge and individual work performance. Therefore, managers in the aviation industry should encourage employees to actively participate in the network of relationships within departments as well as customers to create and facilitate tacit knowledge transfer. In addition, managers should allocate more resources in building trust and enhancing cooperation among flight attendants within and between departments and extend to linkages with customers, suppliers, alliance partners. To develop and nurture trust, it is necessary to create a truly open and consistent working atmosphere. To promote collaboration at workplace, managers need to focus on and create favorable conditions for the working environment, equipments, and working facilities for employees.

5.3. Conclusion and future research

The present study is an attempt to analyse the determinants and outcome of tacit knowledge sharing in airline companies. To this end, drawing from the social exchange theory and intellectual capital theory, a theoretical model is explored, which discusses the distinct impact of individual motivators and social capital on employees' engagement in tacit knowledge sharing from teammates and the subsequent effect on job performance of flight attendants. Tacit knowledge sharing has a direct effect on performance at personal level, whereas tacit knowledge sharing behaviour is contingent upon social status, reciprocity norm and social capital in the workplace environment.

This article acknowledges its limitations. First limitation is that knowledge sharing with

others in organizations may require the costs to a knowledge donator. If the costs are high, they may exclude an actor from this sharing process. Future researchs would explore impacting of cost factors on tacit knowledge sharing. Further, organizational-level intellectual capital is regarded as comprising the components: human capital, organizational capital and social capital. Therefore, future studies may examine knowledge sharing behaviour in association with human capital and organizational capital.

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Appendix 1. Results of the structural model